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SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE DeKUT VICE CHANCELLOR DURING THE 17TH GRADUATION CEREMONY HELD ON FRIDAY 6TH DECEMBER 2024, AT DEDAN KIMATHI UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Acknowledgements

- The Chancellor DeKUT, General (Rtd) Dr. Julius Waweru Karangi EGH, CBS, DCO, LOM;
- The Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Education, Julius Migos Ogamba, EBS;
- The DeKUT Council Chairman, Dr. James Kariuki;
- Members of the University Council;
- Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Esther Magiri;
- The University Senate;
- Members of staff;
- Parents and guardians;
- Students;
- Graduands;
- Distinguished guests;
- Ladies and gentlemen;

Good morning?

1. Opening Remarks

It is truly a privilege to be here today as we celebrate the 17th graduation ceremony and honour the achievements of 000 graduands who are now stepping into the next phase of their professional journeys. As you stand at this pivotal moment, please take a moment to reflect on your accomplishments and the valuable knowledge and skills you've gained during your time with us.

We also sincerely thank the parents and guardians for choosing DeKUT and entrusting us to educate your children and siblings. I would like to thank the Chancellor, the University Council, the Ministry of Education, and the entire DeKUT community for their unwavering support and collaboration in helping us realize the University's vision, which has led to this remarkable graduation today.

Congratulations!

2. The Key Achievements of DeKUT

Ladies and Gentlemen;

As a University, we continue to build on our strategic focus areas that are aligned with the agenda of the government of Kenya. During the Commercialization and Entrepreneurial Institutions Leaders' Summit (CEIL), we recently won the Entrepreneurial Award of the Year.

The University has established a Science and Technology Park to encourage cooperation and synergy between universities, research institutions, the government, and the private sector, creating a favourable environment for innovation, renovation, and training. DeST-Park covers three thematic areas, which are Agri-tech (Food bioresources and natural products value-addition), Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and Design, Materials and Manufacturing (DMM). So far, DeSTPark has attracted three anchor clients: Snowcap Development Limited, Asytec, and Semiconductor Technologies Limited, which is already operational. The company currently manufactures nanotechnology products for the global market, such as integrated circuits and sensors used in electronic gadgets.

DeKUT prides itself as an entrepreneurial University. The University is currently in the process of establishing the Origin Lab. The Origin Research and Innovation Labs concept has entered the entire implementation phase following the signing of a project agreement

between DeKUT, the host of the Physical Hub of East Africa, and UNECA. The agreement covers a three-year period by which Origin should become a financially self-sustaining organization and effectively deliver its mandate in three core work areas. Origin will build a pool of expert problem solvers to aid the private and public sector organizations providing goods and services to quickly and competitively resolve their challenges.

The University also has a FabLab that allows founders to test and prototype their innovations and products.

3. DeKUT's Innovative Ecosystem

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Innovation is at the heart of everything we do at DeKUT. To cultivate a dynamic innovation ecosystem, we established the Dedan Kimathi Start-up and Incubation Center (DeSIC), a key initiative to support and nurture start-ups within the University. DeSIC is crucial in helping these start-ups develop high-quality products, navigate market entry, and equip their founders with the skills and knowledge needed to stay competitive in today's fast-paced industries.

Beyond DeSIC's core activities, DeKUT has hosted several impactful events that contribute to the growth of innovation and entrepreneurship. One such event is the *i2B* Innovation Storming Night, which introduces participants to the start-up journey while engaging them in critical areas such as business modelling, mindset shifts, and pitching. This event is highly effective in promoting an entrepreneurial mindset, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and sharpening the innovative potential of our students. Through this experience, we continue to shape the next generation of business leaders, equipping them with the tools and insights they need to thrive in a rapidly evolving world.

Recently, we hosted the Origin Fest Hackathon, where participants pitched their innovative ideas to a panel of experts. The four most impactful projects earned the chance to showcase their concepts at the 3rd Forum of the Alliance of Entrepreneurial Universities in Africa (AEUA). They will receive ongoing mentorship and collaborative support from Origin and challenge sponsors to refine their solutions further. The Origin Research and Innovation Lab, East Africa, in collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), proudly hosted the 3rd Forum of the Alliance of Entrepreneurial Universities in Africa (AEUA). This milestone event brought together academics, industry leaders, government officials, and entrepreneurs across

Africa and beyond to champion African start-ups and innovation. The forum fostered meaningful discussions on promoting sustainable, long-term collaborations, strengthening inter-University partnerships, and aligning academia with industry and government to address Africa's unique challenges.

Through initiatives like these, DeKUT is committed to creating an environment that nurtures innovation and connects aspiring entrepreneurs with the resources, networks, and opportunities they need to succeed in today's global economy.

4. The University Funding Model Implementation

Ladies and Gentlemen;

The New University Funding Model is pivotal in transforming higher education in Kenya, ensuring sustainable and equitable financing for universities nationwide.

Aligned with Kenya's Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda (BETA), this model prioritizes accessible, high-quality education as a critical driver of economic empowerment and inclusive growth. By promoting accountability and efficient resource utilization, the funding model supports the government's vision of uplifting all segments of society through education, particularly those from marginalized and underserved communities. This approach empowers Universities to provide better opportunities for all students, fostering an environment of innovation, academic excellence, and sustainable development.

In line with this vision, DeKUT welcomed its first-year students on Monday, 15th July 2024, reflecting the University's commitment to delivering timely services and ensuring a smooth academic experience. Despite the challenges posed by the new funding model, DeKUT remains steadfast in adhering to the University's academic calendar, emphasizing its dedication to maintaining high standards of education and providing a continuous, uninterrupted learning environment.

As we adapt to this New Funding Model, we reaffirm our commitment to effectively utilize these resources, ensuring our students receive quality education that equips them for success in the ever-evolving world.

5. **Robust Research Ecosystem**

Ladies and Gentlemen;

At DeKUT, applied research is essential to addressing societal and industrial challenges. Through research, we uncover solutions to the pressing problems of our time and drive innovations that fuel economic development. Our commitment to applied research is central to our mission, as we aim to solve real-world problems and contribute to societal progress.

DeKUT has established specialized Centers of Excellence to foster a thriving innovation ecosystem, each dedicated to pioneering research in specific fields. These centres focus on advancing knowledge and are crucial in attracting funding for projects that tackle critical societal issues.

The research outputs from these centres are diverse and impactful. Among them are air quality monitoring devices, access control systems, and smart card programming technologies, all representing exciting innovations with practical applications. In addition to these technological advancements, our centres actively engage in capacity-building activities, providing training and support to various community groups and institutions. Through these initiatives, DeKUT is building a robust innovation ecosystem that nurtures research, entrepreneurship, and community development, helping to create a brighter and more sustainable future for all.

At DeKUT, we harness the immense talent within our University and extended network, strongly emphasizing collaboration across various sectors. Our commitment to innovation is exemplified by establishing the DeKUT Start-Up and Incubation Centre, which transforms creative ideas and innovations into viable start-ups. This Centre is crucial in guiding emerging entrepreneurs through the challenges of launching and scaling their businesses.

The Coffee Technology Centre (CTC), established in 2013, plays a pivotal role in DeKUT's mission to drive national development through research, innovation, and technology transfer. Focused on enhancing the coffee value chain, the CTC offers training, research, and technological solutions to improve coffee productivity and quality. The Centre has collaborated with community development partners in the past three years to support

over 21 farmers' cooperative societies and 30,000 farmers across seven counties, providing technical assistance and capacity building. Notable initiatives include a Training of Trainers program on coffee cupping, the creation of modern cupping laboratories, and advisory services on soil and coffee analysis. DeKUT also empowers youth and women in the coffee sector through specialized Diploma programs and short courses, with over 250 graduates to date, 70% of whom are the youth and 40% women.

The University continues to strengthen partnerships with private and public sectors to expand the impact of its efforts. In March 2024, DeKUT signed a collaboration agreement with the New KPCU to enhance further Kenya's coffee industry, supporting economic growth, employment, and foreign exchange.

6. **Congratulating the Graduands**

Ladies and Gentlemen;

I want to congratulate to all the graduates today. Your perseverance and determination in completing your studies are truly commendable. Thank you for upholding discipline and demonstrating exemplary character at DeKUT. We are proud to welcome you as ambassadors of your alma mater.

As we celebrate the fruits of your hard work, I wish you continued success in all your future endeavours. The University has not just equipped you but fortified you with a robust foundation to face any challenges that may come your way. Step confidently and embrace the journey ahead with courage and determination.

Numbers 6:24 states May the LORD bless you and keep you;

May the LORD make His face shine upon you and be Gracious to you

May you prosper in all your endeavours and be great in the Land!

Congratulations to the Graduating Class of 2024!