

## **VICE-CHANCELLOR'S ADDRESS: 13<sup>th</sup> CONGREGATION - 28 NOVEMBER 2014**

It is my distinct honour and pleasure to welcome you all to this august 13<sup>th</sup> congregation of the Midlands State University graduation ceremony. Today is a special day on our academic calendar, which marks the culmination of our four years' efforts to prepare our national socio-economic human capital of entrepreneurs and technocrats. It is a day when we celebrate the dazzling achievements of our staff and students, a day when parents, guardians, valued friends and all our well-wishers get to know about our role in the socioeconomic transformation of our country. We welcome you all. We acknowledge the presence of our brothers and sisters from the Africa Management Development Institute (AMADI), our affiliate college in the Kingdom of Swaziland, who are celebrating with us today. Honourable Minister Phineas Magagula and your delegation, we warmly welcome you.

Today is also a day when our President and Chancellor gets a chance to personally bestow the various qualifications on the graduands, who, as Benjamin Disraeli aptly put it "... are the trustees of posterity". Your Excellency and Chancellor, as you are a celebrated scholar of no mean determination and academic stature yourself, your company and personal participation in today's esteemed ceremony gives it the befitting grace and pomp. As we heartily welcome you to Midlands State University, we wish to take this opportunity to congratulate you and the first family eminently, on your assuming the SADC Chairmanship at the 34th Summit that was held in Victoria Falls in August 2014, on your resounding nomination for the position of First Secretary of the revolutionary party, ZANU PF, and on the nationwide nomination of the First Lady for the position of Secretary of the ZANU PF Women's League as well as her attainment of a Doctor of Philosophy degree. We wish you well and abundant prosperity during the whole of your future national leadership.

Your Excellency and Chancellor, we are mindful of the fact that progressive nations such as the Asian Tigers and others have premised their high growth rates on education, education and more education. We have therefore relentlessly sought to increase access to quality and relevant higher education to empower many of our people to create wealth primarily for this country. Against this background, we will be presenting to you a record 4 719 graduands made up of 46% women and 54% men, who are eager to transform the provisions of the well-crafted Zim Asset philosophy into tangible reality through formal employment and through individual entrepreneurship. Besides, 632 of this total figure are gaining Masters Degrees, 1

obtaining a Master of Philosophy and 4 are graduating with Doctor of Philosophy degrees. In the meantime, we have since 2008 continued to invest in the upgrading of our teaching staff so that instead of the paltry 219 teaching staff who had the Masters degrees in 2008, we now have 450, leaving us with only 8 without this minimum qualification permitted to teach in our Zimbabwean universities. Meanwhile, nearly all our young lecturers have either been trained or are in the process of acquiring pedagogical and related skills through the Post Graduate Diploma in Tertiary Education that we run. The number of our academic staff with PhDs has also risen from 68 in 2013 to 93 in 2014, while 204 are currently registered for PhDs. Our strategy in this massive training programme is to utilize our own senior academics, and senior scholars in sister universities in the country as well as those from other universities in the region to supervise our D.Phil and Ph.D. scholars.

Research and community engagement being integral activities of any university that is worth its salt, we have continued to prioritize actionable research and community-based projects that speak to national developmental aspirations. For instance, we strongly subscribe to the view that a robust local government system is the bedrock of any meaningful development, as it is the level of government that is closest to the people. As evidenced by erratic water supplies, pot-holed roads, mountains of garbage, dilapidated infrastructure, including non-functional street lights and regular sewer bursts in our cities, our local government wheels seem to have come off the rails. Against this background, the Zim Asset is a most welcome take off point for us as a university, whereby our Department of Local Governance is finalizing an MOU with the International Center for Local Democracy in Sweden to capacitate women Councilors. Another partnership agreement will be operationalized in January 2015 with the Commonwealth Local Government Forum focusing on capacity development in local authorities. A third partnership is being finalized with the United Nations Development Programme focusing on capacity building, research and infrastructure interventions in local authorities. In response to requests from our first degree holders who are already in employment, we will also be launching a Masters Programme in Local Governance in 2015. All these efforts are aimed at ensuring that our local government system, which is currently under stress, is assisted in every way possible to become more responsive to community needs and concerns.

Climate change being an issue of the moment that is already fast adversely impinging upon Zimbabwe, MSU is currently seized with academic discourses on this subject. Our Faculty of

Natural Resources Management and Agriculture recently hosted an insightful workshop on the implications of climate change on agro-ecological zones (AEZ) of Zimbabwe on behalf of the Ministry of Environment, Water and Climate. In addition, according to research carried out by our MSc Crop Science students attached to the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre, there will soon be cultivars that take two and half months to mature or ultra early maturing cultivars that are both drought and heat resistant. We thus regard our university as strategically positioned to be one of the reliable handmaids of government to address the pressing socio-economic challenges facing the nation.

Our mandate, which is broad-based, means that our participation in the Zim Asset will cut across all the four clusters and our strategic plan has already been re-crafted to reflect that scenario. In this regard, we are finalizing preparations for the establishment of the Faculty of Medicine and that of Mining Sciences. The Faculty of Medicine, which will initially be operated as an affiliate of the University of Zimbabwe Medical School will be opened in 2015. Your Excellency and Chancellor, we are mindful of the fact that if we are to attract high flier scientists to offer academic leadership both in terms of teaching and research we have no choice but to simply equip our laboratories for all the natural and medical sciences with state of the art equipment and related facilities. Accordingly, the university has purchased the latest medical equipment for our pre-clinical laboratories directly from China, which is not only meant for teaching and research purposes but also designed for carrying out medical tests on patients in the region.

Thus, whereas in the past various specimens had to be sent to either Bulawayo or Harare, the Midlands State University Medical Faculty will eliminate the inconvenience, an intervention which will bestow immediate benefits to our communities. In addition, the coming on board of a medical faculty in the province will improve the public health service delivery system as more specialist doctors will become attracted to the faculty and treat patients even well before the university itself has produced its own doctors. I wish to express our acknowledgement and gratitude to my colleague Professor Levi Nyagura, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Zimbabwe, Professor Medion Chidzonga, the Dean of the Medical School and their team for the invaluable guidance that they have given and which they continue to give to us in this project.

As regards the establishment of the Faculty of Mining Sciences, we have expanded our tentacles into the whole province through wide ranging consultations with mining houses. We have also leased part of Shabani Mashava Mining Holdings Offices, which we have rehabilitated and adapted to come up with a fine infrastructure to accommodate our programmes. We await delivery of state of the art equipment, which has again been purchased directly from China. The faculty is destined to start in 2015. In terms of ICTs at the new campus, the Local Area Networking (LAN) has been completed and the campus has already been linked up with the main campus here by means of an overhead line. Given our strategic location on the mineral rich Great Dyke, the university plans to spearhead value addition and beneficiation of minerals such as platinum, gold, diamonds and chrome. We are thrilled by our growth and expansion, which is all happening in the shadows of sanctions and other impediments and imponderables.

The Midlands State University has been asked by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to participate in the capacity building for teachers starting with 500 who are going to be offered a Bachelor of Education degree in ICTs. With bandwidth of 575 mega bytes per second, a robust ICT infrastructure, coupled with well experienced staff in our Faculty of Education, amongst a host of other resources, this assignment appears to us to be an underutilization of the university's capacity. We feel that the nation could have exploited more, the rich legacy and the legendary outstanding pedagogical tradition of the former Gweru Teachers college.

We have made tremendous progress in the incubation of a higher education institution in Manicaland as the Manicaland College of Applied Sciences is up and running, with students already in their third semester. With regards to infrastructural development, we have put up a block of classrooms, a science laboratory, a workshop, a dining hall as well as robust ICTs.

Your Excellency and Chancellor, I am extremely pleased to inform you about some of the awards and distinctions attained by the University recently. Our Faculty of Law came first in the 2nd edition of the Southern Africa Disability Rights Moot Court Competition which was held at the University of Pretoria from the 4th to the 6th of November 2014. The team also scooped the best memorial prize by having the best heads of argument, thereby demonstrating remarkable advocacy and research skills on the part of our students. In a related development, our Faculty of Law has launched the inaugural issue of the Midlands State University Law



review, which will be published twice a year and will be available to the public on Open Access. The publication addresses a lacuna in our legal system's jurisprudential development in light of our new constitutional dispensation ushered in by the 2013 Constitution.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> October 2014, Midlands State University received the Taxpayer Award in the Pay As You Earn Category, a demonstration of good institutional citizenry. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of November, 2014 MSU was again a winner of the service excellence award, in the education category, a competition that is hosted by the Contact Center Association of Zimbabwe, in partnership with the Ministry of Tourism, Consumer Council of Zimbabwe and Zimbabwe Tourism Authority where the Vice Chancellor was also a winner in the individual category as the most customer focused executive in the public sector.

Finally, I wish to extend our sincerest gratitude to all our stakeholders including our government, as represented by our line Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development, our University Council, the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education, parents and guardians, Captains of Industry and Commerce, members of our staff and last but by no means least our graduands. To you, Your Excellency and Chancellor, we wish to thank you sincerely, for the seminal ambience which your leadership provides and which has allowed us to dream and realise all these splendid and magnificent goals.

Our dear graduands, as you are the privileged few of our society, you owe our people out there, whatever their station in life, a great deal as they look up to you for leadership, skills and all the benefits that higher education can give to the individual as well as to his/her immediate community. My fervent hope and prayer is that as you take up your various assignments in society, you remain good ambassadors of your esteemed *alma mater*, the Midlands State University; ambassadors who inspire others to pass through our gates. I wish you Godspeed in all your endeavours.

Congratulations, Makorokoto, Amhlope!

Thank you.