

## VICE -CHANCELLOR'S ADDRESS AT THE 8<sup>TH</sup> CONGREGATION OF THE MSU GRADUATION CEREMONY - FRIDAY 4<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2009

It is my distinct honor and pleasure to welcome you all to this graduation ceremony, and to address you on this special occasion at which we recognize and celebrate the achievements of the students of Midlands State University. Today marks an occasion when our graduands, our lecturers and professors, our administrative and support staff witness the culmination of years of hard work. It is an occasion when the parents, spouses, children, relatives and the wider social networks of our graduands get to know more about the contribution of the university towards the development of human capital for our country; and it is indeed, an occasion when His Excellency the President and Chancellor gets an opportunity to decorate the students who worked hard and passed their examinations. Your Excellency, we sincerely wish to thank you most profusely, for gracing us with the honor of your personal presence and participation at this propitious occasion in our academic year.

My address at the 2008 graduation ceremony was delivered during a period when we were living in 'interesting times'. Perhaps, the memorable opening lines of Charles Dickens *A Tale of Two Cities* more accurately capture our conditions, as we started the academic year. Dickens writes, and I quote:

'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness; it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity; it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness; it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair; we had everything before us, we had nothing before us'. Today, as we live through the aftermath of an extremely difficult year, whose effects were coupled with those of a severe global financial and economic crisis, the context still remains a far cry from the optimum conditions that are required for the smooth delivery of higher education.

In addition to the inadequate resources for teaching and learning, we started the year with the sole funding from parents and guardians, in the form of tuition fees. Subsequently, government came in benevolently with the cadetship programme for needy students as well as allowances for staff, which were eventually upgraded to salaries. Although our staff endured untold difficulties, they continued to demonstrate unwavering co-operation and commitment to the institution. Our students' endurance and perseverance gave us inspiration

and reason to believe that we could very well experience ‘the best of times’, ‘the age of wisdom’, ‘the epoch of belief’, ‘the season of Light’, ‘the spring of hope’, and a time when ‘we have everything before us’. To graduands and their lecturers, parents and government, through the steadfast support from our Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, I say *Congratulations and Thank You* for keeping the university afloat during the trying times and making today a reality.

Your Excellency, it is heartening however, as I hope to show, to note that among the dark clouds hovering around us, there is indeed a silver lining. The unfavourable environment rekindled our capacity to imagine, and also became the launch pad that catapulted us into transforming the university from its conventional mode to being a dynamic think tank. Riding on the commitment of our staff who had survived the brain drain, coupled with the determination of our students to acquire their degrees within the prescribed periods of study, we courageously decided to reopen in January 2009, following the temporary suspension of lecturers in 2008. We managed to innovatively fit in a special semester in a mop up exercise to take care of all students who had been affected by the suspension of lectures. We further managed to forfeit the October 2009 mid-semester break for the final year students in a bid to complete the respective syllabi and facilitate their graduation today, thereby eliminating prejudice to our valued students.

Resultantly therefore, we are most delighted to present to you a record 3218 graduands, of which 1461 are women (45%); 6 are international students from sister African countries; 3019 are graduating with Bachelor’s degrees while 211 will be receiving Masters degrees and Postgraduate Diplomas and 255 are graduating with First Class degrees. We believe this is a tremendous contribution by Midlands State University to the intellectual base of Zimbabwe and other countries. In addition, these graduands have completed programmes that were established in response to the needs of our markets. We have the first group of students in the Master of Science in Computer Science and Information Systems programme graduating today, in answer to the need to locally train science lecturers. We are also highly encouraged by the fact that out of a total of eighteen (18) of our pioneer cohort of Insurance and Risk Management students who are graduating today, five (5) have already been engaged by one company while the rest have all secured employment elsewhere. Thus for us the production of graduates is not an end in itself, but an imperative to produce a human resource that is

equipped with the requisite skills and competencies for both the employment and entrepreneurship sectors.

In our evolution as a developmental university, we are also fully awake to the existence of numerous uncontested advantages of establishing robust Information Communication Technologies (ICTs). Among others, these are; that the coming millennium will require *all* our graduates to be computer literate, and to move along with the rapid advances in information technology; that through ICTs we can deliver quality education to significantly more students, with minimal increases in learning resources as well as lecturing and administrative staff, thereby subsidizing our operating budget; and that through e-business solutions, we can effectively and efficiently revamp our student management and related information systems to enhance the validity and reliability of our administrative processes.

To that end therefore, the university has installed Wireless Network Technology to enable users of personal computers and laptops to have 24hour access to the network and the Internet, while working from any location within the radius of the connection. The connections cover a radius of 1.5km around hot spots namely; the main campus, to include the university extension site as well as the Senga Manpower Planning and Development Center, which houses the Faculty of Commerce and some student halls of residence; the Batanai Campus, to include Senga and Nehosho townships where the majority of our students reside; and the Tel One campus, to include the Dalesford area where some of our students reside. In a bid to improve on Internet connectivity in terms of both speed and reliability, the university has also installed the Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) satellite connection, which will boost broadband services for both the wireless network as well as the existing users.

With regards to projects to cushion our expansion, firstly, I am glad to report that though still incomplete, our own locally funded multipurpose hall has been able to accommodate our core business including all our examinations as well as the congregation today. Our ambition is to properly furnish the hall and make it more modern for teaching purposes as well as conferencing. Secondly, although the water and power situation on campus remains unsatisfactory, gigantic moves in the sphere of Public Private Partnerships have greatly eased the situation through sinking of boreholes as well as installation of generators respectively.

Accordingly we pay tribute to our stakeholders including Mimosa Mines Zimplats and World Vision International, who have invested in the development of the university.

Your Excellency, our developmental efforts have not just revolved at our own institution. We believe that although traditionally our African countries have heavily relied on North-South co-operation for assistance in the delivery of social services to their people, there is also so much of value that could be shared among neighboring countries in the region. In typical 'South to South' collaborative arrangements between sister institutions of higher learning in the sub-region, we have signed Memoranda of understanding with the Gaborone Academy of Law in Botswana and the Africa Management Development Institute in Swaziland. Armed with Zimbabwe's unparalleled tradition of excellence in education, we have embarked on these synergistic outreach programmes, in win-win arrangements where we also benefit in terms of other resources. In all our endeavors, the wise guidance of our parent Ministry, as well as that of a University Council with an enviable skills mix is fully acknowledged and appreciated.

Your Excellency, I wish to take this opportunity to say my parting words to our graduands. Ladies and Gentlemen, when you joined us you were told that at MSU learning and education is a partnership, a relationship of mutual commitment to the pursuit of knowledge and understanding, to the development of expertise and skills, and to the embrace of appropriate values and attitudes. Your graduation today is testimony that you have fulfilled your side of the partnership. From this day, I urge you to partake in our common cause to strive always, to improve the quality of life of our African people who look up to us the enlightened, for salvation from poverty and the misery of underdevelopment. May I also remind you that the legacy that you will leave behind will not be measured by the number of awards that you acquire, but rather by how you would have employed them, to make a positive impact on others, and give back to society. **Makorokoto! Amhlope! Congratulations!**

**I THANK YOU!**