

VICE -CHANCELLOR'S ADDRESS AT THE SEVENTH CONGREGATION OF THE MSU GRADUATION CEREMONY - FRIDAY 5th DECEMBER 2008

We are gathered here this morning to witness the culmination of years of hard work, perseverance and persistence on the part of our graduands who are here present. In this regard, I am exceedingly delighted to extend special greetings and welcome to you all who have managed to come to Midlands State University, to share in the excitement of the occasion. Apart from our graduands, we have in our midst, their proud parents, spouses, relatives, friends and well-wishers who have supported them both materially and emotionally during the four to five years of hard work. We also have our staff, and various key stakeholders and friends of the University, without whose sterling contributions and support our efforts would not have come to fruition. Your Excellency and Chancellor, we always feel deeply honored to welcome and host you at such grand events on our university calendar. Your presence and personal participation is greatly valued. Indeed the occasion is great, and the company is good. We thank you all for choosing to celebrate with us.

Your Excellency, as we celebrate this auspicious occasion, we fully acknowledge that the limelight today should be on the graduating students, their families and friends. At the same time however, we certainly do not wish to lose sight of the enormous challenges that are currently confronting higher education. The need and demand for academic products, performance and service are growing relentlessly while the resources to meet them continue to dwindle. We are operating in an environment that is characterized by grossly inadequate resources including teaching staff, teaching and office space for our lecturers, residential accommodation for our students, library books, computers and bandwidth among others. Some of these challenges have systematically slowed down the pace of our development as envisaged in our Strategic and Business Plans.

A significant challenge in the universities sector is the massive brain drain, which is posing a serious threat to the delivery, growth and expansion of our core business as both core and support staff continue to leave for greener pastures in the region and beyond. This talent flight, which is exacerbated by the general shortage of skills in the sector is fast threatening the closure of some programmes as well as preventing the opening of new ones. The opening of the proposed departments of Architecture, Art and Design, Medical Health Sciences, Sport and Leisure and Engineering, which is long overdue according to our Strategic Plans, has

been put on hold pending the availability of appropriate teaching staff. The incessant brain drain is also stifling our efforts to build a critical mass of senior scholars who can offer academic leadership in both research and teaching. In an effort to mitigate this challenge, we have resorted to the strategy of recruiting our own high-flier graduates to work as Teaching assistants while undergoing staff development. Regrettably, it is also proving difficult to retain the bulk of this group as well.

The slow pace of growth in the academic sphere is also being replicated in infrastructure development where there is failure to complete capital projects in the physical plant. As a relatively young university, we remain cognizant of our key objective and burning desire to establish and maintain an appropriate infrastructure that can adequately accommodate the natural growth and expansion of the business of our institution. However, the construction of Phase One in our Master Plan, namely, the Administration Block and the Faculty of Commerce and Law buildings, which was initially envisaged to be complete by 2006, is still a far cry from reality. Your Excellency, the same slow pace of progress is further being replicated in our own locally funded initiatives to compliment government efforts in infrastructure development. Our ambitious project to construct a prefabricated multipurpose hall, which I am pleased to say, has managed to house our 7th congregation today has also not been spared the harsh effects of the macroeconomic environment. As you can see the project has gone way beyond the completion deadline and still requires a bit more attention. The issue of student accommodation continues to be of major concern to the University, as only 19% of the conventional student population can be accommodated on campus. We had embarked on the Public Private Partnership (PPP) initiative as one vehicle that could be used to create sustainable synergies in infrastructure development. In this regard, although considerable progress has been made towards initiating a Build, Operate and Transfer (B.O.T.) venture in the construction of Halls of Residence, a Business Center, Sporting Grounds and Refectories, the unfavourable environment has again frustrated the University's efforts by markedly slowing down progress.

With respect to the disproportionate ratios of teaching, learning and research materials to student numbers, we have always maintained in our mission, that the implementation of sound e-business solutions would go a long way towards making higher education accessible to many who yearn for it in our societies. We believe that with the appropriate Information Communication Technology, as well as proper management of bandwidth, e-business could

support the massification of degree education through widening access to higher educational opportunity; enhancing the quality of learning; and reducing the cost of higher education. The adoption of e-business solutions also promotes research, lowers all supply chain inefficiencies as well as provides a conduit for the dissemination of the Zimbabwean perspectives. Although the laptop and bandwidth have become ubiquitous in the developed world, in the South it is the cell phone that is now commonly found. It is therefore our submission that through strategic partnerships with the private sector, the university could harness the so called, 'dazzling technology' to ultimately use the cell phone and other e-technology in the massification of higher education.

Your Excellency, these numerous challenges notwithstanding, we remain resolved to free the leaders of tomorrow from intellectual bondage, as well as position our institution on the scholarly map nationally, regionally and internationally. We are therefore most delighted to present to you today, a total of 2474 graduands. Of these talented men and women, 2295 are graduating with Bachelor's degrees, 179 are graduating with Master's degrees, 43 are graduating with First Class degrees, 1003 are female while 1471 are male, and 820 are from Commerce, which is our niche faculty.

The congregation will also witness part of our natural growth in the capping of the first cohorts of students in the following programmes: Bachelor of Science in Local Governance Honours degree, Bachelor of Arts in Archeology, Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies Honours degree, Bachelor of Science in Food Science Honours degree, Bachelor of Science in Psychology Honours degree, Bachelor of Science in Natural Resources Management and Agriculture degree, Master of Education in Philosophy of Education degree, and Master of Science in Ecological Resources Management degree. Twenty-one (21) students will be graduating with the Bachelor of Science Local Governance Honours degree, the first of its kind in this country. Given the fact that the launch of this programme was in response to the gap cited by professionals in this field, it is anticipated that the advent of a qualified local governance practitioner will make a positive impact in the mitigation of challenges being faced by our local authorities in Zimbabwe. Of special note in this regard is the fact that the University has gone a step further to buttress its human resource contribution to this field by rolling out a Visiting School Bachelor of Science Local Governance Honours programme for those already in employment who wish to acquire new skills and competencies at degree

level. The uniqueness of the Archeology, Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies programme lies in the fact that for the first time, Archeologists with the requisite qualifications in Museology and Cultural Heritage will be on the market for employment in the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe. To enhance delivery in this discipline, the department of Archeology, Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies is at an advanced stage in the process of forging some partnerships with the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe aimed at establishing a University Museum for practical learning.

Your Excellency it is indeed heartening to note that we have not been passive recipients of the challenges that confront us. We continue to score remarkable progress in terms of the quality of both the graduates produced as well as the departments that house the programmes. Among other notable achievements;

- In our relatively short period of existence, four of our graduates have already attained the level of Partner in the four largest Accounting Professional Firms in Zimbabwe;
- A sizeable number of our graduates are already lecturing at universities in the region;
- Honorable Anna Ndlovu, a young and recent Human Resource Management graduate of the Midlands State University has already attained the level of Member of Parliament for Shurugwi South;
- Our innovative department of Music and Musicology has produced current MSU students who have teamed up to form a band called 'African Destiny', which is playing here today, in support of colleagues. African Destiny has represented Zimbabwe well in the Music Crossroads regional competitions catering for upcoming musicians in the ages of 15 to 25. The band has also played at various functions including at the Algerian national day celebrations;
- The Graduate School of Business Leadership has attained membership of SADCnet, an association of graduate schools in the SADC region, which aspires for accreditation to the Association of African Business Schools. Through SADCnet, the school has been invited to submit a project proposal to Kellogg Foundation, for an outreach program to assist rural farmers. The area that has been chosen for the implementation of the project is Sessombi Intensive Conservation area just outside Kwe-Kwe.
- The MSU library is fast penetrating the Library International Community. Following the selection of three countries namely; Malawi Mali and Zimbabwe, to participate in a

workshop on Open Source Software for libraries in Yerevan, Armenia, the MSU Library represented Zimbabwe. The purpose of the workshop was to train participants in setting up an Evergreen Server, or an integrated library system that automates library functions.

Once again Your Excellency, I wish to acknowledge that in these trying times, these and many other achievements of the University are only possible in the right ambience created by government, through our Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, the wise guidance and counsel by our University Council, support from parents and guardians who have been sterling partners in the nurturing of our students, and encouragement and invaluable support from other agencies and friends of the university. Accordingly, I wish to take this opportunity on the behalf of the university, to express profuse gratitude to these key stakeholders.

Lastly, I wish to end with a word of goodwill and best wishes to all our new graduates, as they go out into the challenging world of work to make their contributions towards the development of our societies. I have no doubt in my mind, that with the highest quality of training and work-related-learning experience that they have received, albeit under difficult conditions, they have been appropriately nurtured to confront the dynamic world and uplift the standards of living of our people. The nation enlists their contribution and informed guidance in spearheading the socio-economic development of this beautiful country.

Makorokoto! Amhlope! Congratulations!

