



Office of the Principal and Vice-Chancellor

**MAKERERE UNIVERSITY 75TH GRADUATION CEREMONY - COMMENCEMENT  
ADDRESS**

**'THE POWER OF RESILIENCE – AFRICAN WOMAN, FIND YOUR GENERATIONAL  
MISSION AND REDEFINE YOUR WORTH'**

**PROFESSOR PULENG LENKABULA  
PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR**

**FREEDOM SQUARE, KAMPALA, UGANDA**

**MONDAY, 13 & 14 JANUARY 2025**

**09:00**

Dr Crispus Walter Kiyonga, the fourth non-Head-of-State Chancellor of Makerere University,

Prof Professor Barnabas Nawangwe, the Vice – Chancellor of Makerere University,

Chairperson of the Makerere University, Mrs Lorna Magara, the first Chairwoman in the 122 years history of Makerere,

Members Council of Makerere,

Members of Senate,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Religious and Civil Society Leaders present here today,

Members of the Student Representative Bodies,

Members of the university staff,

Members of the Student Representatives Bodies,

Government officials present,

The Graduandi and their families and friends,

Members of the media and the artistic community entertaining us today,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning!

Jumbo!

Mwasuze mutya!

Oli Otya!

Webale!

Thank you. Thank you all.

I bring warm greetings from South Africa – in particular, from the University of South Africa's (UNISA) Chancellor, the former President of the Republic of South Africa, His Excellency Dr Thabo Mbeki, and the entire UNISA epistemic community.

I am deeply honoured to be invited by Makerere University to speak at the 75<sup>th</sup> Graduation Ceremony of this great African institution. Once more, I am grateful for your generosity my dear brother, our Vice-Chancellor Professor Barnabas Nawangwe.

I am truly appreciative to be associated with this august institution, a beacon of academic excellence in building a transformed society, one that celebrated a centenary milestone in 2022.

As you can imagine, I have been requested to speak on a certain topic. However, with the liberty often granted to the speaker, I have, with all due respect decided to alter the topic, slightly.

My new topic is: **African Women, reclaim your Generational Mission and Redefine your Worth!** In this way, I hope to share my thoughts about the resilience, thoughts, actions, and leadership of women – past, present, and future – in the quest to shape Africa's future and its position in the world.

Before I venture into my chosen topic, I wish start-off by paying tribute to the people of Uganda and Makerere University. And in particular, I wish to recognise the common heritage and future than binds us together as institutions and as a People.

- Makerere University and the University of South Africa are both more than a century old.
- Makerere University and Unisa, have contributed immensely in the anti-colonial and post-colonial reconstruction and development era of the rebirth Africa.
- In East Africa, in the dark days of colonial struggles and the post-colonial period, Makerere in Kampala and Dar University in Dar es Salaam, were not only the hive activity for progressive scholarship, but the epitome of academic excellence and innovation.
- And I wish to pay tribute to a continuum of eminent scholars who contributed immensely into the African academy: eminent scholars such as Professor Dani

Wadida Nabudere, Issa Shivji, Ngugi waThiong'o, Mahmood Mandani, Adorah Hoppers, Patricia MacFadden, Amina Mama and many others who have walked through and contributed to the making of our universities – institutions that you proudly call your Alma Mata today.

- The profound and unforgettable contribution of Makerere University in the education and development of the throngs of Freedom Fighters from the Southern Africa region, South Africa, and the African National Congress. Once more, we thank you.
- I also wish to acknowledge and thank Makerere University for its generosity of spirit and consciousness for celebrating our founding father and leader, President Nelson Mandela when you celebrated 100 years of your existence as an institution of higher learning.

All of this is what constitutes the ontological being of Makerere University and as Africa, we are proud of this place. More importantly, it demonstrates the exceptional contribution of Makerere to the cause of Freedom and the unity of the African people, and the fact that we are one people with common interests and a common destiny!

Ladies and gentlemen, graduates,

I believe that the African woman has always been resilient and sought to define the destiny of Africa. Memory is a constant struggle against forgetting. The idea of going back to engage in the exercise of '**rememory**' – to borrow Toni Morrison's phrase – is to engage with our being, social reproduction, the construction of society and its futures.

In the struggle for memory against forgetting, we recall Don Mattera's formulation: 'Memory is the Weapon.'

- Today our graduates will remember Queen Amina, the Nigerian Hausa Queen who ruled for 34 years over the Zazzau Kingdom in 16<sup>th</sup> century Nigeria.
- Njinga, the queen of Ndongo and Matamba in present-day Angola, who fought against the Portuguese colonization.
- Empress Tayetu Betul who actively advised the Ethiopian government and participated in defending the country from Italian invasion in 1896.
- Yaa Asantewaa, the queen mother of the Ejisu in present-day Ghana, who led a rebellion against British colonial rule in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Queen Mother Nandi, the mother of King Shaka Zulu who was instrumental in the upbringing and social orientation of King Shaka in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Southern Africa.

- Wangari Maathai, the Kenyan environmentalist and women's rights activist, who was the first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a doctorate degree and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004.
- Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the former president of Liberia, who was the first woman to be elected head of state in Africa and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011.
- Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the South African politician and former United Nations official, who served as the Executive Director of UN Women and was a key player in the fight against poverty and inequality in South Africa.

These and many other women, have sought to define the anti-colonial struggles and post-colonial decolonial struggles. Today, we have a new generation of young people who must understand, redefine, and shape the past, present and future!

As graduates, you form part of the continuum of life under whose sun and shade we must find refuge, joy, and peace. You have a generational mission. The mission of our forebears was to fight and defeat colonialism and usher in a new dispensation of Freedom, Justice, and Equality. That has been largely, achieved. As the new generation, however, you must walk out of this hall (ground) with a new sense of mission, and it is entirely in your hands to reclaim it and redefine your worth!

Today as you graduate, especially as women, you need to remember the words Frantz Fanon when he said: 'Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it.' In the context where Africa is in desperate need of an army of knowledgeable and skilled workers and leaders, your academic success and graduation should mean something to Africa and her People.

As you will recall, Chinua Achebe's Okonkwo in 'Things Fall Apart', is exactly the fate that you must avoid as you venture into a new phase in your lifelong commitment to reclaim your generational mission and redefine your worth!

It is in his subsequent work – '*No Longer at Ease*' – that Chinua Achebe cautions against the temptation of 'the new generation of highly educated Africans aspiring to the future promised by decolonisation but ultimately [gets] defeated by the weight of *colonial history and the pressures of transformation*' (1960).

Fortunately, for your purposes and mine, Amina Mama who reminds us that:

*‘...education is not an elite indulgence, but a public good, offering an important route to freedom and progress for Africa’s oppressed and marginalized majorities. This public interest drove all the struggles that were waged to establish Africa’s post-colonial institutions as inclusive, modern and to hold them responsible – not to any particular regime – but to the public; the women and men of Africa.’<sup>1</sup>*

Your graduation represents a new generation of skills, ideas and activism in an ever-evolving Africana and world context. History has thrust upon you, the momentous task of reclaiming your generational mission and redefining your worth. Your generation does not need to be held prisoner to the concerns of the past, although you cannot pursue your own visions without understanding where we come from.

Today’s Africa, although exhibiting birthmarks of the past, is different to the Africa of yesterday. A lot has been achieved and a lot more, still needs to be achieved. Your resilient spirit must resonate with the present and the future. It is a present and the future you must redefine!

The fields of medicine, mathematics, agriculture, science, technology must be reclaimed and be put to good use in the agenda to revive the African continent as a place of peace, development, and prosperity. The youth and the intellectual capital of Africa are not inferior to the rest of the world – our history and present reality tells us so!

As you step into the world you have already sampled in your many years of learning, research, and community engagement, I wish to implore you to remain as grounded in your communities in as much as you are in your global outlook.

African societies have developed social resilience in the face of historical, political, economic, cultural adversities. Some of the social resilience strategies that our societies develop, which become cultural practices, are harmful to women and children or place a great burden on women, disproportionate to men in the same communities. The system of patriarchy adds more burdens and traumas for African women to overcome, and so is the intersection between race, gender, and class in its creation of more hurdles for the womenfolk. It is no wonder that Professor Amina Mama reminds us that even in academia:

*‘Whether their consciousness was nationalist or pan-Africanist, African intellectuals have continued to display a quite remarkable reticence over questions over gender’ (2005: 5).*

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<sup>1</sup> Mama, A. The Challenges of Feminism: Gender, Ethics and Responsible Academic Freedom in African Universities. JHEA/RESA Vol. 9, Nos. 1 & 2, 2011, pp. 1–23. CODESRIA.

I would like to believe though, that your university Mr Vice-Chancellor, is an exception as already in 2005, Mama wrote this impressive statement about gender consciousness right here:

'The wider reform effort at Makerere has created a situation in which there are now over a thousand students enrolled at the department, while half of the ten faculty are away pursuing doctoral degrees, now a prerequisite for promotion. From within the university have come demands related to gender mainstreaming, notably the work of ensuring that various players are kept aware of the cross-cutting importance of gender, coupled with the demands that burden the department with the task of providing all the conceptual and practical resources for implementing 'gender mainstreaming' (2005:109

We know too well that across time and space, women face a disproportionate amount of oppression, exploitation, and discrimination in various spheres of life, especially in leadership and management of small and large organisations. It is for this reason that the quest to resolve the problem of patriarchy and sexism, must be a **dialogical** process between women and men in the true Freirean sense.

As I have stated above, the history of humankind is not a man's history and patriarchy has not always been the social order of the day. In each defining epoch, women and men have always forged, through struggle and trenches, trial and error, a better life for all.

In the context where the geopolitical realities are rapidly changing and shifting in the North and South, and the threat of senseless war and complete extinction keeps lurking on the horizon, we need more women to the front; buoyed by the understanding that where women are involved, the peace is sustainable. It is not me who says that it is a report of UN Women.

This for me, is one of the ways in which we truly can make the change that we want to see as women in our continent and beyond: to create a world after our image; one of peace, sustainability, inclusivity, and prosperity!

For her part, Bell Hooks in *Feminism is for Everybody – Passionate Politics*, speaks about the concept of 'visionary feminism' where she suggests that our visions our futures as women must steeped in a certain form of pragmatism. She states that:

'To be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality...The dream was of replacing

that culture of domination with a world of participatory economics grounded in communalism and social democracy, a world without discrimination based on race or gender, a world where recognition of mutuality and interdependency would be the dominant ethos, a global ecological vision of how the planet can survive and how everyone on it can have access to peace and well-being.’

In other words, in a rapidly changing and unpredictable world, Africa must define itself, its interests and its path. Everything we do and expect from you as graduates, is to help propel Africa from being the most underdeveloped region to being the most developed spiritually, materially, politically, and economically.

I imagine that in order to reclaim your generational mission and redefine your worth, as African women and youth, the majority of which are graduates of Makerere University today, you will carry the burdensome mettle and the light to create more opportunities – individually and collectively – for others to reclaim their mission and redefine their worth, in the same way that those who came before have done – with immense pride!

In the end, I hope that you find your strength, and courage – with all the acquired knowledge and skills – to Reclaim your Generational Mission and Redefine your Worth as the new generation that must help us realise the African Renaissance!

I have no doubt that you will, hence forth, become the foremost brilliant and most committed of the Makerere and African graduates that will forever promote the spirit of education, innovation, and Ubuntu here in Africa and beyond. And your parents, spouses, and families, must be proud of what you have achieved today. We are all truly grateful for your great achievements!

Once more, congratulations and may you Reclaim your Generational Mission and Redefine your Worth as the new generation that Africa is waiting for!

Thank you!

Ke a leboha!

Asantesana!

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