

**Remarks by Dr. Kenneth S. Ombongi, Principal, Kenya Utalii College, during the closing ceremony for the inaugural special training programme for Pubs, Entertainment and Restaurants Association of Kenya (PERAK) employees held on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2009.**

- Our Chief Guest, Mr. Titus Kangangi, Chairman Kenya Association of Hotelkeepers and Caterers, North Coast,
- Mr. Allan Chenane, Chief Executive Officer, Catering and Tourism Development Levy Trustees,
- Mrs. Betty Makawiti, Deputy Principal, Kenya Utalii College,
- Senior Managers from the Tourism Industry,
- Senior Staff from Catering Tourism and Development Levy Trustees,
- Senior Staff and Lecturers from Kenya Utalii College,
- Course Participants,
- Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to join you this afternoon on this occasion which marks yet another milestone in the partnership between Kenya Utalii College, Catering Tourism and Development Levy Trustees and the Industry.

I wish to join the rest in welcoming and thanking the Chief Guest for honouring my invitation to grace this occasion.

I take this opportunity to also welcome all our supporters and collaborators who are here with us this afternoon.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me from the onset express my gratitude to all who have worked hard to ensure the success of this programme.

Kenya Utalii College and Catering Tourism and Development Levy Trustees, have spent considerable amount of time and resources in planning and implementing this programme. It is unique both in its focus and delivery.

Our ability to conceptualise and implement this programme custom tailored to the specific needs of the sector is a departure from the usual practice. Previously, trainees were often lumped together. This is a significant step aimed at realizing and catering for the unique training needs employees for of this important sector.

As a premier institution charged with training for the hospitality industry, the College will continue to work with stakeholders in ensuring that their training needs are met in line with best practices.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The College derives its strength from the unique high level interaction it has maintained with the tourism industry through the alumni. We take great pride in offering training programmes that are industry driven.

Through the Tourism Industry/Kenya Utalii College Liaison Committee and other fora, The College continues to provide training programmes in tandem with industry needs.

The In-Service Courses that we are closing today is a case in point. It is also important for you to note that for the first time, the College conducted refresher courses on Lamu Island.

I therefore wish to assure all present here today that the College will continue to assess the needs of the industry based on this and other experiences to and where appropriate, offer training. I urge other regions especially those with low numbers of professionally trained staff in the industry to closely work with us to help improve standards of service delivery.

Our Chief Guest, I am aware that this is not my day to make a speech, however, allow me, nonetheless, to comment on a few pertinent developments in the College.

As you may be aware, the College has in the recent past received negative publicity both in the print and electronic media. However, Kenya Utalii College remains a premier training institution for the industry.

A number of measures have been put in place to ensure the College remains repositioned to undertake its mandate.

Just to remind ourselves, the College started training for the tourism industry way back in the 1970s.

To date over 40,000 graduates are employed in strategic positions in hospitality and related establishments locally, regionally and internationally. This is no mean achievement by any standards.

However, despite this good work, we remain alive to the reality that there is always room for continuous improvement as trends in the market cannot remain static.

As a lead trainer, the College must at all times strive to keep pace with the demands of customers, and the industry, if our services are to remain relevant.

We are aware, however, that much as we have tried in the obtaining circumstances, there could be some feeling among sections of the industry that the College has not kept pace with the demands of the industry.

Admittedly, in some instances, we have lagged behind in responding to client needs both in terms of numbers and scope.

It is therefore incumbent upon us from time to time to reevaluate our operations and focus on improving our standards.

This need is pertinent particularly now that the tourism sector has assumed a high status as the main pillar of the country's economy in line – Vision 2030 and the medium term plan 2008-2012.

The Vision 2030 envisages an increase in the number of international visitors from 1.8 million in 2007 to 3 million in 2012, and per capita spending from ksh40,000 in 2006 to ksh70,000 by 2012 - thereby making Kenya a high-end tourist destination.

Such anticipated increase in visitor numbers means the College has to rethink graduate output, while a high-end tourist destination means top of the range facilities and services. The College has thus sought to address this in the revised strategic plan 2008-2012.

In the revised plan, we have identified expanding our capacity and upgrading our programmes as key issues requiring promptly.

Already the College has started admitting self-sponsored students alongside the regular programme students. We intend to extend this to all courses.

At the same time, we plan as a matter of urgency to start training programmes outside Nairobi.

We are already working our modalities of establishing a satellite centre institutions of the College in the Coast region. Other regions to follow in due course.

At the same time, the College is at advanced stages of offering Degree Programmes in Hotel Management and Travel and Tourism Management courses, both of which are currently being offered at diploma level.

To this end, we shall give priority to modernizing and renewal of our training facilities while at the same time continually reviewing our training programmes in line with prevailing international benchmarks.

Internally, we are undertaking major refurbishment programmes. Utalii Hotel which is the practical training laboratory for our students is being given a major facelift through refurbishment.

In a nutshell, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to assure our stakeholders and collaborators that the College is up and running and we shall not slacken in our endeavour to produce high quality workforce capable of taking the industry to the next level.

On today's occasion I am glad to note that over 150 employees of various establishments are set to get certificates after attending various short courses.

I wish to congratulate them and wish them well as they go back to their work stations. I urge them to ensure that they put into practice the knowledge and skills they have gained.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, It is now my pleasure to invite, Our Chief Guest, Mr. Titus Kangangi, Chairman Kenya Association of Hotelkeepers and Caterers, North Coast, to Address us.

Thank You.