

**PRESS STATEMENT**  
**on**  
**Institutional Reforms at the University of Nairobi (UoN)**  
**by**  
**Chairperson of the University of Nairobi Council**

**9<sup>th</sup>, July 2021**

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Welcome ladies and gentlemen of the Press.

In his first address to the nation in 2018, the current President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind said:

***“Our aspiration must be to reform, upgrade and enlarge our education system - and to make it relevant to 21<sup>st</sup> century realities of the digital economy, genomics, robotics and automation.”***

Appreciating the depth and breadth of India’s advancement in education, one concludes that scientific and technological advancements have driven humanity to the precipice of radical and unprecedented changes. It is, therefore, our solemn duty, as partners in education, to approach the changing global trends with an open mind and unyielding resolve in order to bequeath posterity better prospects for survival in an increasingly competitive and demanding world.

Our quest for reform at the University of Nairobi - benchmarked against global best practice - is informed by the unfolding realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the need to align our priorities with the demands of changing times. May I, at this juncture, hasten to mention that the University Council, as provided for by the

Universities Act, is the supreme governance organ of any university in Kenya. As such, it behooves the Council to institute and maintain adequate and appropriate governance and management structures that serve to maintain the university's corporate integrity, reputation and responsibility.

Existing structures and systems have served the university well over the past 50 years. As the University of Nairobi celebrates her **Golden Jubilee**, our individual and collective reflections have brought us to a point of inflection. In light of the experience of years gone by, we now, of necessity, must ask ourselves, "*what will hold us in good stead to the centenary?*" Council is of the considered view that there is an overarching imperative to reengineer how we do business to better deliver on our mandate.

The road to reform has been a long one.

To her credit, Dr. Vijoo Rattansi, the Chancellor of the University of Nairobi constituted the first-ever Visitation Panel in a Kenyan university. This eminent Panel under the able stewardship of Prof. Margaret Kobia (*now the Cabinet Secretary Ministry of Public Service and Gender*) submitted its report in 2018. It is this report that formed the blueprint from which the current reforms are derived.

The panel, through pointed findings, buttressed the need for an all-encompassing reform towards greater institutional efficiency and effectiveness. These reforms touch on areas of legal and legislative structure, relations with other stakeholders, service delivery, human resource, safety and security, procurement amongst other reforms.

The Council in its Strategic Plan 2019-2024, amongst other reforms, reiterated the need for governance and structural reforms. The management, through the Vice Chancellor, embraced and reinforced reforms in the Senate Approved Vice

Chancellor's Reform Agenda 2020. Various committees of the University thereafter have echoed the same sentiments, that we need to reform. Acknowledging that reforms might trigger changes to statutory instruments, the Council constituted an *Ad Hoc* Committee with the mandate of, *inter alia*, reviewing and updating existing University of Nairobi Statutes and Policies.

In a sense therefore, the university is unequivocally speaking the same language, that without reform our sustainability as a premier university is greatly endangered.

Focusing on the next 50 years and our sustainable existence as a capable institution of higher learning, structural and governance reforms in our context is imperative to achieve the following objectives:

- a) To respond to the changing operating environment
- b) To eliminate duplication of functions and redundancies
- c) To Improve efficiency in service delivery by aligning resources to functions and manage costs of service delivery
- d) To enhance accountability and utilize excess capacity at the University to generate more resources
- e) To address the challenge of declining capitation from the traditional sources.

In meeting the above objectives, at the global scale, the University of Nairobi has:

- a) Abolished offices, merged functions and created new functional positions aligned to the core mandate of the university. Some of the abolished positions are 5 Offices of the Deputy Vice Chancellors replaced by 2 positions of Associate Vice Chancellors

- b) Abolished all Colleges and reorganized all functions around faculties which have been reduced to 11 to avoid duplication and functional overreach
- c) Abolished all positions of Principals and Deputy Principals and their roles reorganized under new positions of Executive and Associate Deans to align resources to the faculties where teaching and learning take place
- d) Retained 14 Research Institutes including KAVI, Wangari Mathai institute (WMI), Institute of Development Studies (IDS) to continue generating knowledge for transformation of communities

In our view, the resultant governance and structural reforms envision a new thinking; a thinking that breaks down bureaucracy for the benefit of our stakeholders. This, as exemplified earlier, is achieved by abolishing all unnecessary layers of reporting and in so doing, eliminating “forwarding offices” and in their stead, replacing them with re-imagined functional offices that lend themselves to conclusion of tasks and resolution of queries at the lowest functional unit. This is expected to result into a lean yet optimal structure that aims at achieving a greater degree of functional devolution of resources, accountability and responsibility thus creating a flexible, adaptable and responsive university governance ecosystem.

The new structure is informed by the centrality of Teaching, Research and Innovations themselves functions at the core of our mandate. A robust ICT infrastructure alongside requisite investments, reinvestments, improvements and facility development aspirations under University Advancement are deemed critical components for delivery of teaching, research and innovation going forward. To keep the boat afloat, the administrative support services will be consolidated under various functions and respective professional heads all reporting to a Chief Operating Officer (COO) who directly answers to the Vice Chancellor.

We envision that these structural interventions will result in shorter decision turnaround time and greater fiscal discipline as evident in timely decision support systems, value for money proposition, significant cost savings, greater competitive advantage and enhanced sustainability.

In concluding, we note the congruence of purpose in the pronouncement by Hon (Amb.) Ukur Yatani, Cabinet Secretary, The National Treasury & Planning about Reforms of State Corporations. At this point when the economy begs a thorough review, we at the University of Nairobi are happy to have played and to continue playing our part in augmenting government efforts. As a Council, we confirm that the exercise of implementing these and other reforms will endeavour to avoid unnecessary disruptions in service delivery and optimal deployment of resources available to the University.

Ultimately, the University of Nairobi and the country by extension, can only look forward to better times.

Thank you very much and May God bless you all!

**Prof. Julia Ojiambo**

Chairperson

**University of Nairobi Council**