



Speech by Dr. Kenneth Ombongi, Principal, Kenya Utalii College, on Monday 9th November at the start of the one-week youth seminar organised by the College

- The representative of PS Ministry of Tourism, Madam Christine Opile
- The representative of the Director of Youth Affairs,
- Resource Persons,
- Colleagues from Utalii,
- Interim officials of the Kenya Utalii College Youth Group,
- Seminar participants,
- Ladies and gentlemen:

I cannot begin to say how thrilled I am, how happy I am, indeed how excited I am to join with you this morning to open this important seminar for the youth among the workers in this College.

We are lucky, very lucky indeed, that the College is full of young people; and therefore full of life and vibrancy. Over 60% of our staff establishment is composed of those of us in their 40s and below.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I not only cherish but relish a chance to work with young people; this is a chance, this is a privilege, like no other; a chance to work in order to change things for the better.

Every time I see so many young people, working so hard to make so huge a difference in their lives, in the activities of their institution, I am very confident. They have no hangovers; they have no baggage of history and tradition; they are fresh and think positively; they are eager to succeed.

In the words of John F. Kennedy, the best president America did not have for long "The problems of the world cannot possibly be solved by skeptics or cynics whose horizons are limited by the obvious realities. We need men and women who can dream of things that never were."

I know, for sure, that the men and women seated before me today have that capacity. The capacity to dream of things that have never been; things that are beyond the oft-quoted argument in this institution that "we have done this or that way always".

These are the men and women who are ready, I hope, because they want to advance the cause of Utalii College in ways that are in tandem with the 21st century.

Looking at what has been happening I want to trust this group of young people in this College. Rarely do we see such a blend of ambition, energy, and enthusiasm as I have witnessed in recent weeks in the organizing for this function.

We live in a country where being optimistic is the most difficult thing to do. I am glad that the youth among the workers of this College decided; they have responded to the mounting pressure on the young people of this country to do more, to produce more results, to show that they are able, to clearly demonstrate that they are not mere rabble rousers, smoke without fire, but leaders in their own right, ready to unlock their potential for the good of this College and humanity in general.

My fellow young people, we have been told for so long, by so many and in so diverse ways that we are leaders of tomorrow.

That tomorrow, the tomorrow we were fed on and have always looked forward to ever since we were teenagers, has never come!

Now we refuse to believe that we would be leaders of tomorrow if we do not become leaders today; we refuse to believe there is a tomorrow, other than now, here, today, when we have a chance to change things in our places of work; in our country; in our continent; in our world.

For some of us, tomorrow is now; now is the time to provide leadership in this country, in our College, where there is too far “so many leaders but so little leadership”, to use the words of the celebrated preacher and teacher, John W. Stanko; now is the time to arise and shine against ethnicity and its ravages in our midst here in Utalii.

Indeed this is the time to say no to pilferage, theft, but yes to honesty, hard work and commitment; it is the time to say no to shifting blame but yes to taking responsibility; the time to say no to mediocrity but yes to meritocracy and excellence; yes, this is the time to say no to immorality but yes to chastity.

Friends, I can go on, and on, and on, but one thing is clear, if we don't shun evils, bad behavior, backward tendencies, things of yester years that have little relevance, we will miss the path of progress as individuals, as an institution; and if we miss it, we will miss out in this life!

And now friends let the Almighty God grant us the ambition to take control of our destiny as the youth in this perilous secular world in which we live today; grant us the energy and enthusiasm to spur the development of our careers; grant us the wisdom to know and appreciate abundantly that our time has come and our course is, indeed, unstoppable.

Grant us the unrivalled knowledge and skill to struggle for our opportunities because it will be costly to wait for tomorrow; for tomorrow never comes.

Before I get to my conclusion, there are some things I must remind my fellow people in this College. For the 180 days I have been

around, I know, for sure, that we have not been doing enough to harness our potential, our energy. We have not fully evinced the quality of leadership that bespeaks of excellence, dedication, commitment.

If you allow me I will say to you, without any fear of contradiction, that from now henceforth you will be required to do more not less. It is my sincere hope that this seminar will equip you with the general skills you need to do more not less; to better manage the critical issues of environment; to be true agents of change in our volatile socio-political landscape; to navigate through the bumpy social state of affairs that we find ourselves in today; to participate, meaningfully, in the country's economic development.

Furthermore, it is my hope that the resource persons will take cognizance of the fact that our young employees are in unique circumstances; unique circumstances indeed. This is because they live and work among another set of young men and women – the students.

Temptations are high; risks are equally high. Those baby-faced young girl students are not there to devour, so to speak, but to nurture. Those naïve boy students are not there to confuse, if the ladies in this audience are listening to me; they, also, need to be nurtured.

I want to say to my friends that when all is said and done time is moving fast in Kenya Utalii College now. The whirlwinds of change are fast sweeping across this great institution. We need to stand up to be counted among those who will succeed ultimately; let us not be on the wrong side of history.

Let us avoid recklessness and rash behavior which signals immaturity and myopia. There is something of an event in this life which proves that the lawyer and politician, Alexander Hamilton, was right when he said "Those who stand for nothing fall for anything."

My fellow youth, in my young age I have lived through the worst of times; I have lived to see the best of times too. But you know what? in all these I have continued my love for hard work and joy for life. It has paid; and paid handsomely. It will pay you too; yes, it will pay you handsomely too!

You have privileges which others can only dream about. Utilize this chance beloved to reclaim our dream, our heritage, and our dignity as trend setters in the hospitality and tourism. Then and only then will you lift up your trumpet, walk tall, and proclaim to the world that you belong to the hallowed heritage of Kenya Utalii College.

And ladies and gentlemen, it is now my pleasure, indeed great and singular honor, to declare this one-week seminar officially open.