

THE AFRICAN UNIVERSITY AND
HUMAN UNDERSTANDING

Address by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor
Lameck K.H. Goma.

MR. CHANCELLOR, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

This is the seventh Graduation Ceremony at which the degrees, diplomas and certificates of the University of Zambia will be conferred on the successful candidates. The number of those who are to receive the awards is 532, as compared with 314 last year. The breakdown is as follows: Master of Arts, 2; Master of Education, 2; Master of Laws, 1; Bachelor of Agricultural Science, 27; Bachelor of Arts, 203; Bachelor of Engineering, 29; Bachelor of Laws, 52; Bachelor of Science, 68; Bachelor of Science (Human Biology), 42; Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery, 11; Bachelor of Mineral Sciences, 4; Bachelor of Social Work, 9; Diploma in Social Work, 11; Diploma in Library Studies, 1; Diploma in Teacher Education, 30; Certificate in Adult Education, 18; and Certificate in Library Studies, 22. The degrees of Master of Education, Master of Laws and Bachelor of Mineral Sciences and the Diploma in Teacher Education are being awarded for the first time in the history of the University.

Mr. Chancellor, Sir, as usual, I now wish to devote the rest of my address to a brief consideration of a number of issues affecting higher education in Africa. I shall treat these under the general heading: THE AFRICAN UNIVERSITY AND HUMAN UNDERSTANDING; and I shall confine myself to four issues. These are (1) the reality of the divided humanity; (2) the guilty silence of the universities; (3) the usefulness of the "useless" disciplines; and (4) the significance of international educational exchange.

THE REALITY OF THE DIVIDED HUMANITY

Mankind has always been and continues to be con-

fronted with enormous and complex problems and barriers which distort or handicap the fulfilment of congenial human relations. While it cannot be disputed that the modern advances of science and technology have brought us physically nearer one to another and increased the interdependence of man, at the same time we seem to be much more deeply divided than ever. Thus, as Mwalimu Julius Nyerere has put it, mankind is "divided between those who are satiated and those who are hungry; between those with power and those without power; between those who dominate and those who are dominated; between those who exploit and those who are exploited;" and, one might add, between those who oppress and those who are oppressed. Then there are those that seek to promote the degradation of their fellow-men simply because they have a different skin pigmentation or belong to a different race.

The deep and significant differences between and among many nations must be seen for what they are. Many of them are often nourished by conflicting values and concepts of what is acceptable and proper and what is not; and by opposing ideologies. But the arrogance of certain countries or nations frustrates the efforts of honest men everywhere struggling to see mankind live in peace and dignity. Furthermore, the compulsion to maintain open conflict can only leave room to manoeuvre for positions of advantage which may not be in the best interests of our common humanity.

At the national level, many of our countries have their own problems of cultural conflict, of people with different languages and different ethnic backgrounds living together. These problems, regrettably, tend to divide us as human beings, and we become reduced by them.

The search for effective means of overcoming these various problems and of transcending these various barriers that divide us as human beings has been a perennial one; but it must continue, and institutions of higher learning everywhere have a duty to contribute to this exercise. It is believed that assaults against the barriers to a universal community can be initiated in universities with much less resistance than in most other institutions. The African university must, therefore, seek to play a significant part in generating and sustaining a deep and widespread perception that human solidarity - across differences of race, nationality, ideology, and cultural tradition - is not merely desirable and beneficial, but is demanded by our common humanity; and it must seek to convey to the teacher and student a deep sense of the dignity of the human person.

THE GUILTY SILENCE OF THE UNIVERSITIES

There are a number of significant questions, the asking of which would seem to be an indictment against our universities for their apparently insufficient commitment to the quest for human understanding. Many have asked whether our universities have held back when they should have led; have remained silent when they should have spoken up; and have compromised when they should have stood fast - against the actions of men and nations which only reveal the depth of misunderstanding among peoples and nations and which mask the absence of real communication between them.

The African university can and should play an important role in promoting rational dialogue which should be regarded as the only alternative to confrontation and resort to unilateral actions, whether at the national or international level. But has the university done enough to **generate**, among its staff

and students and the community at large, the quality of being able to disagree with others without becoming angry; the conviction that differences of opinion should be settled by rational authority rather than by coercion or force; and the significance of a constructive intolerance or a just indignation that does not remain silent in the face of attitudes or actions that are inimical to the future of individuals or of society? And how loud and clear has been our voice in this?

The problems pertaining to human understanding are no different from other problems, in one sense: they require a mental discipline, to make sure that all significant factors are identified and evaluated. This can, for example, be achieved through imaginative and meaningful programmes of research and study. But it may be asked: in how many of our universities are programmes of research and study prompted by a genuine desire to tackle substantive problems of human or international consequence, in order to contribute significantly toward human or international understanding? How many of our scholars, in the various disciplines and professions, have committed themselves wholeheartedly to such understanding? How many of our university teachers use the occasion of teaching, not only for imparting information for its own sake, but with the deliberate intent of showing students how the study of the matter at hand is related to human dilemmas and human values? How serious and successful, if at all, have been our attempts, in these matters, to formulate and organise systems through which there can be more public enlightenment and more widespread response to it? Mr. Chancellor, Sir, I am glad to report that the University of Zambia has decided to move significantly in this direction and has, consequently, recently established an "Institute of Human Relations", as an instrument

while contribution to the development, interpretation and transmission of knowledge in the sphere of human relations.

Our universities must seek to do more than they have done so far. They must stimulate an awareness and promote a more thorough intellectual grasp of the great issues affecting mankind, both among students and the general public. We need more and more basic information about the nature of the national and international community in which we live, and of the different ways in which the interests of the different peoples within nations and of member states tend both to unite and to divide them.

THE USEFULNESS OF THE "USELESS" DISCIPLINES.

It is generally agreed that the acute shortage of high-level manpower is perhaps the single most important constraint on African development. Such manpower must be produced by the African university. We must have agricultural scientists in order to improve and increase our food production; doctors, to meet the health needs of our nations; teachers, to provide for a more adequate and relevant education for our peoples; engineers, mineral scientists, other scientists and technologists, to enable us to exploit our mineral and other natural resources to our greatest advantage, to develop or improve our industries, transportation and communications systems; lawyers, to attend to the legal needs of our societies; and economists to provide expertise in the planning of our national economies. The usefulness of the disciplines which produce such professionals is unquestioned. And many of our universities have accepted the critical and challenging task of training and producing these

professionals in as balanced a manner as possible. The pressures on the universities to concentrate on the training and production of such high-level manpower are understandable. Indeed our universities must continue to respond positively and they must seek to expand their facilities and increase the range of professional fields of study in order to meet the ever increasing needs of our societies.

However, the usefulness, actual and potential, of the so-called "useless" disciplines must never be minimised. And, as I have said in the past, our universities must guard against the summary exclusion, from their activities, of those subjects or academic pursuits which may be thought to have no immediate manpower relevance. Here one thinks, for example, of cultural studies, history, literature and languages, philosophy, ethics, theology, and even classics. These disciplines are of considerable significance in the quest for human and international understanding. To understand your own and other peoples, their outlook, their reactions and attitudes to things, you must understand their culture and social systems, their language, their history, and their contemporary life in general. The study and teaching of these, at our universities, can and should, therefore, play a significant role not only in curing our ignorance but also our intolerance of other peoples' way of life. Perhaps a little more needs to be said about the significance of some of these disciplines.

It has been said that the study of the national language(s), literature, culture and history, if carried on with thoroughness and objectivity, will uncover numerous references to cross-national and cross-cultural origins and influences, and, so, should contribute to emphasizing our common humanity. In the quest for a new world order, the African perspective seeks and should continue to seek,

as Professor Ali Mazrui has aptly said, to relate "world problems to cultural concerns, arguing that human beings can never develop enough consensus for major world reforms unless they develop a substantial area of shared values, combined with parity of esteem among cultures". Our Universities can contribute to this quest through the pursuit of research and the study of human cultures, values and ethics.

Many of the ills of mankind are compounded by the difficulties we have in communicating with our own kind, both within nations and internationally. The language barrier is clearly one of the most complex of the barriers confronting our societies and mankind. It is most difficult for people to relate to one another when they cannot communicate. Our appreciation of what others are saying can be grossly frustrated. For example, I am quite sure that when recently camarada Samora Machel enjoined us to say "A Lutta Continua", to many Zambians he was saying, "Continua has gone!"

However, the problems of language are enormous. Even at the national level, we must confront the predicament of our countries in their search for a national language in a multi-lingual society. But even here the study and teaching of the languages of a country across ethnic frontiers can contribute enormously to greater human understanding within the nation. On the other hand, the learning of foreign languages across national frontiers might not only expand human sympathy, but also create respect for the people identified with the languages concerned. Our universities must assume a more aggressive approach to the whole question of the study and teaching of languages. At the University of Zambia we should now take distinct practical steps to the teaching not only of Zambian languages

but also of Portuguese and even Afrikaans, in addition to the two languages we now teach, namely, English and French. There is great need for us in Zambia to understand what our friends in the new Mozambique and in the future Angola and what the boers in South Africa are saying about Africa and about us.

Sometimes one hears the question: of what use are history and literature in a developing country? The significance of these disciplines has been well stated by the Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh: "History gives a vital record of mankind's success and failure, hopes and fears, the heights and the depths of human endeavours pursued with either heroism or depravity - but always depicting real virtue or lack of it"; while "literature gives an insight into the vast human arena of good and evil, love and hate, peace and violence as real living human options." The claim has been made that the study of both these disciplines can have a sobering effect on all of us: the historical study of one's own and other peoples and other periods should, if properly taught, make one less arrogant about one's own place in history; while the message of literature should help us to appreciate more our common humanity. As Professor Arnold Kettle has said, "what has made great literature great is precisely the help it has given to real men and women to see the world more clearly and to become more aware of the boundless potentialities of human beings." However, the African university should reject both the history and literature which belong to and seek to strengthen the values of exploitation, of oppression, of racialism, of war, and of contempt for human life.

The "useless" disciplines are, therefore, not to be regarded as a luxury which contemporary Africa cannot afford. They meet a real human need: the need for greater human understanding.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE

Many universities throughout the world are now devoting a share of their resources to international educational exchange. They are educating students from abroad and are sending some of their own students to universities in other countries; they are appointing foreign scholars to teach or engage in research, and making it possible for some of their own academic staff to teach or engage in research abroad. However, in Africa, this desirable two-way trafficking, particularly in the case of university teachers and research workers, between the universities across national frontiers, within the continent or with universities outside the continent, has not always been possible. One major reason for this is the paucity of nationals on the academic staffs of many of our universities. It can also be said that the number and proportion of foreign students tend to be small because, understandably, it is felt that the limited resources available should be more properly applied to the education of the country's own citizens. However, in the context of our present concern, what is the significance of international educational exchange?

According to Professor Otto Klineberg and others, there seems to be a widespread conviction that international educational exchanges help to promote mutual understanding and friendships among peoples and nations, and so open up new possibilities for the establishment of a more human basis for international relations; that they constitute an integrative force in the world, since political relationships are so frequently based on mutual lack of knowledge and confidence; and that they enrich not only students from other nations who are seeking an education, but all those with whom they come into contact. For as someone has said, "when

strangers meet and have an opportunity to share ideas and experiences, friendship and understanding grow – differences among nations and backgrounds assume their place as part of the rich mosaic of human life".

But has the reality been as effective as the prospect? Are our universities and our countries adequately exploiting the advantages which should accrue from the presence of foreign academics and students at our campuses? What has been our performance in the facilitation of human interaction and the development of real friendships across ethnic and national frontiers? Have we done enough, or indeed anything at all, to promote cross-ethnic and cross-national cultural activities at our campuses? Or have we only succeeded in isolating foreign academics and students with co-nationals? On the other hand, how many of our foreign colleagues, both academics and students, care to learn our languages; to understand and appreciate our culture; to really sympathise with us in our attempts to overcome the problems and obstacles that hinder the realisation of our national aspirations? Regrettably, there have been a number of cases where not only has the conduct of some of our foreign academics and students on our campuses been utterly reprehensible, but the activities of such colleagues have sometimes even been inimical to the interests of the host university and the host country. These things seriously detract from the real value of international educational exchange.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Mr. Chancellor, Sir, I must now conclude my address. No one can doubt the fact that we live in an increasingly interdependent world. While, therefore, the realities of those things that divide