

## **INAUGURAL SPEECH BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR AT THE INSTALLATION OF THE CHANCELLOR AND MY OWN INSTALLATION AS VICE-CHANCELLOR OF MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY - 17 MARCH 2001**

It is a very high honour to have been invited to be the first Vice-Chancellor of the Midlands State University. Located in the Midlands City of Gweru, that is serviced by an excellent rail and road network, and is easily accessible from most parts of Zimbabwe, the University promises great potential as it should be able to tap both human and material resources relatively cheaply from all corners of the country. With this inauguration, we at the Midlands State University can say we are in that period of time which our rural folk graphically describe as the dawning of the dawn, when only the tips of the horns of the cattle can be seen etched against the morning sky. For us this has been the most awaited-for event and our preparations for the day have been occupying every waking moment since the beginning of 2000. At the end of this ceremony, the Midlands State University will have in place the Chancellor, the Vice Chancellor and all other administrators. The piece of land on which our university is to be built is before us and our Vision of the University has been formulated. We are indeed at the daybreak stage, and ours promises to be a very bright day!!

This event would not have been as great as it is and as it is going to be, were it not for the companies, individuals, professional firms and our own members of staff who have generously donated in cash and kind as well as in intellectual and labour time. We have decided that to express adequately our sincere gratitude for the assistance we have received; we are going to do so through the national media.

Meanwhile, the day offers an opportunity to look back at the long road that I have travelled to reach here. It gives me a chance to share with you some aspects of my life and to pay tribute to all those people who have helped me to become who I am. The day further presents me with the rare chance to give you a broad-brush of the university we want to come up with and, if possible, some of the immediate and long-term challenges that lie ahead. To put in a speech of this nature things that are entirely personal to me is not to be arrogant or to indulge in ostentatious self-adulation or vain egotism. To be sure, this is meant to achieve two things. First, it's meant to help me to pay due credit effectively to all those who assisted me in my climb to the summit. Secondly, and even more importantly, it is my sincere hope that the fragments of my life that I shall give will inspire and spur some of my students to even greater heights of achievement than I have been able to reach.

Your Excellency and Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen, as I stand here, I am truly every inch the product of a woman, of her toils and of the sweat of her brow. Right from the day I was born, my mother provided me with a home and then spared nothing to give a solidly grounded upbringing. She was a tough, determined peasant woman and she devoted almost every penny from the sale of her peasantry produce to my education. I cannot rub off from my memory the abject poverty this indomitable lady reduced herself to, simply to have me educated. As a last act of her solemn dedication to my education, she sent me to Roma for my university education, with very little money; in fact, just enough for my train fare, because she still had to sell her groundnuts and just as I was sliding into some desperation at the university, sure enough a £5 note arrived by post. That was the last instalment she made, as I soon got a scholarship. I therefore challenge any male chauvinist, after a careful study of my mother's life, to continue to doubt the equality between women and men. My mother was able to pursue her project, of course, under the generous, warm and protective ambience of my loving uncle, her brother TaravusaNhongo Zhou, who up to today remains the idol of my reverence. To my uncle and his entire Nhongo clan, I say today, publicly, thank you.

Indeed, it was my mother's diligence, endurance, indomitable courage and focused nature that I always drew upon for inspiration, even in my studies. Both at school and when I went to university, I worked very hard. At university, especially in history, I wrote my essays three times before submitting them for marking and they never fell below the range of excellence in marks. I aimed to remain among the top two students in my class. I carried the same industry to my PhD, so much that when I nervously turned up for my oral examinations, expecting to be grilled by the three examining professors, they unnerved me even further by the most unexpected remark, that they had not come to examine me but to advise me on how the thesis should be published, as it was excellent! The same striving for perfection has sustained me as a university teacher. In the classroom, I have prepared my lectures diligently and thoroughly, and aimed to present them in a theatrical fashion, and almost melodramatically, by rehearsing them before delivery. This is because I personally tend to enjoy, and remember best, lively presentations, I therefore confirm, Your Excellency and Chancellor, that I bring along to this Vice-Chancellorship, you have conferred upon me today, diligence, industry, self-discipline, together with an almost self-effacing modesty or diligent humility. My advice to all my students, therefore, is that there is no substitute for hard work in striving for the best achievements. Besides, you should always be motivated by

highly focused ambitions. I was also lucky that, beyond the example of my mother, when I was doing my JC, I read John Hunt's Ascent of Mount Everest and memorized the following of his most inspiring statements:

“There is no height nor depth that spirit of man guided by a higher spirit cannot reach.”

Your Excellency and Chancellor, the story of my personal development is only a partial explanation of the event we are witnessing today. This occasion, very easily the biggest event in the educational development of this province and country would have been a non-event were it not of those men and women who invested their time and energy towards the realization of this university. May I, with your indulgence, single out some individuals in the Midlands Provincial Leadership. I want, most fondly, to acknowledge the untiring, unstinted and most dedicated efforts of CdeEmmersonMnangagwa, the current Speaker of Parliament; Cde Richard Hove, then National Economic Planning Commissioner in the President's Office; Cde July Moyo, the Minister of Public Service Labour and Social Welfare; Cde Fredrick Shava, then ZANU-PF Provincial Chairman; and Joram Gumbo, ZANU-PF Parliamentary Chief Whip.

At the height of debates and delicate preparations for the establishment of the university, these otherwise very busy people put aside Tuesday evenings for meetings in CdeMnangagwa's office to attend to the obstacles, snags and other impediments and to note any progress. Although some of these people occupied strong and powerful positions both in government and the Party, they operated with a high sense of honour and were always mindful of the fact that the project was the ultimate responsibility of the Ministry of Higher Education and Technology and that the most they could hope for was to lobby and influence the Minister of Higher Education and Technology.

Indeed, the pivotal and decisive role in facilitating the establishment of the University was played by Dr Ignatius Chombo, one of my most successful students and most promising national leaders, together with his whole staff of dedicated civil servants, especially Dr Michael Mambo, the able Permanent Secretary, and Mrs Joyce Mkushi, the tough and astute Secretary for the National Council for Higher Education. They both readily provided the requisite technical underpinnings to the project. On the spot, at Gweru Teachers College, was Professor RunganoZvobgo, now my loyal, indefatigable, energetic and indeed

irrepressible deputy, who was called upon to lay the foundations of the institution with the most meager resources. And, typical of the undaunted individual he is, laying the groundwork for the university.

Your Excellency and Chancellor, to pay tribute to all these and many other men and women in one breath is certainly not to imply that their visions of a Midlands State University were by any means identical. In fact, sometimes the violent differences of their visions threatened to derail the very project whose materialization they all so dearly worked hard to see come to pass. But it was the mature and sensitive tact with which they handled their disagreements and the adroit and subtle way in which Minister Chombo approached the minefield which saw the idea sail through seas to its destination. Chombo crowned his whole magnificent performance by providing the nascent institution with an inaugural Council of high-minded and patriotic professionals who have carefully nurtured the university to what it is today, with five faculties, a current budget of \$180.5 million, a student population of 1783, a teaching staff of 96, a support staff of 73 and with all the non-core activities, such as the refectory, cleaning and grounds maintenance, as well as security, all outsourced.

Your Excellency and Chancellor, the successful piloting of this whole delicate vessel to its destination was largely determined by your ever presence behind the scenes, your readiness to lend positive support, and by the sheer knowledge of all those concerned, that the whole assignment enjoyed your jealous interest of no mean magnitude. Indeed, my observation is shared by all Zimbabweans that your commitment and unshakable belief in the uplifting potency of education has been responsible for the phenomenal provision of education in the country at all levels. It will forever be part of the precious annals of this country, as one of the most enduring legacies of your premiership and presidency of Zimbabwe. The university which we are inaugurating today is but one elegant feather in your cap of productive and glamorous statesmanship.

Your Excellency and Chancellor please allow me to take you on a brief tour of the university we are inaugurating today and, in conducting the excursion, I shall remain as simple as possible, so that we can all understand the institution.

To start with, the institution is being planned and developed and will conduct its teaching and training in complete partnership with all our stakeholders. We have already demonstrated that

such a partnership is achievable, viable and extremely productive. We have just used it in our strategic planning. The first part of the Strategic Plan is out and I have the honour and privilege to present it to you, Your Excellency. The second part, which will have the Business Plan and the Master Plan, is on the way. Our Minister of Higher Education and Technology, Dr Herbert Murerwa, himself not an alien to erudition, who is also equipped with impeccable credentials to testify to that, has fully participated in our effective operationalisation of this seminal partnership.

The partnership draws participants from commerce, industry, government, donors, other universities, both local and foreign and, above all, our first customers – the students themselves. That partnership has now produced a Strategic Plan that envisages eleven faculties, 10,000 students, 700 teaching and 350 support staff by the year 2015. We have not tried to depart from the general character of the university envisaged in the original University Act of 1999 of the Parliament of Zimbabwe. But we have responded to the call for an identification of an area by which we must become famous in a slightly unusual way. We have chosen to articulate our excellence in a different way from the fashionable and familiar approach of carving out a niche, through the development of a centre of excellence in a particular discipline, or cluster of agnate or cognate disciplines. Instead we have decided that our distinguishing hallmark, our badge of difference from other universities, shall lie in the qualities of our products, whatever discipline or training they might choose to pursue in this University.

We want to give our students skills we are sure are not in abundance in Zimbabwe and help mould their characters into useful and productive citizens. Of course, we believe that successful business people and inventors are born. But we also believe that these skills, talents and capabilities can be inculcated into and nurtured in people through teaching and training. In that regard, we plan to devote disproportionately large resources to our Faculty of Commerce and commercial disciplines, so that they have a capacity to reach right across the entire university, at the same time as they are also able to churn out their own graduates. We want to give the country innovative and enterprising human resources. Our graduates should not just seek to be employed in existing enterprises, but they should be men and women with a penchant for starting their own businesses.

We think it will be possible to churn out this type of graduate, not only on the basis of disciplines, but also because of the manner in which we teach, which relies on firm collaboration with partners outside the walls of our university. The work-related experience which we use, exposes our students to solid theoretical knowledge and to the world of work.

To cement our partnership with the outside world and gain maximum benefit from it, we intend also to draw into part-time teaching people from industry, commerce, the public sector, and other professions. Such collaboration, together with student internships, spanning over periods of an academic year, should produce self and formally employable graduates.

Apart from equipping our graduates with innovative skills and entrepreneurship, we want to supply Zimbabwe with disciplined and socially integrated men and women. To do this, we shall try to learn from the lessons of Europe and America in the nineteen sixties. In that decade, students in those countries were simply anti-establishment, iconoclastic and brutally bohemian. Sometimes they rioted for no apparent reason. Indeed one John Foster Dulles later recalled his anti-social days at university in a most representative way of his generation by remarking:

“When I was a student at the Sorbonne in Paris, I used to go out and riot occasionally. I can’t remember now whose side it was on.”

In other words rioting was being carried out sometimes for the sheer fun of it. Of course, there were deep-seated grievances in those societies which students wanted to see righted. But that is not what I am interested in is this presentation. I am interested in drawing parallels between those times at overseas universities and what is happening in some of our universities in Africa. Governments and university administrations then responded to the riots heavy-handedly and crushed the student outbursts with sledge-hammer tactics. All these helped universities to do their core-business without disruptions, but only temporarily. However, what I believe finally brought permanent peace and harmony in overseas campuses were the steps and measures taken by governments and university administrations to de-alienate, to socially integrate and to co-opt their young people into the social establishments. Students were entrusted with the financial responsibilities for their education. They were made to negotiate for their grants and loans on equal terms. Either side of the bargain understood that they stood to benefit from the relationship. Such empowerment and

recognition of the student was extended to the whole system of university governance, the choice of study programmes, decisions concerning board and lodgings and the management of student discipline. Students came to share the ownership of their institutions. Their pride in their societies at large grew correspondingly. The use of the work-related programmes, which also helped students to develop contacts and to build networks with future employers or the money markets, facilitated the complete integration of the young people into the so-called establishments long before they left university. They rapidly developed a stake in their political systems, in their economies and in their societies, whose values they intimately shared.

Please don't misunderstand me. I am not for a moment suggesting that we should lift European and American solutions lock, stock, and barrel and bring them to Africa. In fact, I am disillusioned in their potential efficacy, having been tailor-made for industrialized societies and not for the largely peasant countries of Africa. We need globally compatible African solutions of co-opting our students into the establishments. Here at the MSU we are committed to producing socially integrated and disciplined students through our student affairs management and through our partnership with all stakeholders in the training of our graduates.

In terms of funding, the university recognizes that Government will for the foreseeable future remain the principal source of our income through students' grants and loans and through direct annual allocations for recurrent costs and capital development. However, both Council and all stakeholders of the institution realize the need to identify our own ways of generating income. The Draft Strategic Plan identifies some strategies. The first is what is called Cost Recovery at the Basic Unit Level. This includes charging economic fees for regular and part-time programmes, letting out facilities when not in use by students, starting up university businesses, especially in those areas that are immediately related to university education. The second strategy is to use our limited financial resources prudently so that they can stretch farther. This includes cutting down on unnecessary costs and increasing efficiency. Indeed we want to practice the principle enshrined in our motto; "Our hands, our minds, our destiny, "by cultivating the spirit of self-reliance and self-sufficiency.

Just to round off our very hurried tour, these, then, are some of the prominent features of the university we are founding today: a small, compact and general university; a university

whose excellence lies in supplying the country with innovative and enterprising graduates, a university that is anchored in firm partnership with all its stakeholders, a university that deliberately aims to produce men and women that are self-disciplined, socially integrated and developmentally oriented.

With this brief, sneak preview of the MSU, I want to end my oration as I started, by paying the greatest tribute to another woman in my life and this time this is none other than my wife, Faith NtabeniBhebe. When to be married, for me, had become a dismal and barren desert upon which male hormones urged me to tread, my wife, Faith, you turned the last twelve years of our union into a blissful, enriching and inspiring experience. It has been a productive relationship which has seen me redouble my scholarly output and which has seen me scale the ladder of my career rapidly to the summit where I stand today. Fully occupied with your demanding professional toils, you still find ample time to lend me so much support that you leave me mortified with shame, jealousy and envy, simply because I am unable to reciprocate it all. The debt I owe to you my wife, Faith, is of huge dimensions that even the fact of life itself cannot repay it.

**I THANK YOU ALL**