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Egerton
University

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Statement by Amb. Dr Hukka Wario, Chair of Council, Egerton University

On the occasion of the 42nd Graduation at Egerton University's main campus, Njoro on Friday 31st July 2020

Our Guest of Honour, the Honourable Cabinet Secretary for Education, Professor George Magoha, The Chancellor, Egerton University, Dr Narendra Raval, Chancellors of other Universities present, Chairs of Governing Councils of other universities present, Members of the Governing Council, Egerton University, Members of Governing Councils of other Universities present, the Vice chancellor, Egerton University, Professor Rose Mwonya, Vice chancellors of other universities present, Deputy Vice Chancellors of Egerton University, Professor Kahi, Professor Kibwage and Professor Bebe and Deputy Vice Chancellors of other Universities present, Members of the Egerton University Senate, Heads of Campuses, Faculties, Schools, Directorates, Departments, All Members of the Teaching as well as non-Teaching Staff, Members of the Students Council, All invited Guests, graduands, parents and all Alumni present, all continuing students, the Egerton University Neighbourhood Community, Ladies and gentlemen,

May I start by thanking all those who made this joyous occasion of the 42nd Graduation of Egerton University possible. The Cabinet Secretary and the Ministry of Education, the Higher Education Loans Board, the Commission for University Education, the graduands themselves, the Chancellor, the Vice Chancellor and the Management, the Senate the Deans and Heads of Departments, all members of staff, teaching and non-teaching, parents guardians friends of the University, and all stakeholders.

I would like share my thoughts on five related issues today. You can count them on the fingers of one hand.

- Privilege
- Responsibility

- Service
- Empathy and
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In our country, where only a tiny fraction of the population ever gets access to University Education, you must count yourselves a fortunate and a privileged lot. A diploma or a degree is a ticket to entering a higher social strata, an exclusive club of laptop carrying digital natives, the club of the intelligensia and of men and women of letters. Society gives you a higher value and a superior position. This privilege extends into giving you higher chances of being employed or self-employed because you are skilled and because you have an informed consciousness and world view.

Privilege is a right or benefit given to some and denied to others. Privilege is the advantage wealthy and powerful people have over society. It borders with rights. The right to govern, to collect taxes to give instructions and expect to be obeyed.

Power and the privilege that goes with it is given to you to serve your country, its people. In this sense, privilege is honour, it is respect and you are held in high esteem. Privilege gives you an opportunity to serve. Not many get this opportunity. So you are a chosen few. A position of power and privilege is one of trust. You become a trustworthy person. You enjoy the confidence of the public and you are regarded as a man or woman of integrity, a steward of self-less service.

You will be faced with the temptation of using a position of power and privilege for personal gain. If you give in to this then trouble sets in. Corruption is beckoning. If you use your position of public trust, of privilege for personal gain, there is a conflict of interest and you are no longer a person of integrity; you are no longer trustworthy. You lose all the aura of honour and respect, public trust, and being a man or woman of letters has no meaning. Infact it is demeaning. People will ask, how is that a university graduate has bent so low as to be on the take? How is it that he or she has accumulated so much wealth a few years after graduation? Is this not living beyond your income? People begin to ask questions and what happens? You lose. You lose respect. You lose honour. You lose your name. You lose your face. You lose your very identity. The abuse of privilege is the abuse of power and position. As Egertonians my first message to you is this. **Respect and uphold your positions of privilege. Don't ever abuse it.**

My second isse for your ingestion and digestion is responsibility. Think of holding a coin in your hand. If the side facing you has privilege written on it, just turn it and the other side reads responsibility. Privilege and responsibility are but two sides of the same coin.

A position of privilege is not a free lunch. It comes with responsibility. When you are given responsibility, you are given a task. You take charge. You may get praise if you succeed and blame when you fail. It is a position of trust. You are entrusted with a job to do, a duty to carry out, something to do, usually within a given time frame. When you are in a position of responsibility, it is morally and legally incumbent upon you to do certain things. For example take responsibility of supporting your aging parents; support your siblings and see them through school and see to their housing, food, warm clothing and other basic necessities. If you are

in a position to do so, you may take responsibility for donating to support the less fortunate in society, the persons with disabilities, orphans and vulnerable children, older citizens. You take your responsibility as a good citizen, as a tax payer to support your government, and not try to evade tax obligations, because the development of our country, the provision of essential social services, all depend on those taxes.

Men and women of letters do not shun responsibility. They take charge. Their presence is felt by the people around them by the good they do.

When things go wrong under your watch, take responsibility. In a certain country that I would not name here, there are three ministries of transport: Ministries of Air, Rail and Road Transport respectively. When there is a plane crash in which citizens die, the Minister of Air Transport takes responsibility and resigns. When there is a rail disaster the same happens and when there is a bad road accident in which citizens lose their lives the Minister for Road Transport takes responsibility and resigns. Think about it. The respective ministers did not cause the accidents directly. But for everything under their docket the buck stops at their desk. They do the honourable thing and resign. That is taking responsibility.

My second message to you is this. **Be responsible. Take responsibility.**

My third issue as food for thought is service to the people. You have had a privileged position in society by getting a University education, most at public or tax payer's expense. Education is the most powerful tool for social and economic improvement. It has and will continue to make a difference in your lives. Its incumbent upon you, it is your responsibility to give to others what Egerton University has given to you. If you are a teacher, you teach; If you are a Vet, treat and care for livestock and other birds and animals, both wild and domestic. If you have graduated in a branch of Agriculture, use your skills to enhance the country's food security. At this juncture, allow me to quote Benjamin Disraeli. 'A university should be a place of light, of liberty and of learning.' My third message to you is **take the light the liberty and learning you got from Egerton in the service of the Kenyan people. It is your duty and responsibility to serve, and to serve selflessly.**

My fourth point is on empathy. Listen carefully, empathy should not be confused with sympathy. Empathy is putting yourself in the position of others, in their shoes, if you will so that you actually go through their experiences. You join them in their times of sorrow and celebrate with them in times of joy. That ability to understand the person you serve is empathy.

Let me give you another example that will I think notion of empathy clearer. A researcher in Anthropology came to a pastoral community from a western country to do research on culture. It was a year long field research. So the researcher built her own grass thatched hut like those of this people. She was given camels, cows and goats for milk, on loan. She would live in her hut and go out with the women for firewood, water and other needs. She lived the life of the members of that community in every sense. With time, she ate what they ate and drank what they drank. She learnt and spoke their language. She sold some of the milk

from the livestock loaned to her to buy tea and sugar and other supplies from the market. She milked her livestock herself and took care of them. This researcher, no doubt has empathy towards members of the community.


So my fourth message to you is this. **Have empathy for the people you serve.**


My fifth and last point is hope. If you nurture hope, you will expect to achieve your ambitions. Hope gives you confidence that you will be employed or be self-employed, that you will get married and raise family, that you will have a roof over your head as a home of your own. A hopeful person is a positive thinker. If things are bad now, they will get better soon. You must enthuse others with hope. In one of Achebe's books, Things Fall Apart, I think, hot water was poured on cockroaches. The young cockroaches cried to their mother that they are going to die. Mother cockroach did not hesitate to give them hope. 'Just be patient, for whatever is hot will soon turn cold.' That is giving hope when it's badly needed. If you embrace hope, you are always cheerful and free of stress. A hopeful you does not say things like, 'I do not know,' even if you don't. You will admit ignorance but add, 'I'll find out and get back to you.'


So my fifth and final message to you today is this. **Keep the flame of hope burning always and enthuse the people around you with hope.**


Once the Chancellor confers degrees and diplomas upon you and the Vice Chancellor dissolves the congregation, you will go. Go and serve the people across the country with honour, dignity and pride, knowing very well that you lead best through humility, compassion, responsibility, commitment to serve, empathy and hope in your selfless service to all.

All the best for the future and keep safe.

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