

VICE-CHANCELLOR'S ADDRESS ON THE 14TH CONGREGATION – 21ST NOVEMBER 2015

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the Midlands State University's 14th congregation of our graduation ceremony.

As we welcome back our shining graduands, I am equally thrilled to invite you all to join me in extending a hearty welcome to His Excellency and Chancellor, Cde R G Mugabe who not only crowns the auspicious ceremony today, but whose participation is most affectionately and fondly welcomed by us all. Your Excellency and Chancellor, the entire Midlands State University community deeply cherishes as much as it admires the premium value that you accord education and its inherent potency to positively transform our society.

Your Excellency and Chancellor, I wish to underscore the fact that I always get moved when we host these graduation ceremonies as they enable our valued stakeholders to witness the rewards of creativity and hard work in a challenging environment. In the fifteen years of our existence as Midlands State University we have produced 27 321 graduates, some of whom are occupying strategic positions in the various sectors of our economy as well as the economies of our region. For instance, upon completion of our programmes some of our alumni have been appointed to high offices in the SADC Chamber of Commerce as well as the administrative organ of the African Union, a clear sign of the tremendous confidence in the innovativeness of our programmes by the international business community.

Today we are delighted to present to you, Your Excellency and Chancellor, a total of **2 358** graduands, a figure of which is made up of 2060 undergraduates, 58 international graduands, 78 graduating with First class passes, 295 gaining Masters degrees and 3 gaining PhDs. Regrettably, two of our students, Ms Syethia Tabani Chitambira and Ms Catherine Mashoko are graduating posthumously. In as much as we accept death as a natural and inevitable occurrence, we still feel sorely touched when we lose any one of our students. We pray that the Good Lord will rest their dear souls in eternal peace.

Your Excellency and Chancellor, I wish to underscore the fact that as we produce our graduates, we never lose sight of the need to entrust our students in the hands of well-trained and skilled teaching staff. In this regard, at the same time as we allocate 5% of our annual

budget for research and postgraduate studies by our academic staff, we also form collaborative partnerships with universities in the region, which have got more advanced research equipment and experienced postgraduate supervisors. This strategy has seen us nearly doubling the cohort of PhD holders among our teaching staff in 2 years, from 68 in 2013 to 107 currently.

One of the exciting achievements in this regard is that we have become the only university in Zimbabwe whose Faculty of Law is headed by an executive dean with a Doctor of Laws (LLD) degree. Our Dean of Law, Dr Gift Manyatera, recently obtained his Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Pretoria, one of the renowned citadels of Roman Dutch Law in South Africa. We especially appreciate the fact that Dr Manyatera achieved this feat without necessarily abandoning his teaching and administrative commitments in the faculty. In an environment where most lawyers struggle to obtain Master of Laws degrees, we highly regard our Faculty of Law, which now boasts of (6) doctorates in Law amongst its academic staff, and all obtained from reputable law schools. Against this background, it is not at all surprising that the MSU team came first in this year's International Humanitarian Law Moot Court national competitions and is currently in Arusha Tanzania, representing Zimbabwe in the All Africa contest. Moreover, following the successful implementation of the Disability Rights Project at MSU for the past 3 years, the Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa, (OSISA) has awarded our Law faculty a one year grant of US\$97 000 with an expanded mandate to assume a mentoring role of sister law schools in the region, specifically at the University of Botswana, University of Namibia and the University of Swaziland.

Another strategy that we employ in the production of our graduates is the kind of support we give to our library, which plays a pivotal role in supporting research, teaching and learning activities of both our staff and students. We invest heavily in the subscription of a number of robust electronic book and electronic journal collections, which our staff and students can access from anywhere 24 hours a day. Resultantly, the statistics that are not our own, but those provided by the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) demonstrate that MSU has managed to remain at the top of institutions of higher and tertiary education in Zimbabwe with regards to the usage of some of the e-resources that we access as a consortium.

Let me hasten to add that the Midlands State University has a unique Work-Related-Learning teaching and training methodology, which we copied from the United Kingdom. This innovation, which takes away from the campus all third level students, is a contemporary approach that strives for relevance of the curriculum through partnerships and consultations, which involve the student, the teaching staff and the employer. Moreover, in the current environment that is characterised by downsizing or closure of companies the concept is being well served through entrepreneurship and community engagement, both of which promote self employment as well as community development in the rural areas. We have heavily invested in the implementation of the Work-Related-Learning methodology through the purchasing of appropriate vehicles, which are being used countrywide in the supervision of our students.

In all these teaching and research initiatives, we have observed that although our mandate is broad, we have tended to excel in commerce, law and the humanities, perhaps at the expense of science disciplines which are the drivers of industrial development. In a conscious effort to increase the cohort of students in science and technology, we have introduced a Science Foundation Programme, which is intended to assist students that have missed the opportunity to study science programmes due to the shortage of science teachers, poorly equipped laboratories in schools, as well as poor career guidance. To date, 260 students have already taken up this programme as an affordable, convenient and shorter route to the Science and Technology degree programmes of their dreams and at institutions of their choice.

To crown it all, it should suffice to note that this graduation ceremony is taking place at a time when MSU is still basking in the glory of being the recipient of the International Star for Quality Award from Geneva, Switzerland in recognition of its Leadership, Quality and Excellence as an upcoming institution of higher learning.

Your Excellency and Chancellor, it would certainly be amiss for me not to mention the interesting observation that the establishment and growth of MSU has promoted the process of conurbation among the previously separate communities of Fletcher High School, Senga and Nehosho townships. The university has made a significant impact on the housing sector over the past 15 years as huge investments have been made in direct response to the continued growth of the institution. Various stakeholders have come in at an almost alarming rate to take advantage of the ever-growing demand for student accommodation in the

neighborhood. According to the City of Gweru figures, these investors have injected an estimated US\$100 million over the past 15 years in which more than 2 000 houses have been newly constructed, extended or refurbished. The Senga/Nehosho community has over the past 15 years enjoyed a new lease of life as a result of the various new economic opportunities that have been brought about by the growth of the university. That scenario has resulted in our students enjoying decent and affordable accommodation as well as the freedom to choose where one wishes to stay while acquiring education. To our utter amazement, the emerging competition has triggered the designing of student accommodation with facilities and amenities that match what we offer as a university such as Wi-Fi, power and water supply backup, bus shuttle services, as well as sport and recreational facilities. It is thus quite apparent that without the Midlands State University, the increasingly bustling city of Gweru would largely be a ghost town especially in the context of the closing down of the major industries that previously sustained it.

In all these developments Your Excellency and Chancellor, we are profoundly grateful to you and your good offices for providing the necessary ambience for us to dream. Indeed we also enjoy the immeasurable support that we get from our imaginative line Minister, Hon. Professor Jonathan Moyo, and his diligent team, who tirelessly labor to guide us to pursue national aspirations. Added to this support is that which we receive from the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE), our University Council, Senate, Captains of Industry and Commerce, our Communities, business partners, parents and other agencies, and of course not forgetting the staff and students who labour at the coal face of our operations and processes. We are sincerely indebted to you all!

To our dear graduands, we implore you always to remember that the Midlands State University did not aim to fill you with knowledge, but rather to unsettle your minds so that you become more versatile, inquisitive, innovative, enterprising, and internationally acclaimed graduates who seek to acquire knowledge and skills to take Zimbabwe and other nations to higher levels of development. It is primarily your attitudes towards life and work that will make you successful alumni and good ambassadors of the University Of First Choice, the Midlands State University. Congratulations, Makorokoto, Amhlope!

I thank you.