

**Remarks by Dr. Kenneth S. Ombongi  
Principal, Kenya Utalii College at the  
Inauguration of the College's degree  
programme, on Tuesday, 19<sup>th</sup> January 2010.**

- Madam PS
- Director of Tourism
- Chairman, Kenya Association of Hotelkeepers and Caterers
- Chairman, Board of Governors, Kenya Utalii College
- Chairman, KUC Alumni Association
- My colleagues, CEOs, of various parastatals and organisations here today
- Invited Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen:

Today is our day. And I will say it again, this is our day. This is our finest hour in the forward momentum in the development of this great institution.

Neither words of mine nor of any one of us in Kenya Utalii College will express the serene joy and a deep sense of gratitude in our hearts for this momentous occasion.

With this collaboration with the University, that is not a mistake, I mean the University, a new chapter in the history of Utalii College has started to be written. This is not only a source of great satisfaction for us but it gives us reason to celebrate and celebrate in a big way this epic achievement.

Our celebration today is partly because of the fact what we are seeing, inauguration of our degree programme is a product of a long, indeed very long, and protracted process. The first time the idea of making Utalii College a degree offering institution was mooted was during the mid 1980s, 25 years ago! At that time I was hardly 19 years old struggling with my O'Levels at a local secondary school in my village.

Here I am, today, inaugurating this degree programme 25 years late. 25 years late! As one French philosopher once said, "armies can be resisted but not an idea whose time has come". Launching a degree programme in this College is an idea whose time came long ago.

There is no going back now; we are looking ahead; this is a dream that has been long in coming; we are now set and ready to live the dream of transforming this institution into a university in the days and months to come.

For a start, we have two programmes: a Bachelor of Arts in Hospitality Management and Bachelor of Arts in Travel and Tourism Management. These are programmes so many of you, the stakeholders, so desperately wanted us to launch.

Prof. Bethuel Allan Ogot, the celebrated Kenyan historian, said recently and I quote: "Kenya's education formula needs to move from uniformity to diversity, from rigidity to flexibility, from conformity to resilience and from molding to empowering." That is exactly what we want to achieve in training graduates in these two programmes.

Our problems are diverse enough to accommodate those in industry and those who intend to join the industry; they are flexible enough to accommodate anybody, at any age, who needs training; our problems are resilient enough to accommodate trainees who want to work in the fast changing hospitality industry; and our programmes are empowering enough to train, not just employees, but entrepreneurs too.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In times like this, in times when we are overwhelmed by joy, I can only, on behalf of the staff and students of Utalii College, extend our sincere thanks and deepest of gratitude for the support of all those who have been instrumental in the launching of our degree programme.

Some of you, as evinced by your being here today, have stuck with us through thick and thin all this time. This is your day much as it is ours.

First, our mother, the Ministry of Tourism. Madam PS, the Ministry has been there for us. With you, personally, I have had endless discussions, some done at a very short notice, on some of the challenges we faced in starting this programme. Your word, your advice, your piece of mind and, often times, encouragement have always kept us going even in times when we were about to give up.

Second, the University. I'm sincerely grateful that some of my mentors and lecturers from the University of Nairobi are in this audience. Thank you for being there for us. When I asked some of you to support us in endorsing this programme, you gladly did that.

Dr. Wahome, take our message of gratitude to Prof. George Magoha, Vice Chancellor, Prof. Jacob Kaimenyi, Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs, Prof. Isaac Mbeche, Principal, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prof. Enos Njeru, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Prof. Milcah Achola, Chair, Department of History and Archaeology. They all in their different capacities and various ways made this collaboration possible.

Dr. Wahome, we appreciate you and we will be eternally grateful to your efforts. You worked with our staff – literally day and night, in the face of great odds, in a very robust engagement, – to make it happen. You, and our staff, Mr. Julius Muli and Ms. Jenniffer Maina, have won yourselves a honorable place in the annals of the history of Kenya Utalii College, when they will finally be written.

Third, let me now recognize the industry, and the majority of who are Utalii alumnae. You are the truest of the true friends of and believers in Utalii College. This achievement is yours and is for you. We simply cannot recognize enough.

My discussion with many of you has helped us to debunk the bankrupt idea that people in the hotel and hospitality industry do not need brains, they need brawn, do not need skill, they need energy, do not need to know the why, but the how of things. Nothing is far from the truth. You have supported and supported this programme.

As I move to my conclusion now, there is something which I will not forget to remind the lucky 59 pioneer students we have admitted to our degree programme.

Yes, this is a hospitality institution; yes, we can be very hospitable indeed; we try always to make our students comfortable in conformity with the requirements of industry.

But remember, this is not a picnic site; this not a place to laze and lounge around and make merry; this is a place for hard working, dedicated and diligent students.

Those who have walked on these hallowed grounds of Kenya Utalii College, those who have drunk from this great fountain of knowledge, those who have made a name in the industry, and some of them are represented here today, will tell you that they worked hard in their time; they spent sleepless nights reading in their rooms and doing practicals in our demonstration kitchens; they went through the harrowing experience in their in-training. That is why they are successful today; that is why my elder brother Mark Gathuri, GM Serena Hotel, my brother Anthony Ngunga, GM Panafric Hotel, stand tall and proclaim to the world that they owe it all, they owe their success and sterling performance in the industry, to this College.

So for you guys, the students we admitted, I don't promise easy life in the four years you will be in these corridors. Good things don't come easy.

But with dedication and commitment, behold, I can see your future; it is for you to get there and you must get there. I can see better things ahead; I can see the men and women who will walk in the footsteps of Gathuri and Ngunga among you.

You have no choice; failure is no option for you beloved in this place; take to your studies like a duck to water; you need to be focused; you need to rise to the challenge and I promise you things will be smooth all the way. Yes, smooth all the way!

Thank you, thank you very much.