

REMARKS BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL, UGANDA NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR UNESCO, MR AUGUSTINE OMARE-OKURUT ON THE OCCASION OF THE COMMEMORATION OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EAST AFRICA.

Your Excellency, Yoweri K. Museveni, President of the Republic of Uganda,
represented by the Honourable Ephraim Kamuntu,

Honourable Jessica Alupo, Minister of Education and Sports,

Honourable Ministers and Members of Parliament,

Representatives of the Family of Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere,

Permanent Secretaries

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Chairperson Makerere University Council

Vice-Chancellors of Universities

Prof. Ngugi wa Thiong'o,

Alumni of the University of East Africa

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour and pleasure for me on behalf of the Uganda National Commission for UNESCO to welcome you to this memorable occasion in which we mark fifty years since the establishment of the University of East Africa(UEA).

Allow me to share with you the genesis of this event. The idea to mark the 50th anniversary of the UEA was first mooted at a meeting a colleague in the Africa Department of UNESCO in Paris, and I had about three years ago. At that meeting we discussed possible activities for UNESCO to engage in, in Uganda and the East African sub-region. Our discussion was guided and influenced by an agenda item

of UNESCO's governing bodies titled: "Celebration of anniversaries with which UNESCO could be associated with". We narrowed our search to a commemoration of an anniversary which would be common to East Africa.

On scanning the East African sub-region for appropriate events/anniversaries that met the UNESCO criteria for events or anniversaries that UNESCO may be associated with and, that would bring together several countries in the sub-region, the 50th anniversary of the University of East Africa struck a chord with both us. The event was particularly pertinent given the spirit of the harmonization of education within East Africa that was high on the East African agenda as well. The Uganda National Commission for UNESCO was tasked to follow up on the matter with relevant authorities to its logical conclusion. The logical conclusion is the reason we are here today.

The celebration of 50th anniversary of the University of East Africa received the approval of the 36th Session of the UNESCO General Conference. It is therefore one of the events in the official calendar of events with which UNESCO is associated during the 2012/2013 biennium. The Director General of UNESCO, H.E Irina Bokova, sends us her felicitations on this 50th anniversary of the UEA. She regrets she could not be here with us in person. However, she assures us of her personal support and that of UNESCO to this event and to Uganda in general.

In confirmation of UNESCO's support, UNESCO Assistant Director General for Education will in the second week of July, 2013 attend the High Level Forum for Eastern African Ministers of Education High Level Forum on Education for All. He will have opportunity to associate UNESCO with today's events.

Your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen, another reason the Uganda National Commission for UNESCO committed itself to this celebration is because Uganda is in a golden jubilee mode. Last year, we marked the golden jubilee of our independence that is still fresh in the minds of many Ugandans. Last year too, was fifty years since Uganda joined UNESCO. In November 2013, we are marking fifty years, since the establishment of the Uganda National Commission for UNESCO. The celebration of fifty years of the UEA is only another way to continue to keep the golden jubilee era torch glowing.

The establishment of the University of East Africa, marked the surge of higher education in East Africa. The University was a centre for scholarship, creativity and intellectual discourse. While each constituent College had its area of specialization, Makerere was generally regarded as the cradle of the university. It was also a preparation ground for many nationalists in East Africa and beyond. Makerere University College, besides its academic excellence was also a centre for grooming creative talent and for responding to societal needs of the time. The Makerere Free Travelling Theatre and budding writers come to mind.

Indeed the presence of Prof. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, himself a product of Makerere of the sixties, is an appropriate way to reflect on the UEA of the past as he makes a home-coming to his *alma mater*. Prof. Ngugi's homecoming we hope will build bridges on the rivers between East Africans and water petals of flowers loaded with petals of love in the region. On a very personal note, it is my pleasure to reunite Prof Ngugi many years after the launch of *Petals of Blood*, the subsequent events of which directly affected some of us who were his students at the time.

As we mark fifty years of UEA, we may like to reflect on the state of higher education in the region and the role of universities in society today. Can we say, the institutions that have been delivered from the nursery of the UEA are today anchors of intellectual discourse and bedrocks of values to common humanity? To what extent is higher education, particularly university education addressing the challenges of poverty, disease, insecurity, civil strife, environmental degradation and governance in our society today? Are universities well positioned to shape and influence the national, regional and international agenda? Too what extent has Makerere, for example lived to its motto of, *pro futuro eadificamus* or Nairobi to *unitate et labore*? These and, many other questions deserve answers, not just from Makerere, Nairobi and Dar es Salaam universities, but from all institutions of higher learning.

Your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen, UNESCO at the end of last century produced a report of the International Commission of Education for the 21st Century, titled, *Learning, the Treasure Within* which identified four pillars for education for the 21st century, namely: *learning to know, learning to be, learning*

to do, learning to live together .To these, others have added, *learning to transform society*. These pillars may be informative when we are trying to in answering the questions whether or not universities are addressing the social concordat between them and society.

I would like to congratulate all the alumni of the University of East Africa on this day and the triplets of Makerere, Dar es Salaam, Nairobi and Makerere universities for growing into mature adults that have also produced other institutions of higher learning. I would like first, to congratulate you ,Your Excellency as an alumnus of the UEA and, to thank you for choosing to grace this occasion with your presence.

May I also thank the family of President Julius Kambarage Nyerere for gracing this celebrations with their presence. You are not only coming to follow on the trail of the academic career of Mwalimu Nyerere to his *alma mate,r* but also to celebrate the university of which, he was the only Chancellor. I had a personal encounter with Mwalimu at State House Dar es Salaam in the late seventies and also visited his home in Butiaba. Both experiences left profound and fond memories of a great African leader in my young mind.

I thank UNESCO for recognizing this day as one that it associates with and for co-funding the celebrations .I would also like to thank the Makerere University for accepting to host this event and for the excellent organization.I thank the sister universities of Dar es Salaam and Nairobi for participating in this great commemorative event. And to all of you ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming to associate with this celebration.

May I conclude my remarks with an appeal especially to the alumni of the UEA, particularly those in decision making positions, in the spirit of cooperation in East Africa and, upholding the spirit of *ubuntu* that moved the founders then and that holds us together as humanity, to consider reviving the University of East Africa in one form or another.

I wish all of us a happy and memorable golden jubilee.

Thank you.