



SPEECH BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI,

PROF SAMSON SAJIDU

DURING THE ORIENTATION OF FIRST YEARS

HELD ON

MONDAY, 25TH APRIL 2022

IN THE GREAT HALL

Salutations

Deans

Registrar

Our Beloved First years

Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish to take this enviable moment and singular privilege to welcome you to the University of Malawi. It is an occasion that deserves celebration. What else can I say on receiving close to 2000 students who excelled in the Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE), IGCSE etc which are tough. Last year we received about 2500 because we had a combined function with ODeL. This means that if we combined this year the group would have been close to 3000. You are among the few who secured admission to the University of Malawi. As you will confirm soon, you made the correct choice and you are in the right place. We are happy you made the decision to join this great institution. Congratulations. As administration we would like to correctly call you Freshers. However, your seniors have tended to call you yearo! Do not take offence at all. We have all been yearos. It is

scientific for it means year raised to the power 0 which is equal to 1. I am year 95.

The University of Malawi is the oldest, largest and premier University in the country committed to scholarly excellence. We started in 1965 from Chichiri in Blantyre and moved to here in 1975. We are a University that pride ourselves on both beautifully designed old structures like the Great Hall where we are seated now, library, lecture theatres and ultra-modern infrastructures like the Mwambo and Chikowi lecture theatres, ICT complex, Chemistry laboratories/Chimphamba laboratories, Economics complex, beautiful landscape (with chairs and tables in the gardens for your use donated by alumni) and excellent staff (highest concentration of PhDs are here than at any other university in this country). Just to mention that we are undergoing a transformation for effective and efficient delivery of our services and also in order to smoothly be increasing student enrollment. Delinking... (MUBAS, KUHES etc). You are the second cohort/group of the reformed university of Malawi. How transformed shall you be?

The knowledge you gain here will enable you to use the resources on the planet earth appropriately for the transformation of mankind. We also have courses in astronomy in Physics though. Your objective then should be to aspire to gain the ability to do this through the development of your mental, physical, emotional and spiritual capacity.

So, today you are making your first step in a journey of several years. The time and place where this transformative journey begin is known. It is today and at the University of Malawi. The end however will only be determined by you. I will emphasize this by pointing out that a number of students have passed through this institution since 1965. To set out on a journey, you must know the destination, the means of getting there and the resources you need to get there. In the case of academic journey, the destination is graduation while time, commitment and attitude form the other requirements. No one here wants you to be weeded out. Currently our pass rate is about 85% but we would love to raise it to 100% because Government, parents, donors, spouses, family members spend resources on you to succeed in your studies and be useful in the development of this nation. What happens during assessment! Spend time on a single student who is failing. Difficult to be withdrawn: referred ...Carry Over...repeat....

I know most of you are not at ease. You are preoccupied with the idea of being in an unfamiliar environment. For most of you, this might be the first time you are away from your teachers or parents. You must be wondering about what it is like to be away from the familiar and predictable life in secondary schools or comfort zone at home. However, you are not the only ones who have left familiar territory to join this University.

The world has so many examples of successful personalities who went through this university like you. The President Dr Chakwera walked in these corridors and graduated with BA (Philosophy) in 1977. He made it. So, can you. The Vice President Dr Saulos Chilima came from Mtendere Secondary School, walked in these corridors and was in Chilembwe room 4 and graduated with BSoc. He made it. So, can you. The Minister of Education Agness Nyalonje, the SPC, Honourable Khumbize Kandodo (Minister of Health), Honorable Gospel Kazako, both the Chief Justice and Attorney General and most of those cabinet ministers, the speaker of parliament Hon Catherine Gotani Hara and many more were in these corridors and made it. So, can you. And you cannot imagine how nervous they were on their first days in this campus (in those days without mobile phones, kabazas and taxis were a luxury). Your Vice Chancellor (Makata 22) registrar, deans, lecturers they all walked in these corridors and proceeded to do their masters and PhDs mostly abroad and here they are. So, can you. Any vibrant industry you can visit in this country you will always find a University of Malawi graduate in its leadership hierarchy. So, can you. We have equally exported experts to work in international organisations such as the World Bank (Dr Goodall Gondwe, Late Prof Mathews Chikaonda to mention but a few) and we have Professors in the World reputable universities such as Oxford (Prof Samson Kambalu, he did fine arts here at the University of Malawi). So, can you.

So, you can see that this is the University of universities where leaders for both the public and private sectors are made.

This University is founded on a core conviction to develop you to the utmost end of life like those other personalities who have excelled. In a few days' time you will find out that the programmes offered across the four faculties and one school are carefully designed to give you the recipe required to do just that. In addition, the mix and pool of lecturers and administrative staff are dedicated to combining their resources to instill in you the requisite skills and competencies.

As you can see, there are numerous opportunities at the university. These come in many forms; They may come in the form of sports and games (sports complex has facilities such as tennis, basketball, netball and volleyball courts including a gymnasium). We have areas for you to develop your talents like music and drama. We provide opportunities for people from the industry to come or you visit them as professional circles where you interact with your future employers. Our training also ensures that you can be entrepreneurial. You can start your own businesses instead of waiting for employment. Ensure that such skills are embraced. There will be social networks as well with the potential of providing a future spouse as you interact but most importantly you need to create a strong network to work with even in future. Spiritual growth also happens here and you are also given the opportunity of honing your acumen in student politics. Soon

there will be campaigns for positions in the executive of the Student Union. Participate actively.

Of course, what I have said is easier said than accomplished. The university life is littered with challenges that will make your dreams difficult to realise.

University life has excess freedom which opens doors to sweet life. For the first time you have the opportunity to date and go out without the watchful eyes of your mum and dad or older siblings. But let me caution that this takes time and money. So strike a balance between social and academic life.

Life is more materialistic today than during our time. The products are also varied and more tempting. They range from sophisticated electrical appliances, mobile phones, alcoholic drinks with strange colours and catchy names, drugs, to fancy clothes and even gambling activities. The temptations will push your financial demands to the limit and sometimes even tempt you to divert your fees. Careful and prudent utilization of finances is your only way out.

Sometimes you may confuse time spent on your smart phone or computer device with learning. Time on whatsapp, facebook, movies etc.

Modern lifestyle if not handled carefully, could easily open doors to promiscuity whose outcome could be disastrous. The individual freedom coupled with the absence of someone to watch over you as well as unfamiliarity with the new environment may lead to confusion normally manifested in the form of failure to register for the right courses, truancy, missing classes, inability to keep timelines and so forth.

Then there is the issue of peer pressure, bad influence. Seek counsel, choose good company.

When one gets overwhelmed by all the challenges narrated above they become easy prey for radicalization and recruitment into groupings including radical religious groupings (which sometimes teach bad things. Some so called religious groups will tell you to pray for Sajidu that his exams should just be easy without even preparing for it). Be able to differentiate between prayers and madness! They will call you to teach you study skills only to hear different things contrary to prayers!

But all is not hopeless. Like thousands who have made it before, you too can excel. The following simple statements make the road map that will keep you on track.

1. You know what brought you here. To study. Set your goals right and stick to your lane.
2. Uphold values. Confirm to us that we did select the best students. We did not make a mistake
3. Familiarize yourself with the rules and regulations.
4. Don't be tempted to cheat in exams. You will be expelled
5. Ensure you are always in the right place and at the right time.
6. Further, always make sure someone knows where you are.
7. Respect the laws of the land.
8. Live within your means and manage your finances.
9. Be yourself. Don't pretend to be what you are not.
10. Seek counsel and assistance.
11. Adopt and adapt to information technology and strive to improve your skills and mastery of internet every day.
12. We have talented, qualified and committed academic and administrative staff. Keep a record of their contacts and seek their guidance and support timely (not after you have failed). No lecturer wants you to be weeded or that you should come for supplementary exams ayi! If people say that at the onset, it means that they want you to jack up and work hard. No ill-intention at all but weak students take advantage of that! (It is unfortunate that students graduate here without knowing the difference between Dean of students and Dean of Faculty)
13. Master the University time table and programme of events.
14. Ensure you comply with requirements including paying fees.
15. You must keep safe at all times.
16. Saying "thank you" and "I'm sorry" is powerful. These simple acts, when said genuinely, can yield unexpected results. You are crossing a zebra crossing in town! The culture of university students. You are late in class and you say sorry to the hungry lecturer!

This is the only University which enrolls students with special needs on the principals that:

- *Everyone of us* wants to belong and be included
- *Everyone of us* is different
- *Everyone of us* has areas of strengths and areas of weaknesses

Let us live inclusively with each other to be a great institution forever.

Let us remind each other that you have come to the University after slightly over a year since you were selected due to the scourges of COVID. COVID is still real. Wherever we are and whatever we do let's observe COVID measures as outlined by the relevant authorities. Masking up, washing hands, sanitizing regularly, physical distancing are some of them. We had a number of painful options leading to your coming.

1. The University had an option of not selecting students in the 2022 academic year so that you come in September with continuing students, however, prospective students would be demoralized and the expectation of the public would not be met;
2. students could be selected to join the 2022 academic year and would be made to wait; however, this would lead to a situation of having 3 cohorts of students that would be defining themselves as first years at some point;
3. the University could have a double cohort of first years by September, 2022 potentially reaching 4000 students which in turn would:
 - prove costly;
 - result in lack of teaching space;
 - lead to difficulties of satisfying accommodation and staffing requirements.
4. the University could stagger the opening for first year students and the cohorts could be merged by second year of study. This is the option we have chosen. With this, please get to know that the lecturers will not have time to rest. Do not disappoint them since they will be teaching you out of good will. Almost 70% of you will have accommodation in campus (a rare opportunity nowadays). The few with accommodation out of campus (such as Chikanda, you are able to get the best facilities (a rare opportunity nowadays). The library space will be adequately available to you without competing (also a rare opportunity nowadays). I am stressing these issues because you will have very conducive environment for learning and therefore our expectation is that we will have 100% pass rate in this cohort. You have no excuses. You should not be creating illness and financial crises in order to run away from academic work.

In conclusion: This day is a beacon that marks the end of one stage in your life (the secondary school mwana wa amami or wa adadi stage). You are now adults. We do not accept parents writing letters to us on your behalf. We do not accept parents seeking accommodation on your behalf. We do not accept parents sending nuns to wash your clothes here. Accommodation challenges! (1200 vs 6000 some of you would not have been here ofcourse). Embark on your studies with vitality, valour, virility, vigour and you will never go astray. You will complete your journey and get your degree. Then all of us present here will be happy to witness you being given the power to read and do all that appertains to the degree.

Thank you. You are well received!

Zikomo kwambiri. Takulandirani mokondwa!

Sikomo kwejinji. Twapochere nikwanyadira!

Yewo Tawonga tachomene. Tampokelerani makola yene!