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**SPEECH**

**GRADUATION ADDRESS**

**BY**

**MS EVELYN BREUER**

**CHAIRPERSON OF THE POLYTECHNIC COUNCIL**

**AT**

**THE OCCASION OF THE 19<sup>TH</sup> GRADUATION CEREMONY  
OF THE POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA**

**SAFARI COURT HOTEL**

**WINDHOEK**

**ON**

**11 APRIL 2014**

Presiding Officer and Rector of the Polytechnic of Namibia, Prof TjamaTjivikua

Honourable David Namwandi, Minister of Education

Mr Junius Mungunda, Chief Executive, Standard Bank Namibia

Honourable Ministers of Government and Honourable Members of Parliament

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Members of the Council of the Polytechnic

Faculty and Staff Members of the Polytechnic of Namibia

Distinguished Invited Guests

Dear Graduates

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning. It's so good for all of us to be here this morning on this wonderful day! On behalf of the Council of the Polytechnic, I would like to extend our warmest welcome to you at this important gathering, the 19<sup>th</sup> Graduation Ceremony of the Polytechnic of Namibia. A special welcome goes to all our guests of honour, the graduates who will in the course of the morning receive their awards.

May I also take this opportunity to welcome and thank the Honourable David Namwandi, the Minister of Education, conveying the message of His Excellency, President Hifikepunye Pohamba, to this gathering this morning.

A heartily welcome to our distinguished guests, who were able to join us at this occasion; I am sure you will enjoy today's celebration.

Let me first extend my heartiest congratulation to all the graduates who are to receive awards this morning. Today, we have come to recognise and celebrate the successful completion of your studies at the Polytechnic of Namibia. I especially recognise the families of the graduates. It's been said, behind every graduate stands very proud – and very relieved parents. Graduands, your friends, families, guardians and sponsors, all in their distinctive variations have been there for you. Let's take a moment to thank them.

To the graduates the qualifications you will be receiving from the Polytechnic are well recognised nationally and internationally and open up rewarding career opportunities to you. More importantly, your qualifications provide you with a strong foundation for long-life learning.

Director of Ceremonies

An occasion of this nature provides me, as Chairperson of Council, an opportunity to give a brief account of what the institution has accomplished in the past year, we also need to tell you about our shortcomings as well as about the challenges we face as we go into the future. That's what accountability in a public institution requires of us. 2013 was a unique period for the Polytechnic of Namibia partly because of the daunting challenge that was posed by the Government's declaration to change the mandate and name of the Polytechnic to that of a university of science and technology. Consequently, for the better part of the year, the institution was preoccupied with the development of the strategic and transformation plan for transitioning to the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) but I will call it NU for short. This provided us a platform for reviewing what we have been doing and how we have been doing it, and also to consider what is it that we need to keep, what are the strengths that we need to enhance and what is the new that we should incorporate as we become the NU.

Please allow me to blow our trumpet loudly when I say that our planning process was meticulous and professionally executed and it makes the Polytechnic community proud of itself! We now have all our ducks in a row and we are only awaiting the promulgation of the Act that will establish the NU – we are hopeful that this will happen before the end of the year.

The institution experienced a tumultuous period given that other significant transitions occurred as we worked on the transition to the NU. These transitions were precipitated by the fact that the terms of office of the Council of the institution and that of the Rector of the Polytechnic were coming to an end. I am quite happy to report that new council members were appointed and the new members who have joined us are bringing incredible intellectual insights and perspectives into the organisation. I'm equally happy to announce that our Rector's term of office was extended and so he would provide leadership during this period of transition. The Council has also approved the senior management structure required to enable the new institution to function effectively. You may be wondering why one dwells so much on these structural changes in the organisation; however, matters of the governance and management of the institution are particularly important because if they are not set on a solid foundation, then that ultimately impacts negatively on the running and development of the institution.

Director of Ceremonies

As part of the transition to NU it also became necessary that the academic structure of the institution be revisited. We have six schools or faculties as you see in the programme. This new configuration is in line with the mandate of the NU, as four out of six Faculties are in the Science, Technology and Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields as well as that the number of new programmes in the same fields will increase, of the under-graduate as well as post-graduate levels.

Thus the institution will be able to grow significantly its student enrolments in these programmes.

Of course, the decision to transform the Polytechnic to the NU has other serious implications, particularly with respect to provision of appropriate funding infrastructure. Just last year, following huge investments we made into modern teaching aids and facilities just about all the lecture rooms have been equipped with computer technologies, smart boards, and white and blue boards. At the same time, the physical infrastructure was expanded with the completion of the new Health Sciences building which is now housing the School or Faculty of Health and Applied Sciences. The construction of the extension to the Faculty of Engineering building which will accommodate Architecture is underway. The staff members of the Faculty of Computing and Informatics were all moved into a new building at the beginning of this academic year.

These developments are bringing temporary relief in a situation where accommodation was getting tight for staff and teaching purposes. However, with the requirement to have more programmes in the STEM area and also to increase students in postgraduate studies, this will lead to a demand for additional infrastructure. Nevertheless, this does not take away the fact that there are other areas that urgently require provision of physical infrastructure. A recent student satisfaction survey indicated that more than 60% of the students were quite happy with the institutional teaching and learning environment. Thus, I think there is room for improvement in this area.

The students pointed to lack of residential accommodation and a student centre, multi-purpose centre and sporting facilities as reasons for their unhappiness. This is despite enormous efforts by institution to try and improvise in order to make things better for the students. The lack of facilities impacts adversely on the holistic learning of students and it leaves students with an unfulfilling experience of university education. This is an area that needs immediate redressing and I hope that Government will assist us in this respect as a matter of urgency.

Ladies and gentlemen, 2013 has been a year of extremes for the Polytechnic. While, on the one hand, there was a huge hype around planning for the new institution, on the other hand the financial situation of the institution was a bit of a damper. This was rather frustrating given that the institution has an excellent track record of utilising public resources in an effective and accountable manner, as indicated by the number of unqualified audit reports it has received over the years.

However, even in this year of extreme austerity measures, the institution was able to meet its obligation and the graduation this morning is evidence to that effect. It is also no wonder why the institution has been recognised for the fifth successive year by receiving the PMR Diamond Arrow Award, *in lieu* of being the best higher education institution in Namibia. It is hoped that with the finalisation of the Funding Framework, it should bring relief to the unfavourable financial situation. Otherwise all the positive gains so far will be compromised and our nation's dream of a university of science and technology will be compromised. And I hope this is not the desired or intended consequence.

Director of Ceremonies

In concluding, let me state that graduations are optimistic statements about the future – graduates give us the reason to believe that tomorrow will be better than today. You, graduates have accomplished so much already and therefore despite the challenges facing us all into the future, I have confidence in your capacity to contribute meaningfully to our country and the world – and your prospects for a productive and fulfilling life. We believe in you. We are counting on you. Congratulations to you.

I thank you.