

EGERTON



UNIVERSITY

**INAUGURAL SPEECH BY PROF. ROSE AWOUR
MWONYA DURING HER INSTALLATION AS THE 5TH
VICE-CHANCELLOR OF EGERTON UNIVERSITY ON
FRIDAY, 19TH FEBRUARY 2016, AT THE EGERTON
UNIVERSITY PAVILLION**

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Science and Technology, Dr. Fred
Matiang'i**

Other Cabinet Secretaries present

The Chancellor of Egerton University, Prof. Shem Wandiga

Other Chancellors present

Chairman of Egerton University Council, Dr. Reardon Olubayo

Other Chairpersons of Council present

**The Outgoing Vice Chancellor of Egerton University, Prof. James
Tuitoek**

Other Vice Chancellors and Deputy Vice Chancellors present

Members of the Egerton University Council

Members of the Egerton University Management Board

Members of the Egerton University Senate

Members of staff

Students

Distinguished guests

All Protocols observed

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Afternoon!

Today as we usher in a new era of leadership at Egerton University, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the Government of Kenya and the Egerton University Council for appointing me the 5th Vice-Chancellor of this premier institution. I am humbled by the enormous goodwill and support that I have received from Council members, colleagues, students, members of staff and our stakeholders as I assume the leadership mantle of Egerton University. I sincerely thank you all.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, though you have all been welcomed by the Chairman of Council, I also extend a warm welcome to everyone here present. I feel greatly honoured by your presence on this very special occasion.

I commend the outgoing Vice-Chancellor Prof. James Tuitoek for his outstanding stewardship of this University during the last 10 years. I want to personally thank him for a job well done, full of milestones that have been achieved under his stewardship. I am grateful to him for mentoring and helping me to grow professionally. Professor, I wish you well as you pursue your academic and other endeavours in life.

Mr. Chancellor Sir,

It is important for me to recall my origin in a small village of Ugenya, Siaya County, some of whose inhabitants have come to witness the installation of one of their own as a Vice-Chancellor of a very revered University. A unique set of circumstances have brought me and this University together at this time. The journey started at Ndenga Primary school and Asumbi then Nyabururu Secondary school in Kisii in the early 1960's. The journey of those seen as too humble to make it, those who are in the rural areas who walk long distances to school, often barefoot, or in worn-out pairs of shoes that have acquired the color of the local red soil. It is a

journey from a background where people are not sure whether you will move to the next class because the fee is not there or not adequate. The situation was particularly perilous for a girl-child. Thank God I had a father who embraced education for all his children regardless of gender – a norm today, but a novelty in my childhood. It was a journey seasoned by hard work and a desire to be the best, yet occasionally taking it easy like any other young person. It was a journey full of excitement of successes and challenges. A journey sweet and rough.

A journey full of encouragement from lecturers, teachers, friends and relatives. Starting with my mother Josphine, aunt Rebecca, my late father Linus Otieno, my brother and sisters. My immediate family, my husband Joshua, children Julie, Cornelius, Seline and Cynthia, my son in-law Denis, nieces and nephews who are here and others not present, my primary school teachers, and my certificate level teacher in Agriculture and Home Economics Mrs. Prisca Kandie.

It is a journey dedicated to those who put God first and put to practice what God gave them. Those who are recognized for their talents and hard work in what they do because everyone loves a hard working person.

I take pride in the past and in Egerton University – my association with the university runs deep. For those who may not know, I am a proud alumnus of Egerton, having undertaken my Diploma studies here between 1973 and 1975. I have lived a considerable portion of my life here and witnessed all the growth that has brought Egerton to where it is today. Life is dynamic; nothing stays the same, I am therefore convinced that the Egerton of today will not be – or should not be – the Egerton of tomorrow. I appeal

to all of you to join me in shaping the Egerton of tomorrow. This journey is for working together, of good will, love and dedication.

Mr. Chancellor Sir,

My first priority as Vice-Chancellor would have been to meet with as many members of the University and broader Community as possible to listen and gain insights from them as I assume office. But am saved that burden because Egerton is my home and I have grown here with my colleagues and shared all that we have-from our Council team, our Professors and our Students.

As I hinted earlier, taking the “torch” of leadership of Egerton University from Prof. James Tuitoek is somewhat daunting. He has stamped his mark in the history and evolution of Egerton University and higher education in this country. His leadership has at times been less than that of a torch bearer and more of that of a controlled burner. Having had the benefit of his mentorship over the last eight years and with the support of all friends, staff, alumni and students of Egerton University, I gain strength from my faith and confidence from two predominant forces in my life. The first is the love with which I have been blessed and the second is the education I have received. These two defining forces in my life, love and education, are the cornerstones on which Egerton University was established by the Founder. Lord Maurice Egerton of Taton had enough love to be moved to donate the land we stand on today to further the education of many. I believe that my faith, coupled with the love and education I have received, will help me to serve and successfully lead this University.

While education is the bedrock of society, higher education is the

key that locks everything in place. Egerton University is a jewel in the crown of higher education in Kenya. We at Egerton stand tall when agricultural training is mentioned in Kenya and Africa in general. I want to assure members of the Egerton University Council and other stakeholders that under my leadership we will scale the heights of fame in Agriculture and also excel in other disciplines as we make the connections between all disciplines offered at Egerton University relevant to the aspirations of Kenya as a nation and the global environment in general.

I make this assurance with full knowledge of the tremendous growth we have achieved in the recent past through the support of the Kenya Government, development partners and other stakeholders. But, I want to ask the question. Can we sustain the growth? Do we have the right balance as we grow? These fundamental questions are important given that there have been concerns raised around inclusivity and diversity, as well as the institutional culture we have cultivated. As I focus on these two fundamental questions, I promise that I will not let you down - and by that I mean the entire University Community.

Mr. Chancellor Sir,

I recognize there are challenges ahead- We must first grapple with the issues of finances and fiscal stability, the incredibly rapid pace of technological change, the need for modern infrastructure and an increasingly mobile and volatile student population. Nationally, there are running calls for transformation at all levels of our education system, including higher education. In my opinion, this transformation can be thought of in two ways. On one hand, it relates to the need for change in responses to

historical issues of discrimination and exclusion. This though is more relevant at the lower levels of the education system. But the place of the University in this is its intellectual contribution to the debate that will eventually shape the system at that level. The University should and must be able to define the product they want to receive for further processing into the workplace. On the other hand, the transformation in higher education should relate to the imperative to grow practical skills and engage in advanced research for purposes of building the future we desire as Kenyans.

Mr. Chancellor Sir,

Allow me now to briefly examine the idea of the University - the essence that established the continuity with those ancient times. I believe we need to understand the institution that we are all called to defend. There are three themes of continuity I want to examine. First is the essential structure and governance – this I address especially to you, Mr. Chancellor. University, from Latin, Universitas: means a kind of universe – a self-contained whole. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, by the late 14th Century, the word 'Universitas' had come to refer to the idea of a self-regulating community of scholars and students, whose corporate existence had been sanctioned by civil or ecclesiastical authority. It was the idea of the university's separateness, independence, autonomy and an entitlement to a special kind of freedom that is one of the enduring aspects of what we stand for, and what I am being inducted today to advocate and defend. Mr. Chancellor Sir, during my leadership, I undertake to defend the University's tradition and rights of autonomy, independence, and academic freedom.

The second theme, addresses all of us, ladies and gentlemen, members of the community. The rituals, the dress, the very fact of an inauguration, reminds us profoundly of the modern University's ecclesiastical lineage – that we are the descendants of the Church and heirs to the figurative mantle of the role of the church played in society. The university today is regarded by society as the home for the pursuit of truth and independent thought; it is the oracle to which people turn for help in making sense of the natural and social world around us, for guidance on values, government, and the future. Like its ancestor, the Church, the University is expected to take on the role of moral loadstone. On reflection, I now understand this better – The robes and ceremony are demanded by society because society expects the university to play a leadership role within it, to be some kind of counterpoint to the State and indeed to religious authorities for knowledge, analysis and ethical guidance. The University must take responsibility for playing that role and recognize the authority it has been granted to do so.

The third theme of continuity defining the essence of a University is addressed largely to the members of Senate. Senate must be and remain the space for focussed intellectual inquiry, imaginative thought, experiment and analysis – a space of ideas, critique and the pursuit of truth (even if the meaning of that concept is sometimes contested). While recognizing that the Church of old did produce many great philosophers and thinkers, like Thomas Aquinas, more often than not the Church was traditional and conservative in the literal sense of resisting change and new ideas. The Universities parted ways with the church and the two have continued in parallel partly because, with the rise of scientific

rationalism, Universities offered a space which encouraged new ideas, controversy, argument and challenges to orthodoxy. This is the primary purpose of a University, and its success depends on a culture within the institution which is sometimes tolerant of heretical views (a reference I use deliberately). This is to say that the University is not tolerant of attacks on people based on their backgrounds, what they believe in or who they are, but insists on the debate being about ideas, their evidence and logic. It means that a University requires that people respect each other and give them the benefit of the doubt that all are equally committed to seeking truth. In our context here, it means, for example, that one may not call someone a tribalist as a way of challenging their views since this closes down the space for constructive debate and the expression of different opinions.

Mr. Chancellor Sir,

Considering these three, it is in my opinion that Egerton University should be different from others. The University should be an independent actor in society, free from all forms of undue interference. Our academic freedom should never be jeopardised. The primary task of Professors and Researchers is to think freely, to think critically, and to innovate. In a time when different, often contradictory and sometimes ill-founded, opinions are expressed publicly, the University should stand for rationality – for solid knowledge based facts. By promoting and developing this culture, the University also helps to find answers to the most burning questions of the present and the future.

As a people, we are currently faced with challenges and possibilities of a magnitude and complexity that we have never

seen before. The challenges to research are probably greater than ever, and have a greater global impact than never before. But as I said in the opening, Egerton University has cut its niche in Agriculture and Environment. What characterizes Egerton University more than anything is the complexity with which these two mega-disciplines intertwine and find complementarity with the rest of the known universal disciplines in a traditional University. That's why when one asks why we have a newly founded Faculty of Law; I remind them of the Human Rights of the Pastoralists in Turkana and the greater Northern Kenya. Really, these people are engaged in livestock agriculture, but their rights need to be taken care of by a lawyer. So why not develop the lawyers and the Animal Scientists here at Egerton so they can start the conversation as they go to class. And what about the Doctors and other health professionals we are training? People ask, where does Agriculture meet Medicine? My simple answer is – as the farmers work, their issues of health are also important. Hence, our Egerton trained health professionals should find a niche in the whole Agriculture value chain.

There is no other university in Kenya that has had a developmental path like Egerton. Ladies and gentlemen, you will remember that we were a University College of The University of Nairobi for only one year before we were granted full status as a University in 1987 – a feat no other college shares with us. Though this may seem impressive, it also exposed us to some unique set of challenges. With these quick transitions, Egerton University did not have time to adjust to its status through steady growth in infrastructure and human resource. It has taken ingenuity of my predecessors to simultaneously grow these

essential elements of a modern University with the meagre resources we have laid our hands on. I commend my predecessors for their steadfastness in ensuring that we still invested in infrastructural development in the face of very scarce resources.

Mr. Chancellor Sir,

Internationalisation will be one of our most important issues going forward. Our standing should be such that if you come from Egerton University, you will be well-regarded wherever you go in the world. We already have a high degree of good, solid standing, but we can always become a more visible player internationally with distinct cutting edge achievements in research and innovations in teaching. This means that we must act globally to a greater extent, both as individuals and as a University. I have a vision to increase international student enrolment at all educational levels in Egerton University. The internationalisation process must also be driven and motivated by the needs of our research and academic collaborations.

As we contemplate this, we also need to be aware of the widespread ramifications of a globalised higher education:

1. Universities today are nodes of global networks of knowledge-creating institutions. Their independence and self-sufficiency has changed. Egerton University will actively assert itself into those global networks in the areas of research, teaching and exchanges to avoid slipping into the second league.
2. Our graduates must be internationally mobile. The nature of employment today is such that companies and organizations will expect them to work in Kenya today,

work in DRC tomorrow, China next year and New York in 5 years time. The University therefore will adapt to these trends by preparing our students better for this change. Hence the need to ensure that our students get an international education and get connected to global networks.

3. Students' sources of information are no longer confined to local lecturers and local libraries and have hardly any geographical restrictions. Local fee-paying middle class students are being solicited by public and private universities both locally and internationally. Egerton University aims to continue to offer unique high quality education in order to attract local and international students.
4. The quality of the University is fundamentally about the quality of its staff. The global market for top academics is such that it will be increasingly difficult to hold onto our stars unless we are considered by our own staff to be the preferred intellectual home of similar standing to the international competition.

Ladies and gentlemen, all these cannot be accomplished by a Vice-Chancellor alone. I will not pretend to have answers to the myriad of issues we require to fix to reach our desired end, but one thing I cannot step away from is the push to always seek for mechanisms for fine-tuning and shaping our destiny as we ask the right questions. I am looking forward to your maximum cooperation, to build on the foundation for the future of Egerton University.

Mr. Chancellor Sir,

Leading this great university will be a challenge, but it is a challenge I embrace with confidence informed by my extensive experience at this institution. I have served Egerton University well in different capacities since my student days, and in my self-assessment, I have done well. As a student, I actively participated in student matters and promoted excellence among my peers. Since I was employed, I have carried out my duties diligently and responsibly. My reputation led to my appointment as Chairperson of the then Department of Agriculture and Home Economics. This gave me the opportunity to oversee expansion of the department in terms of student numbers, academic staff and programmes.

My passion to articulate gender issues at the University level and my overt gender advocacy efforts bore admirable fruits when I became the founding Director of the Centre of Women Studies and Gender Analysis, which has since grown to a significant Institute of Women, Gender and Development Studies, offering specialized academic programmes at all levels.

My appointment as Dean of Students was a pleasant surprise; it was the climax of my responsibilities at Egerton University. Student power is so overwhelming that if you do not play your cards well, you can lose every game you attempt: I lost none during my tenure, thanks to my embrace of the role as a unique opportunity to help create a leader in each student. This cultivated sustainable understanding among key stakeholders. I always yearned to produce all-rounded students and this is why I solicited funding from Pathfinder International that enabled Egerton University to start and run a student peer counselling programme. This programme is still active. I treasure those skills and the

experience that I gained as Dean of Students.

Having dealt with individual categories of members of the Egerton University family, I did not shy away from presenting my candidature for the position of Deputy Vice Chancellor in charge of Academic Affairs. My objective was to make a direct contribution to putting sustainable structures in place that could facilitate academic excellence. As destiny would have it, I succeeded and was appointed the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for two terms. I am positive that my personal contribution in the academic division has left a notable mark on each of the people I served.

Knowing where I am coming from, I purpose to diligently tread the present course with utmost responsibility just as I have done in the past.

Mr. Chancellor Sir,

I am taking over the leadership of Egerton University when it is marking 76 years of its existence. This is no mean achievement; from a Farm School in 1939 with only three certificate level students, Egerton has steadily grown to the current University status with over 20,000 students at all training levels. In comparison with other institutions, this may appear exceedingly slow, but those who have been part of the journey like me understand it better. Being a science based institution; the growth had to be planned meticulously with intensive investment of ever scarce resources. It makes me proud to have been part of this history for the past 43 years, first as a student and later as a member of staff. I am delighted to have contributed to the making of Egerton University.

Egerton University's place in higher education nationally and globally, is better exemplified by the high calibre of graduates it produces time and again. University education in Kenya has in the recent past undergone unprecedented expansion and Egerton has played its part. As a University we are pleased to have mentored Laikipia University, Kisii University and Chuka University, that were granted University Status in 2013. Currently, Egerton University has several campuses, Njoro main campus, Nakuru Town Campus College, Kenyatta, Baringo, and Nairobi City Campuses. Under my leadership we shall strengthen these campuses to enable more Kenyans to access our quality programmes as they attend to other nation building obligations at their convenience.

Mr. Chancellor Sir,

As I said earlier, Egerton University has a chartered path into the future. We prepared the first ever ten-year (2005-2015) Strategic Plan in 2005 and subsequently revised it in 2009 and 2012 due to the dynamic nature of the processes of national transformation. Within that period, as a University, we are satisfied that we made considerable progress towards the realisation of our vision and mission. It then became necessary to develop a 2nd edition of the Strategic Plan (2013-2018) in 2013 which is aligned to the new Universities Act (2012), and Egerton University Charter (2013) and Statutes (2013). I find our current strategic plan practical because it sets forth a framework for making Egerton a University of choice. We intend to do this by providing sufficient facilities for teaching, learning and research. The University has identified five strategic goals, twenty strategic objectives, and detailed strategies

and activities for realising its vision of '*A World Class University for Advancement of Humanity*'.

Our strategic goals include:

1. Provision of quality higher education and training. This requires that we work together and be prepared to think differently to ensure that the education we provide to our students remains of the highest quality.
2. Increasing research, consultancy and community outreach. This will ensure that the highest quality of education that we aspire to achieve has tighter complementarity with research since research excellence is the defining feature of our University and the society.
3. Enhancing physical infrastructure and ICT capacity. My personal vision for Egerton University is to establish sustainable quality information flow, systems and structures at all levels. In this regard, I will require everyone's support in enhancing our teaching, learning and research facilities. My dream is to see the construction of a modern library to cater for the ever increasing students and staff needs. I will prioritize development of our ICT infrastructure to facilitate quick flow of information within the organization, and stimulate scholarship and innovation to ensure that our e-learning programmes are considerably expanded.
4. Increasing linkages and collaborations. This will ensure interface for networking between Egerton University, other institutions and organizations and other stakeholders nationally, regionally and internationally. During my tenure as the Vice-Chancellor, I will drive this goal by

initiating, developing, promoting and maintaining functional relationships with institutions, organizations and industry.

5. Enhancing governance and resource mobilisation. Good corporate governance and management are key pillars of effective organizations. Egerton University committed itself to clear governance processes and procedures that led to the attainment of ISO 9001:2008 and ISO 22000 Certification. To ensure greater commitment to environmental governance, the University has committed itself to the ISO 14001 standard, the world's most recognized framework for environmental management systems (EMS). Under my leadership, Egerton University will continue to uphold governance principles espoused in the Constitution of Kenya, 2010. We will also invest in the human resource capital as one of the critical pillars in realization of the vision and mission of the University as my predecessors have done.

As a University we have developed an ambitious resource mobilization strategy to bridge the funding gap we are grappling with. I intend to lead the implementation of this Resource Mobilization Strategy to enable us raise the resources that we require to actualize this goal.

Mr. Chancellor Sir,

Guided by this strategic plan, we have had great achievements. Notable among these has been the steady rise of our rankings both nationally, regionally and globally to the current attainment of number 2 position in the 4-icu rankings of Universities in 2016

and position 2759 in the Webmetric world rankings. As Vice-Chancellor I will endeavour to create an environment favourable for fostering even greater achievements towards the attainment of our vision and mission.

Mr. Chancellor Sir, the strategic plan will remain our road map as we endeavour to adapt to the ever changing external environment. I find strategic plans to be directive but the best strategy should be evolving rather than a stable fantasy.

Mr. Chancellor Sir,

Despite the many successes we have registered, we still face glaring challenges that we will need to address as a University. Our current strategic plan has identified some of these challenges and measures have been put in place to address them:

- i) Inadequate funding from the Government;
- ii) Increasing competition for students from other Universities;
- iii) Ensuring quality in provision of higher education;
- iv) Environmental degradation and diminishing water resources;
- v) HIV and AIDS, and drug and substance abuse;
- vi) Growing insecurity and incidences of terrorism;
- vii) Government control with respect to tuition fees and unit costs;

While there is much to learn, one thing is certain: what attracts me to Egerton University is that it is open, it is inclusive, we are diverse, and we have a really caring, committed and nurturing faculty. There's a good sense of purpose at Egerton University. The management, faculty and staff constitute a talented team that

plays an important role in nurturing tomorrow's leaders and ensuring that Egerton continues to produce outstanding community and globally minded citizens. There are many opportunities ahead to solidify our reputation as a progressive and compassionate place of higher learning. We are THE COMMUNITY UNIVERSITY, a place where students want to discover, achieve and belong; a place where the wider community is proud to associate with.

Mr. Chancellor Sir,

Building the Egerton University of tomorrow, from today, is a work-in-progress. And knowing the vital difference that Egerton University makes in the lives of its students, I want to be sure that the path to opportunity remains open. Let me assure you, my sleeves are rolled up – even though it might not look like it in this academic gown and hat! I'm ready to work with all of you to take this venerable University to the next level and to usher it into the last quarter of the century of its existence.

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH!
AND MAY GOD BLESS YOU ALL!!**

