

*Opening Speech: Conference on African Liberation movement
focusing on the Mau Mau Struggle in Kenya*

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All protocols observed.... Mrs ... Kimathi, the widow of Dedan Kimathi, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to thank Dedan Kimathi University of Technology administration led by the Vice Chancellor Prof Ndiragu Kioni for the invitation and warm words. I congratulate the University for its Systematic Pursuit in organizing these series of conferences over the last ... years hence I am privileged to be here today. I follow in the footsteps of Prof Ali Mazrui, former Chancellor of JKUAT the academic icon on these matters of freedom fighters, who in 2009, discussed the Mau Mau struggle in the context of history of the black people and struggle for freedom in Africa, I notice that other freedom fighters and Kenyan heroes such as Muthoni Likimani had already spoken here at this University. Muthoni Likimani talked about her role in the liberation struggle as an African nationalist. I salute Mukami the wife of the late Dedan Kimathi for graciously staying by his side and sharing the knowledge and keeping the struggle for his memory alive. I

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will build on the legacy of the previous two speakers. I will not profess to be an expert in history, archaeology, art, music, politics, anthropology, language, of struggle and other human rights, since speakers to follow are well versed in these areas. I am a simple scientist, an academic, and administrator, who lived through two decades of the colonial period, then another five decades into the new post independent Kenya. I will attempt to initiate such discourse which will hopefully form the core of today's discussion.

Let me begin with a poem by Lewis Carroll, a young English poet, who I think is apt because I understand Dedan Kimathi was not only a brave soldier, but was a wise man, he would have been an intellectual, as he was certainly good in English and a poet.²

‘You are old, Father William’, the young man said,
 ‘And your hair has become very white;
And yet you incessantly stand on your head,
 Do you think, at your age, it is right?’
‘In my youth’, Father William replied to his son,
 ‘I feared it might injure the brain;
But now that I’m perfectly sure I have none,
 Why, I do it again and again’.³

Here the young man wonders why his father William has white hair; he links the white hair with stubbornness and wonders whether it is right. Quite rightly, his father's retort is courteous yet wise; he speaks to the persistent nature of old men, especially when he says he will do it again and again.

² See Dedan Kimathi

³ Charles Lutwidge Dodgson or "Lewis Carroll," as he was to become known was born on January 27 1832.

Yet you our young people are more valuable than any of the resources we have in this country, we are committed to providing you with the critical thinking tools you need to thrive in a world that grows ever more connected and complex. The more our students can draw from the world, the better they can contribute to their communities. We can only do this by looking at the past and exalting and appreciating our heroes.

This leads me to why we are here. Why are we here?

Firstly, we are here because we are all stubborn, we were stubborn in the struggle to liberate ourselves, to gain Uhuru from the colonialists, we are here to relive and reform a centre for memory for the freedom fighters of yester years. We are here as young people and old people alike because we need each other. We are here because we continue to seek a common identity and culture as Kenyans. The Mau Mau, Land Freedom Movement, Dedan Kimathi, General China and others were the embodiment of that struggle. Let me just salute some other heroes of the past, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Leopold Senghor of Senegal, Gamal Naser of Egypt, Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, Shaka Zulu, Nelson Mandela, Albert Luthuli, of South Africa, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, Mzee Daniel arap Moi, Mzee Oginga Odinga, Mzee Mwai Kibaki, Mbiyu Koinange, Kungu Karumba, Paul Ngei, Mzee Achieng Oneko, Mzee Bildad Kagia and many more for which time does not allow. There are also Martyr's like Tom Mboya, Orkoyoit Koitalel arap Samoei, Menkatilili wa Menza, in Kenya. In the literary field People like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiogo, Wole Soyinka, Ali Mazrui, Taban Lo Liyong, Marcus Garvey, the late Nobel

laureate Wangari Mathai among others have also contributed a great deal to African consciousness and liberation. Last weekend, on 15th of February 2014, Kenya buried the late Professor David Peter Simon Wasawo, a contemporary of Dedan Kimathi and a hero in the academia described as a giant among giants, a professor among professors, a rare individual distinguished by his great humility and simplicity.

In its preamble our Constitution recognizes the role of God and that of our freedom fighters, as well as that of place of culture and its diversity amongst others, it is a result of more than a hundred years of “African Liberation”, it says

“We, the people of Kenya–

ACKNOWLEDGING the supremacy of the Almighty God of all creation:

HONOURING those who heroically struggled to bring freedom and justice
to our land:

PROUD of our ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, and determined to live
in peace and unity as one indivisible sovereign nation:

RESPECTFUL of the environment, which is our heritage, and determined to
sustain it for the benefit of future generations:

COMMITTED to nurturing and protecting the well-being of the individual,
the family, communities and the nation:

RECOGNISING the aspirations of all Kenyans for a government based on
the essential values of human rights, equality, freedom, democracy, social
justice and the rule of law:

EXERCISING our sovereign and inalienable right to determine the form of
governance of our country and having participated fully in the making of this
Constitution:

ADOPT, ENACT and give this Constitution to ourselves and to our future generations”.

GOD BLESS KENYA

Secondly, we are here because the university is a place to test ideas and to test the truth, the human rights for which Dedan Kimathi and other freedom fighters fought for, is now entrenched in the Bill of Rights, Constitution of Kenya (2010).⁴ Academic freedom is part of freedom of expression. Unknown to us is among those fundamental rights which human rights fighters call for, it is not a right for the rulers, it is not a right for academia or the elite, it is a right for everyone, we cannot deny the truth.

Thirdly, and most important is that we are here to strengthen the heroes corner, “Memory Centre for Heroes” or “ A Centre for Memory”, in the same way the South Africans have lauded the memory of Tata Mandela. Indeed Dedan Kimathi was a humanist, an extraordinary leader who was an agent of change, he can only be likened to Nelson Mandela, whom he inspired in the liberation movement of Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation)⁵ to change the environment in which he lived and left it a better place than it was. The story of how Kimathi’s principles inspired Mandela is often told thus, Mandela’s main reason for visiting Kenya was to pay homage to the Land Freedom Army (LFA), best known as the Mau Mau, which had waged a bloody liberation war against the British between 1952 and 1963. Mandela had been drawn to Kenya by three aspects of the Mau Mau: One, he wanted

⁴ Constitution of Kenya, 2010

⁵ Nelson Mandela was inspired by the gallant struggle put up by the Mau Mau in Kenya to defeat colonial rule by Wanjohi Kabukuru in the New African available at <http://newafricanmagazine.com/features/politics/nelson-mandela-was-inspired-by-the-gallant-struggle-put-up-by-the-mau-mau-in-kenya-to-defeat-colonial-rule>.

to visit Field Marshall Dedan Kimathi's grave; two, he wanted to see Kimathi's widow, Mukami Kimathi; and three, he wanted to meet the former Mau Mau commander, General China (real name Waruhiu Itote)."⁶ One of the quotes that Kimathi is known for which inspired Mandela is, "It is better to die on our feet than live on our knees for fear of colonial rule".⁷

So in relation to my second reason for being here, is the power of universities such as Dedan Kimathi University of Technology—just like Kimathi's ability to be a change agent—universities must make the unthinkable realism signifying the continuous and stubborn mission I referred to at the beginning. The mission of higher education must be to create and advance knowledge, and in consonance with our theme of the place of African Liberation focusing on the Mau Mau Struggle, Culture and National Identity, we must always draw on our roots and our experiences.

What are the challenges we will face in so doing?

By its very nature, universities are the frontline of promoting identity and culture through sharing knowledge in a global field. As a result, academia knows no borders. Commemorating to memory through setting up a heroes corner or a centre for memory, helps us draw on the strengths of diverse perceptions to encourage the sort of interaction that is the basis of creativity and innovation.

Globalization is one of the challenges we face reflecting on past consciousness of our liberation struggle, and trying to identify with it as we

⁶ *Ibid.* Nelson Mandela was inspired by the gallant struggle put up by the Mau Mau in Kenya to defeat colonial rule by Wanjohi Kabukuru in the New African.

⁷ *Ibid.*

establish a culture. If globalization in the 21st century is one challenge to the creation of new knowledge, then so is raising African consciousness as we are doing with remembering the Liberation (Uhuru), movement and its place in the way of life in educating individuals. Globalization is pushing us together and making us more aware of what makes each of our nations and cultures unique, while also revealing the bonds we share. As a research institution, the Dedan Kimathi University of Technology aspires to become a leading institution, to engage at the national and global level through the personal experiences and contributions of students and lecturers. There has never been a greater time for higher education to seek out new knowledge in new communities, because whether we are based in Nairobi, Lagos, Cape Town, Toronto or Cairo, we share the language of ideas. In this rapidly changing world, we have never had so much to learn from one another. Globalization necessitates that we “compete with everyone from everywhere for everything”.⁸

There are other challenges such as those of re writing history, changing the terminology of the struggle, and addressing historical details appropriately, at the same time recognizing the unification of our country and acknowledgment of our identity in historical context. Here the results of African Liberation as a consequence of the victory of domination by the white race come up. Mau Mau has for long been questioned as a legitimate revolution, we have a chance to revise this history and identify ourselves as a nation with the struggle.

To this end Dedan Kimathi University as Kenya’s only university related or connected to a freedom fighter, Dedan Kimathi UoT can provide a heritage of change. As a research institution with a rich diversity of academic

⁸ See Globality: Competing with Everyone from Everywhere for Everything (11 June 2008) by Hal Sirkin, Jim Hemerling, Arindam Bhattacharya.

disciplines it should engage in an array of teaching, research and service in collaboration with other African countries and academics so that we write history appropriately. For instance establishing an African Studies Center to harness the work of scholars in our academic programs will allow us to feed on wonderful intellectual energy. An African Studies Center at the heroes corner, will also explore the complex and often emotional issues of tribe, culture and heritage.

We can have exchange programs with other African Universities and beyond to encourage a healthy osmosis of capability between our institutions, to explore resources such as academic libraries, to have time to interact with fellow faculty who share their interests, and time to publish journal articles or books.

We legitimately share a cultural day along with the United States, the where the month of February is Black History Month, which commits lectures and lessons to significant African-Americans. Similarly through the centre for memory and heroes corner as a museum—we can exhibit art and culture, showcase television programs on the accomplishments and challenges of the African Liberation Struggle, and explore human identities in Africa and Kenya in particular.

In Kenya, we continue to struggle with the legacy of bondage, the reality of ethnic discrimination, and their effects on education, housing, health care and personal identity. Many would argue our country has made greater advances speaking to equality since the end of independence fifty years ago, but we still have a long way to go in meeting our national goals. We have much to learn from other's accomplishments and continuing challenges.

Questions of African Liberation culture engage many of us in Kenya today; Dedan Kimathi UoT can take these up via the heroes corner. From

issues of museum studies and monumentalization in Kenya to architectural work on the historical sites, such as slave sites, struggle caves,—we should support the archives of the African Liberation particularly Mau Mau, and across the country.

This brings me back to the messages of African Liberation struggle Focusing on the Mau Mau, of looking back as we move forward and looking to extend our ties to the global village through which we may grow.

Our universities - in Kenya -all have important histories, individually and as partners. The differences between us - those of background, of experience, of culture, of perspective - must not be a source of conflict, but must charge us to creativity and innovation. They are, and can be, harnessed for the good of all.

Dedan Kimathi himself would have been ninety one years old today. Through the contributions of his family and the university and millions of Kenyans, we can build a university that is known for diversity, a university with liberation heritage, pursuing varied academic disciplines, and other scholarly pursuits. For instance we encourage our anthropologists to cooperate with social and cultural historians to illuminate what the past says about us as Kenyans.

Through a range of disciplines and interrelationships we can be a mirror of the nation and the world we serve as a university. The public and our students and faculty, expect the Dedan Kimathi University of Technology to meet society's needs. These are consistent with DeKUoT Core values namely Innovation, Scholarship, Diversity, Reliability, Teamwork, Nature and Heritage.

As I conclude I want to remind you that Heroes like Kimathi were giving us a wakeup call like 911. Their alarm was to address the 7Ds that ails Africa, the 7Ds that Nkurumah, Kenyatta and Nyerere Mandela and Kimathi fought for. These scrooges, still with us today are:

1. Desertification,

2. Drought,
3. Demography,
4. Disequilibrium,
5. Debt,
6. Diseases
7. Dependency

I urge the University to implement its Strategic Plan that entails developing an international repository for the studies on the freedom fighter Dedan Kimathi and the Mau Mau freedom struggle congruent with meeting the targets of Vision 2030 and Millenium Development Goals. The MDGs was a resolution of the United Nation General Assembly 2000 which is:

1. Eradicate poverty and hunger
2. Universal primary education
3. Gender equality
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability

Paradoxically the African heroes of the 1950s identified the 7Ds as constraining the continents development agenda yet the 2000 MGDs that were to be met by 2015 remains a challenge.

I realize you have a very busy three days of presentations and discussions. I thank you for responding to our call. Use your time here not only to warm this auditorium but also to look around the main campus and offer us advice on how to do better. I admire the rich mix of public and private universities in Kenya gathered here today. Allow me to appreciate participants from overseas. I commend the organizers of the conference in designing the programme. Just ensure the proceedings are published soonest and that major findings and recommendations are synthesized as policy brief for the executives so that implementation of important decisions is not delayed. We wish you a safe return to your home and come back to visit us in the future.

It is now my pleasure to declare the Conference officially opened.

Thank you.

