

## VICE CHANCELLOR'S ADDRESS AT THE 10<sup>TH</sup> CONGREGATION OF THE MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATION CEREMONY, FRIDAY 2<sup>ND</sup> DECEMBER 2011

It is a great honor and privilege for me to warmly welcome you all to the 10<sup>th</sup> congregation of the Midlands State University graduation ceremony. At the outset I wish to put on record the observation that the august gathering today is made up of so many of our valued stakeholders and friends of the University who have elected to witness the propitious occasion with us. Indeed, the cause is great and the company is good! The cause is aptly captured by Robert M Hutchins who says, and I quote,

**Education is not to reform students or amuse them or to make them expert technicians. It is to unsettle their minds, widen their horizons, inflame their intellect, teach them to think straight, if possible.**

As for the company today, apart from our shining graduands, whose minds and intellects have undergone such earth shaking dilatations I see many faces of their proud parents, guardians, spouses, relatives and friends who have especially made this day possible through their material and emotional support. I see happy members of our staff from our various departments, and other key stakeholders who have contributed immensely towards the nurturing of our graduands. I also see elegant members of the Midlands State University Alumni who keep the university flag flying through their demonstration of integrity and intelligence in their various places of work. We also have in our midst, the Minister of Education from the Kingdom of Swaziland, Honorable Wilson Ntshangase and his Permanent Secretary, Mr Pat Muir who have accompanied 56 of our graduands from that part of our Southern African region. We warmly welcome you Honorable Minister. Your Excellency and Chancellor, we always regard your presence and personal participation in our special day as an impeccable testimony of the value that you as a world renowned scholar attach to higher education and its greatness of human capital, which is indispensable for our socio-economic development. We welcome you and thank you for your steadfast support.

As every farmer knows, the cycle of seasons of hard work is punctuated most vividly and memorably by the days of harvest. This is especially true if the harvest is good and the farmer is blessed with a bumper crop. I must add that memories last equally long, if not longer when the harvest is unusually poor. Your Excellency and Chancellor, I am

exceedingly pleased to present to you today, our colorful and first grade bumper harvest of 1882 graduands, of which 46% are female whilst 54% are male. We have a total of 42 students obtaining first class degrees and 74 receiving prizes. 1589 are obtaining their first degrees while 293 are postgraduates. Your Excellency, we are extremely delighted to inform you that among the postgraduate students that we are presenting to you today, we have our first Doctor of Philosophy graduand of the Midlands State University, Mr Samson Rwadzi Mhlahlo who hails from our Department of Geography and Environmental Studies. Through the University's extensive partnerships and networks with each other regional sister universities, the student was supervised by Professor Marie Huchzermeyer from the University of the Witwatersrand and his external examiners were Professor D S Tevera from the University of Swaziland, Professor J Marais from the University of the Free State and Professor Dr G Hampwaye from the University of Zambia. We are grateful to these distinguished colleagues for their productive collaborative work with us.

Last year we presented to you our pioneer cohort of lawyers from the Midlands State University. The Faculty of law continues to place the University on the international map. It is one of the four law schools in Southern Africa that have been chosen to host the Disability Law Schools Project, which is funded by the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA). The project seeks among other objectives to develop a pool of lawyers with specialized skills and knowledge in the field of disability rights in Zimbabwe, to improve access to justice for people with disabilities and to improve awareness of disability rights and entitlements through community engagement activities. Today we are presenting the second cohort of 23 graduands from the Faculty of Law, which is made up of 15 women and 8 men. We remain confident that the learned men and women that we produce will always aim not to become lawyers of success but rather lawyers of value, for it is when they pursue their profession with integrity that the corresponding material rewards will also follow them.

The reputation of the Midlands State University has spread throughout the sub-region of Southern Africa so that the University now attracts students from several countries in SADC. Some students enroll with us on an individual basis, while others are enrolled through associate colleges. One such associate college of the University is the Africa Management Development Institute in Swaziland, which is witnessing its first crop of 56 graduates made up of 12 B Ed students and 44 postgraduates receiving Masters degrees in Business Administration as well as in Education.

Your Excellency and Chancellor, as we share in the pomp and excitement of the occasion today, I wish to dwell on the issue of 'quality assurance', a development in higher education in Zimbabwe, which we have embraced and welcomed wholeheartedly. Elsewhere on the continent, trends have shown that when the issue of quality assurance is not adequately dealt with, graduates increasingly experience challenges in securing employment even when jobs are available. Dr Fred M. Hayward (2005), the former Executive Vice President of the American Council on Higher Education Accreditation, who currently works as Senior Higher Education Consultant in Afghanistan, makes an interesting observation that the changes that have been brought about by the transition to a knowledge economy have created a demand for higher skill levels in most occupations. Thus, countries wishing to move towards the knowledge economy are challenged to undertake reforms to raise the quality of education and training through changes in content and pedagogy. Hayward further concludes that without high quality tertiary education nations lack trained professionals to meet the needs of highly competitive markets as well as other challenges of knowledge societies. In the same vein, the Association of African Universities (AAU) (2010) noted that, "One way to guarantee that higher education is sensitive to national situations and offers value-for-money education, is to constantly and efficiently assure high standards in the provisions of the institutions that deliver higher education." (AAU, 2010)

In Zimbabwe, these observations resonate with the new thrust for quality assurance spearheaded by the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education. ZIMCHE seeks to benchmark 4 items namely; the qualifications of our teaching staff, the grading of our teaching staff, the criteria for promotion and the structure of our degrees. There are real challenges in meeting some of the ZIMCHE criteria for quality assurance but as John Ruskin put it, "quality is never an accident; it is always the result of intelligent effort". What this means is that universities in Zimbabwe will have to be highly innovative and think outside the box, as this development coincides with our seismic effort to reconstruct our higher education after the shattering impacts of the massive brain drain of the past few years.

At Midlands State University, we can happily report that the efforts by ZIMCHE have fallen on fertile ground as they have remarkably coincided with our own initiatives to rebuild our institution following the economic crisis that hit our sector. Indeed, the massive brain drain of 2007 to 2008 seriously undermined the delivery, growth and expansion of our core

business, threatening the closure of many programmes while preventing the starting of new ones. The unprecedented talent flight also stifled our efforts to build a critical mass of senior scholars who could offer academic in both research and teaching. In an effort to mitigate this challenge, we have made significant strides to improve on the quality of our delivery and we have also set ourselves on a trajectory with time framed measures, to become a well resourced institution of higher learning in terms of human capital. In 2008 for instance, when we experienced our worst loss in terms of qualified teaching staff, we were left with only 201 Masters degree holders and only 9 with PhD's. Since then, we have increased our qualified teaching staff to 386 MA's and 41 PhD holders, increases of 83% and 78% respectively.

Moreover at MSU we have set up a vibrant Department of Research and Postgraduate Studies, which is run on a Result based Management approach, with clear performance targets. The leadership of the Department has signed a performance contract to ensure timely implementation of the university's objectives. In a bid to support research and postgraduate studies, the University allocates 5% of its total budget to the Research Board and we have also heavily invested in the provision of electronic books to compliment our print book collection.

Your Excellency and Chancellor, we are pleased to inform you that our infrastructural development has progressed well in tandem with our efforts to grow and retain a credible human resource base. The completion of the Administration Block will be the subject of our other agenda this afternoon. However, with the completion of that project our focus will now be on the construction of a four-storey library designed to accommodate 2000 students at any given time. The project will be constructed on the back of our local fundraising initiatives as well as government effort. To date, the local initiatives have raised over US\$2million in cash and pledges of cash and building materials, of which the vast proportion of the materials has already been delivered on site, while government has allocated US\$2,3 million for the project. It is hoped that these efforts will see us complete the first two floors of the structure next year and naturally, we will intensify our fundraising mission to complement government efforts.

Since inception of the Midlands State University, we have been renting the Senga Manpower Training Centre to accommodate our Faculty of Commerce. We are now in the process of putting up structures to house the whole of the Faculty of Commerce, which is our niche. To

increase efficiency in the delivery of our core-business as well as create a favourable, living and learning environment for our students we have invested in the construction of a dedicated power line, which connects us to the Somabula Gwenoro line. We are confident that these and other initiatives are leading us in the right direction with respect to the provision of a conducive learning and teaching atmosphere.

Finally, I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate you, our graduate, on your tremendous achievement. To be awarded a degree, from Midlands State University entails a lot of discipline, hard work and persistence. It would be most fitting for you to acknowledge gratefully, the unstinting support that you have received from your parents, guardians, families and benefactors, all of whom have generously contributed to your receiving an MSU education. We wish you the best in your future endeavors.

Congratulations! Makorokoto, Amhlope!

I thank you.

