

SPEECH BY DR. KENNETH S. OMBONGI, PRINCIPAL KENYA UTALII COLLEGE, ON THE OCCASION OF THE FOOD AND BEVERAGE SERVICE AND SALES GRADUATION CEREMONY HELD ON THURSDAY, 25TH MARCH 2010

- Our Guest of Honour, Mr. Karl Hala, Director of Operations – Africa - and General Manager, Intercontinental Hotel
- Representative of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Mr. Daniel Kairu
- Chairman, Kenya Utalii College Board of Governors
Mr. Tangai Ngoma
- Other Members of the Board of Governors
- Guests from the Hospitality and Tourism Sectors
- My Colleagues from other state corporations here this morning
- Parents and guardians
- Graduating students
- Invited Guests
- College Staff
- Distinguished ladies and gentlemen

I consider it a great privilege and honor to welcome you to Kenya Utalii College.

We sincerely thank you all for finding time to be with us in this celebration of the achievements of 132 of our Food and Beverage Service and Sales students.

Our Chief Guest, Mr. Karl Hala, I really have no words to express my gratitude and that of the College community for your readiness to join when I asked to come just a few days ago. It gives us satisfaction; it gives us hope that as a key player in the hotel industry we can bank on you Sir.

Our guests from the hotel and tourism industry – calling you friends of Utalii College will be surely an understatement; calling you collaborators is simply not enough! All I know is that, as a College, we are because of you and since you are so we exist. Your being with us today bespeaks of our long drawn, indeed historic, bond which no hammer is strong enough to break.

For the parents and guardians, this is your day; a day of great outpouring of joy; it is a day you are able to see the fruits of your labor.

I know, for sure, that some of you have come here from farlong areas of this country; many of you travelled overnight, determined and set, to get here. As a son of a peasant, I know that some of you have paid to the last of your penny to have your son, your daughter, train here. It is possible that some you sold the only piece of land you had, the only cow that was a source of milk for your family, to give your child an education. This is the best decision you ever made. As a College, we join you in this celebration; this is your achievement dear parent, dear guardian! Celebrate and rejoice! And I say again, celebrate and rejoice!

We have enough facilities in the College to enable you celebrate. Our hotel is a few metres from here. The student leaders in the College have, also, prepared some thing to showcase their skills in service and they tell me that they can help you to celebrate.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

There has been considerable amount of work done to prepare these students for this day and to make this occasion successful. This has been a product of collective duty. Many are our College staff who have worked so hard, have put in so many hours, months on end, to prepare these graduating students.

Some of our lecturers have had to travel, some times in odd hours, odd days, away from their families and loved ones to take these students for field trips, many a times, in areas where only four wheel drive vehicles can go. The majority of our people have done this in the

most dedicated and the most committed way, ever, their low pay and low allowances notwithstanding. I commend them; I congratulate them; I applaud them.

Beloved colleagues, I want to let you know that your sacrifices are known and I want to believe that your rewards are coming. Your efforts will never be in vain. And I'm glad the representative of our PS is here today. I want to thank our PS for the support she has offered, so far, to have the College re-categorized from parastatal category 8 to parastatal category 4. In this recategorization lies the key to enhancing our remuneration package; the key to making the College competitive in order for us to recruit and retain quality staff.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Our government got it right some 35 years ago when it created this College to train personnel for the hospitality and tourism industry. That at the moment the tourism sector is second to none as Kenya's foreign exchange earner speaks, I believe loud and clear, that this is an industry to invest in. And the best way to do that is first to invest in personnel training.

It is no wonder, therefore, that Tourism is one of the pillars in our Vision 2030 – a national commitment that we want to make Kenya a middle income country in our life time, in our generation.

Kenya Utalii College has committed to contribute to the realization of Vision 2030 by training more 2000 graduates annually by 2012. By 2030, if all factors remain constant, we want to be the global leader in university hospitality and tourism training.

It is in this context that we present to you today's graduands. The graduating candidates before you have surely made short term sacrifices for, hopefully, long term rewards. In past one year they have woken up early with every sunrise; attended their classes, both theory and practicals; they have visited hotel establishments in this town and beyond; they have acquired nothing but the best of skills, the highest of standards and the right attitude in food and beverage service and sales.

It is now our conviction, and a strong conviction for that matter, that this is their day of reckoning. They mark this day with joy and celebration to tell all and sundry that they are ready to join the industry; to make their contribution; to develop their careers; and to learn more from experienced hands.

Simply put, they are smart people; people who work hard no matter what; people who have learned to embrace self restraint and self-denial, for the sake of what they do, as their second nature; people who have internalized the timeless and noble creed that customer is king, customer is queen, as their integral ethos.

And now from us all, the lecturers, myself, and the rest of the Utalii College community is thumbs up for them!

The only question which remains unanswered is to the members of the industry, some of them represented here today,: are you ready to receive these young men, these young women, for the benefit of your businesses? Thank you very much indeed.

For Kenya Utalii College, we regard the time we are in, now, as our golden age; a golden age, indeed; an age in which, for once, we have sat back, in this defining moment, and are asking ourselves questions of where we have come from in the last 3 decades, where we are now and where we want to be from now forward.

It is in answer to these questions that we have elected to do those things which will keep us number one in hospitality and tourism training. As a College, we recognize and appreciate the sky-high competition in training these days; the sky-high demands of skills in the industry these days; the sky-high demands for value-for-money training from the parents and guardians who bring their sons and daughters here these days.

It is with regard to meeting these sky-high demands that we started our first degree program, ever, in collaboration with the University of Nairobi. The first batch of our degree students is here already; the second batch is coming in May this year and I'm sure many of you saw our advert to that effect in the newspapers recently.

Furthermore, we are running many customer tailor-made courses, evening or after-work classes, and short courses all together geared towards taking care of the hitherto neglected demands in training for the industry.

We are, also, expanding out of Nairobi. We have started a branch in Mombasa and our courses there are set to start any time now. The parents and guardians here today who might be interested, kindly, hurry up and secure a place for your son or daughter before it is too late. There are just a few remaining places before we close our intake for May.

As we create new programs, we will continue to strength our traditional courses which have earned us a significant niche in the industry. For example, at the moment our refresher courses which focus on improving skills of employees of the industry are on-going in various parts of the country. Here in College alone we are hosting more than 500 of our colleagues in the industry who have been selected for training in various disciplines.

Besides rapid expansion we are continually upgrading our library and improving our infrastructure; we are creating partnerships with stakeholders and collaborating with training institutions of high repute for mutual benefit.

These are the goals for which we stand; these are the goals we want to use our energy, our passion, and our talents to achieve.

And finally, ladies and gentlemen, may God, the almighty, cause his countenance to shine upon the faces of all these young people who are set to start their careers and all those who have played, and those who will play, their rightful role in shaping them.

Ladies and gentlemen:

It is now my great pleasure and honor to welcome our Board Chairman, Mr. Basil Tangai Ngoma, to address us and, thereafter, invite the representative of our PS who will invite our Chief Guest to address us.

Thank you, thank you very much indeed.

