

Speech by Professor Kazhila Chinsembu, Director-General of the Higher Education Authority, delivered at the engagement meeting with Vice-Chancellors of public universities, Mulungushi International Conference Centre, Lusaka, 25 April 2024

(Professor Kazhila Chinsembu is full professor of molecular biology and drug discovery. University of Namibia promoted Chinsembu to the rank of full professor on September 1, 2020).

THEME: TRANSFORMATION OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN ZAMBIA

[salutations]

Let me preface by saying that, on 28 March 2024, we were delighted to see students from various higher education institutions visit Community House to express their appreciation to President Hakainde Hichilema for reinstating student meal allowances. The President talked about changing the curriculum and teaching a new generation of entrepreneurs. The President also reiterated that each province will have at least one public university.

In line with the President's vision for university education, the theme of this meeting is *Transformation of University Education in Zambia*. Today, we shall examine some of the broader political and socioeconomic and legal contexts that affect the transformation of education in our public universities.

It is important that we have a sense of perspective, a sense of self awareness, regarding the societal context and the grand scheme, that serves as the imperative for governance and transformation of contemporary university education in Zambia.

You may be interested to know that we are all heirs of Professor Lameck Goma's vision of *the university of our dreams*. Unfortunately, this vision is circumscribed by existential threats on the public university. Today, one of these existential threats is the abuse and misuse of social media platforms. Social media is complicating and demeaning the functional mission of the university.

Our country is locked in a cut-throat cycle of divisive politics and poisonous propaganda. Politicians attack each other's ethnic identity instead of presenting their economic policy options to the public. Social media propagandists spew all manner of untruths to mislead a very susceptible public. Armies of unemployed youths have been hired to bully, harangue and verbally abuse our social media space. Violent cadres that left the streets of our towns have transmuted into vicious trolls and vulgar bullies on social media and radio. They attack and denigrate every fact and every truth.

Distinguished colleagues, social media is a double-edged sword for the public university. When you retreat, you give it ammunition to attack and unleash its venom. When you engage, you give it the liberty to scandalize empirical knowledge. It is difficult for the university to defend the truth in the face of social media abuse and political propaganda.

Despite this hateful environment, the university should stand tall. The university must count on its strategic niche and academic rigour to survive the contemporary and future perils of social media. The relevance of university knowledge is on trial. The resilience of the truth is now threatened by disinformation, misinformation and propaganda transmitted via Facebook, podcasts and yellow press left-wing newspapers.

Now, more than ever before, the public university has a responsibility to reclaim its rightful place in our society. It is in this vicious socio-political milieu that the public university must rise to the occasion, to reposition itself and regain its territory as the vanguard and praxis of scholarship, to safeguard the truth, and to pursue the truth to wherever it may lead.

The public university should strengthen its outreach and community engagement programs. If you retreat away from the community, social media will take your place, and podcast propaganda will pollute our national psyche. If you fail to reclaim your seat at the table of the knowledge society, if you fail to reclaim your place in our digital space, the public university shall become irrelevant, and the gap you shall leave behind will be filled by ignoramuses. That will be a very sad day for scholarship.

So, in this dark hour, the public university must stand tall. The public university should bring comparative and contextual understandings to the plethora of uncomfortable truths that confront our nation today. It is important to reiterate that the public university should avoid the temptation to sleepwalk into the collective amnesia that seeks to write off historical injustices that were committed against staff and students.

It is important for staff and students in our public universities to refrain from playing to the gallery. Remember that the university is a public space for big thinkers, critical thinkers. Therefore, the university should shun simplicity and half-truths.

Distinguished colleagues, a public university is a repository of our national memory. It should always remind us of the dark past from which we have recently emerged. Our system of university education should have an eye on our historical past and a handle on the future. Let the public university continue to impose its empiricism of truth on our nation.

We should continue to remember our university's dark past, we should continue to remember our university's darkest hour, through the killing of a female student by police, using teargas. We should continue to remember the dark days when the regime withdrew meal allowances from university students. We should all remember that the public university is coming out of a very dark and gloomy era, a historical error, in which students were massacred by instruments of the police and fiscal policy.

We should never forget that a system that was supposed to protect the university came to the campus, employed its police cadres to kill a student using teargas, then withdrew student meal allowances to put a final nail into the university's coffin. The theory of planned behaviour informs that these two horrific events, namely, police brutality and economic dispossession, were acts of repression carefully planned and calculated to silence the grain.

The levels of intolerance against the academe were shocking. They allowed public university infrastructure to get dilapidated. They drove the public university into a fiscal crisis and debt trap. Public universities were almost liquidated.

It is important to belabour this dark and painful historical context in order to remind ourselves that the public university that you now lead is still struggling to come out of the eye of the storm. Our public universities were in a deep and protracted poly-crisis.

The financial state of our public universities is still fragile. It is your responsibility to steer the university out of these lingering and protracted headwinds that inhibit progress and threaten growth of the public university.

The public university will pass through painful inflection points. But pain is the raw material for institutional evolution. Pain is the best incentive for the university's transformation. So, as we reflect on these ugly and dark forces that were unleashed on the public university, one motif that begins to emerge is that the public university must muster its knowledge currency to help address the glaring deficits in our society. For example, how can the university help to address the deficit in the police service? Perhaps, the university can consider the introduction of degree programs in modern policing science.

Despite the tough challenges that we face as a nation, our job is to make sure that the public university recovers and rebounds from this dark and ugly past. Undoubtedly, the dark and ugly past will continue to haunt the public university, and those who committed atrocities against the public university are always agitated by the truth. Those who abandoned the public university, those who committed atrocities against the public university, are allergic to historical facts. They want to re-write history. It is the role of the university to stop them.

Many in our country today are trying very hard to run away from their atrocious and shameful past. Devoid of moral capital to admit failure, despots now claim to be democrats, and the worst now claim to be the best. They want solutions to current problems without reference to the long-lasting impacts of their horrendous legacy.

But the History departments in our public universities should remind our nation that we cannot go further into the future without looking deeper into the past. The past informs the future. The Vice-Chancellor should deliberately commission studies and nudge academics to author books to document the university's passage through these difficult historical times.

Our public universities were thrust into political and economic doldrums. Today, your most urgent mission as a Vice-Chancellor is to drive the university out of the clutches of failure. The university should use the power of knowledge, the university should use the power of shame, to confront and conquer the dark forces that wish to return and threaten the university's core business.

Students should continue to draw critical attention to the horrendous and shameful actions of all those public officials that withdrew their meal allowances. Public opinion should continue to lynch and hang all those who abolished the student meal allowance.

The university community should continue to call out all those officials that stood with their arms akimbo while the police teargassed a female university student to death. There is no question that scholarship stands to lose if we fold our arms and allow previous existential threats to return to our campuses. The notion that violent political party vigilantes could in fact enter the campus to beat up professors should scare all of you.

We are here to clean and redesign the higher education landscape. We are not here to make friends.

As Higher Education Authority, we shall be working with public universities, government and all stakeholders, including unions, to develop a viable funding model for university education. The funding base for higher education will be broadened through the reform of student financing. Our goal is to raise public spending on higher education and research to at least 2.7% of GDP.

At national level, the path out of poverty may be narrow. However, public universities should provide innovative ideas that can put our country onto a new road of poverty reduction and sustainable development. Life in our country will only improve when bold thinking is directed at our toughest problems.

As a Vice-Chancellor, your pursuit is neither conspicuous consumption nor the quiet enjoyment of your conditions of service. As a Vice-Chancellor, you ought to get worried about the efficacy of the mandate and mission of your university. A Vice-Chancellor ought to get worried when ignoramuses become development activists and governance experts that mis-educate and mislead the public. It is the function of the Vice-Chancellor to ensure that you provide a platform for genuine experts in our public universities to reach out to government, private sector, newspapers, radio and television to disseminate the truth. Be proactive.

The public university that you lead should be transformed into a citadel of knowledge and a juggernaut for the truth. Truth should always find sanctuary in the quiet corridors, libraries and lecture halls of the university. As producers and purveyors of new knowledge, universities retain the moral authority and academic necessity to liquidate ignorance and propaganda in our society. The Higher Education Authority is eagerly desirous of a public university that is engaged. We urge you to strengthen community engagement and outreach programs. As beacons of universalism and inclusion, universities should mount community engagement programs to heal some of our citizens that have become hate mongers and tribal bigots, especially on social media.

Universities should uphold academic freedom, dissenting views, free speech, and free thinking. Equally, universities should uphold empiricism, honesty, and the truth. Academic freedom and insolence should become mutually exclusive.

Distinguished colleagues, the ethical and professional codes of conduct in the university should warn and caution academic staff that consciously twist facts in order to deliberately mislead the public. Censorship of academics is retrogressive. However, in order to preserve the integrity, brand and reputations of our institutions, academic staff that project themselves as commentators or public intellectuals should be held accountable for their presentations to the public.

Patriotism means that our universities should dissociate themselves from doom and gloom academics who do a hatchet job on their own economy and country. Public intellectuals should be authorities that support their opinions by providing empirical evidence from publications in their sphere of academic research. Public comments should be accurate, factual and fair. The university should separate and distance itself from academic staff that exhibit professional incompetence through the misapplication of knowledge within their professional sphere of influence.

The university should broaden the contours and horizons of academic freedom. However, loose canons are tarnishing the public image of the university. We urge university authorities to take keen interest in staff that engage in academic malfeasance for the sake of attracting sensational headlines in the media. We urge university authorities to help staff to refrain from bringing the integrity, brand and reputation of the university into public odium.

Colleagues, the university will find it difficult to attract funding as long as academics who are infamous for their flagrant deeds and unfavourable qualities are in its rank and file. It is important for the university to promulgate rules of engagement for academics who present themselves as experts on matters of public import.

The public is looking forward to the university for the truth. Academics that deliberately twist facts in order to misrepresent the truth should be referred to ethical and professional codes of conduct in the university. Working together with staff unions, Vice-Chancellors must therefore enact ethical and professional codes of conduct in order to rein in the unbecoming behaviour of academic staff that go on rampage to disseminate falsehoods and publish unverified information to the public.

We should avoid censorship. However, to maintain the integrity of the university, it is important that all public statements made by academic staff are weighed against empirical evidence. All public universities should cause all their employees to adhere to core values and ethos. The university should rid itself of staff that engage in actions that transgress our national and constitutional values underpinned by our motto of *One Zambia One Nation*.

The role of the Vice-Chancellor is to safeguard the academic atmosphere in the university. In contemporary Zambia, you should guard the university's academic atmosphere from divisive and toxic political hullabaloo spearheaded by individuals that think peace is boring.

The university should remain an oasis of peace and peaceful co-existence. We urge the university to develop robust programs in peace studies. It is important for the university to teach peace so that we prevent conflict. Our university education should be transformed to promote national unity and to teach against tribalism.

Many newspaper headlines in our country point to a deficit in our national politics, often saturated by hate and other vulgarities. There is no denying that we need higher education to address the crisis in our political praxis and discourse. It is imperative, therefore, that higher education should be transformed to remedy contemporary ills in our national politics. The university should re-educate our political arena to make it civil, gracious, respectful and issue-based.

Our nation is in the middle of a moral and ethical emergency. We urge universities to teach morality and ethics to all first-year students. Many of the ills we face in our country today would be prevented if our people exhibited higher levels of moral and ethical behaviour.

Universities should address the deficit in the spiritual sphere. Transform and strengthen religious studies in order to train a critical mass of upright religious leaders who will preach integrity, peace and love.

Higher education plays an important role in the political life and political progress of every nation. In this milieu, you should set up a centre of excellence in democracy, leadership and politics, to educate our political leadership that politics is not war, and to educate ourselves that democratic space should never ever expand for political violence and hooliganism.

Our universities should redefine the contours of our democracy so that students can answer deep questions that confront us today. If our universities are to remain open and functional, if our universities are to thrive, then Zambia should avoid the path of Haiti.

Zambia should not return to political violence, because political violence destroys the host society, the very foundation of the university. We therefore urge the university to audit skills in political science and transform its pedagogy towards the training of a responsible cadre of political leaders in our country.

Your job as Vice-Chancellor is to ensure that the university remains a public space for scholarship, imagination, reflection and mental fermentation.

Let me take a few moments to speak to the role of university education in the current era of propaganda.

Our country is passing through a very difficult phase when academics seeking a culture of comfort are becoming vectors of propaganda detrimental to the ethos of the university and the cohesive values of the nation-state.

The quality of university education in Zambia is threatened by propaganda. Propaganda threatens the integrity and quality of university education in Zambia. The faint voice of our university is drowning in the loud voice of propaganda. This is the most fundamental reason we should be worried about podcasts.

In my view, in my opinion, we should self-regulate podcasts in order to stop harming the truth. We should self-regulate podcasts in order to stop the contorted and distorted caricature of the truth.

We should self-regulate podcast propaganda in order to protect the fidelity, integrity and quality of our higher education ecosystem. A society that harms the truth, a society that harms facts, harms itself very harmfully.

The harmful effects of propaganda on the authenticity of the university, the harmful effects of propaganda on our national life and national values, are too ghastly to contemplate.

When truth is destroyed, the credibility of the university is destroyed. When facts are destroyed, the credibility of our national institutions is destroyed. This is the reason propaganda is dangerous.

Propaganda is today the most dangerous threat to the authenticity, believability and plausibility of the university. Propaganda is today the most poignant threat to our national life.

Propaganda trashes the truth. Propaganda poisons the lifeblood of our nation. Propaganda kills the nation slowly. If we fail to stop propaganda, one day, the nation will wake up dead. To argue that we should not self-regulate podcasts because podcasts use the internet is a tragedy of missing the point.

Let me beseech our Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation to revive the culture of seminars. Invite doyens, seasoned professors and leading figures to illuminate our understanding of current topics. If well managed, seminars have the potential to debunk and rebut podcast propaganda.

Seminars can retrieve our universities from the knowledge graveyard. Zambians need well researched, empirical answers from full professors, not these self-appointed and self-acclaimed experts posturing as development activists and governance specialists on Facebook and in newspapers.

Vice-Chancellors, the university can tolerate dissenting views and divergent opinions. It may even dismiss political correctness, cronyism, and sycophancy. But the university should guard itself against this treacherous breed of public intellectuals that is becoming pervasive in our national discourse.

A Vice-Chancellor is the custodian of academic integrity and quality. A university should therefore be critically aware of obvious and latent threats from its host society. Each threat that the university faces is an opportunity for transformation.

We understand that it is inappropriate for the Vice-Chancellor to politicize the university. Now, you are a full professor appointed by the Minister. You are a political appointee. You should therefore not be politically naive. Your role as Vice-Chancellor is to carefully calibrate and recalibrate political and technical strategy.

Student evaluations, reports from external examiners, and implementation of performance management systems can help the university to rid itself of incompetent and unprincipled staff.

Government funds the university because the nation is looking to the university for knowledge-intensive solutions. A university has a heavy responsibility, to light our feet with knowledge.

As Vice-Chancellor, you should allow healthy debate and diversity of opinions on campus, but you can ill afford to let the university to aimlessly drift into a state of anarchy.

The university is something heavy. It occupies a critical place in our national life. Education is the best economic policy. Universities are our most formidable frontiers for economic success, our noble symbols of progress, and the last bastions of our national unity.

Students and staff can exercise their political freedoms and rights. They have the right to associate with political parties of their choice. Clean politics can enrich academic life. However, the university will pay a heavy price if you allow toxic and violent politics to gain a foothold on our campuses.

On several occasions, we have observed an aberrant academic community which is a danger to itself. Some sections of the university community ignite very quickly and combust very easily without thinking very deeply and very carefully about the crisis that the university faces.

So, the truth is that the problem in the university is not limited to government. It is not limited to funding. Sometimes, the problem in the university is the university itself.

We need sober and deeper analysis of national issues. It is important that the university community does not shoot from the hip. It is also important that you change the organizational culture and industrial psychology within the university.

Move the university community away from rules of engagement founded in acrimony to rules of engagement that use soft power to win the hearts and minds of our people. Student and staff unions, instead of using confrontation, can use soft power and quiet diplomacy to lobby for the university.

Build networks, build coalitions, communicate compelling research narratives, and use the power of persuasion to make the university positively attractive to the goodwill of local and international funding agencies.

Vice-Chancellors, the Minister of Education has given you power. The ball is in your court. Power is very powerful. Power is something heavy. As Higher Education Authority, we urge you to view power as the ability to influence others in order to get the outcomes that you desire to positively transform the university.

Avoid abuse of public authority. You should desist from being autocratic and draconian. Use power to build the university, knowing fully well that the university is governed by the principle of collegiality. Let me repeat: Use this power to get the outcomes that you need for the positive transformation of the university.

There have been reports of Vice-Chancellors who have changed examination marks. The Higher Education Authority views these reports in very serious light. We have several options that we are studying and action shall soon be taken.

Remember, the power of a Vice-Chancellor can destroy a university as much as it can help restore its brighter future.

Transform university education to provide interventions for poverty, high cost of living, unemployment, SMEs, green economy, climate change, and drought. Strengthen teaching and research programs for the production of smart crops.

Our system of university education requires a complete overhaul, a complete reset, and a complete turnaround. To stay relevant to the needs of the host society, our universities must transform.

We need radical transformation of university education. We need to move and lead the university away from its old story of shame. This means that we cannot transform if we simply graft our policy reforms onto the weak and precarious foundation of the past.

Without radical transformation, universities shall wither and die. We should seek transformation with a strategic intent, because random and aimless transformation will be meaningless.

Distinguished colleagues, the Higher Education Authority is directing all our public universities to undertake curriculum transformation. This process must start tomorrow.

To ensure that new programs are relevant and demand-driven, this curriculum transformation process should be underpinned by evidence of stakeholder participation and input.

We shall not approve academic programs that are developed without the participation and inputs of internal and external stakeholders.

Universities should introduce student-academic staff forums where issues pertaining to teaching and learning are discussed. All universities should guarantee the tenure of full professors.

Colleagues, the starting point for transformation is the Eighth National Development Plan (8NDP). Transform university education to realign it to the 8NDP. You should also pay attention to the President's speeches.

President Hichilema recently said our goal is to double the economy. Ask yourself, how does the university, how does my portfolio, contribute to this effort?

As Vice-Chancellor, you are the catalyst that uses the university to translate the President's political vision into technical knowledge solutions for our economy. Reposition teaching, learning and research at the heart of our country's socioeconomic growth. Correct transformation of our university education will hasten the pace of our national economic reforms.

Transform university education to anchor it on our indigenous knowledge systems. Universities should formulate an indigenous knowledge policy.

Transform university education to realign it to the novel applications of artificial intelligence. Transform your websites, because many university ranking agencies collate information from websites.

Transform your system of records. When I took my NAPSA forms to UNZA, I was shocked that a university that teaches records management could not find my employee number. They call it man number. How can a university that employees women use the misogynistic term "man number"?

You should also formulate policies that protect innovations, inventions and intellectual property rights.

Many of our university students today could be helped by a course in English for Academic and Professional Communication.

Transformation of university education is the most potent tool for creating a knowledge society.

We are directing universities to implement affirmative action policies to bring the Zambian academic diaspora back home.

The Higher Education Authority is the advisor to the Minister on all aspects of higher education.

We have a seat on the Higher Education Loans and Scholarships Board.

It is not our wish to feel a sense of self importance, but it is always a good idea to run your strategic plans by our offices. This will help reduce duplications in academic programming.

Remember that the Higher Education Authority is the nerve centre and powerhouse of our higher education architecture.

Distinguished Professors, ladies and gentlemen:

In line with the Dar es Salaam Declaration on Academic Freedom, we are committed to ensuring that universities pursue knowledge without let or interference from government.

Autonomy of the university is accountable to public interest. To safeguard public interest, institutional autonomy of the university is controlled by the Higher Education Act. Procedural autonomy is retained by the university.

But the concept of autonomy was transformed in 1999 when the University Act of 1992 was repealed and replaced by the University Act of 1999.

In the University Act number 26 of 1992, the Vice-Chancellor was appointed by the Chancellor on the advice of Council. In the University Act number 11 of 1999, the Vice-Chancellor was appointed by the Minister on the recommendation of Council.

It is correct to say that university autonomy should revolt against any system of doctrine and dogma. In reality, it is correct to note that since 1999, university autonomy in Zambia has been an elusive and nebulous phenomenon.

Events that led to the Bobby Bwalya Commission of Inquiry, coupled with subsequent changes in legislation, have placed more focus on accountability and quality, rather than autonomy and massification. Regardless of its merits and demerits, this is the framework in which we now operate.

We would like the university to enjoy autonomy. The best universities in the world are very collegial and autonomous. Institutional autonomy and academic freedom are defining characteristics of the academe.

The university is the corporate realisation of our essential determination to know. Arguments for the autonomy of the university are therefore grounded in the principle that knowledge is sacrosanct, revered and inviolable.

This means that universities will become more innovative and more responsive to transformation if they are given real autonomy. The Higher Education Authority shall ensure that the university is focused on its core business. We shall ensure that the university remains a physical and cerebral space free of party politicking and power relations.

University autonomy and accountability may not be mutually exclusive. Perhaps, the two are mutually exhaustive. Either way, as long as public universities continue to receive government subventions, accountability to government and steering by government will remain a legitimate ambition and a legitimate course of action. It is that simple.

The government should be interested in the accountability and economic pay-offs of its investment into public universities. Government should get worried when universities produce low-quality, unemployable, and non-useful graduates.

University autonomy is a necessary but not sufficient condition for excellence. At any rate, autonomy is not absolute. Society has too much vested interest in higher education to allow pure autonomy in higher education institutions.

So, institutional autonomy is a relative concept, conditional on a variety of historical, cultural, political, and economic factors. University autonomy comes with pre-conditions such as accountability, transparency, and quality assurance.

When all is said and done, the boundaries of university autonomy remain contested, but it is a dangerous thesis to imply that government must not fund public universities that hunger and thirst for more autonomy. Public universities must balance two core values that can be in tension, autonomy and accountability.

As a result of the Bobby Bwalya Commission of Inquiry coupled with landmark shifts in the law, the Higher Education Authority is mandated to steer university education in the right direction for our country.

The Higher Education Authority, on behalf of the State, is the custodian of the public interest. We are part and parcel of the democratic, regulatory and oversight machineries of governance in the university. We are in a very envious position, because the law has given us power to regulate all aspects of higher education.

We shall even be regulating the number of students to be enrolled by universities. It is your statutory duty to conform and ensure that you do not go off tangent.

Let me use this forum to warn that even programs administered under the Health Professions Council of Zambia must toe the line.

Distinguished Professors, ladies and gentlemen:

The university must undergo Darwinian transformation. You must drive this process of transformation. The relevance of the university, even its continued survival, rests on transformation.

To reiterate, universities should develop new degree programs and transform course content for relevance to poverty reduction, industrialization, climate change, green economy, morality and ethics, *One Zambia One Nation*, graduate employment, entrepreneurship, SMEs, and self-employment.

Programs in film production, digital content creation, medicinal plants, forensic science, and bio-entrepreneurship may offer viable opportunities for self-employment.

Annual cultural festivals on campus may foster the peaceful coexistence of citizens from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Cultural festivals could showcase the rich tapestries of our shared history and interwoven society.

Our universities should celebrate, not insult, the ethnic and cultural diversities in our nation. In so doing, our universities should make it clear that there is no single ethnicity or culture in our country that should claim any entitlement to privilege or superiority. Our universities should always lionize equity, equality and merit.

Restructure and transform programs to be responsive to the human resource, economic and development needs of the country.

Transform from ordinary to Honours degree programs which include a research project in final year. Create research chairs.

Transform the university towards third stream funding. Join the revolution in electric vehicle batteries. Establish a Vice-Chancellor's scholarship fund to sponsor needy students.

If you fail to transform the university towards its most noble goals, we shall advise the Minister that you are not fit for purpose.

Transformation means that universities will be in a constant state of flux. However, chaos will ensue if there is no stability and homeostasis within the university.

You are walking a tightrope. The way you balance opposing plans of action, the strategic decisions that you take, and the way you manage change, will be very critical to the success of the university.

Success in university education is directly proportional to success in the broader society. Stated differently, the current socioeconomic problems in Zambia are a disastrous consequence of a lack of a well coordinated and relevant higher education system.

Our mandate is to coordinate and make different higher education institutions to start working effectively as a whole. Our goal is to cause differentiation, not duplication, of our institutions of higher education.

Our system of higher education should teach our students to be critical and creative, not to be cynical and derogatory.

We shall not develop this country if our higher education institutions produce gifted demagogues that are only good at cynical manipulation of the truth.

Our country shall not win the future if our system of higher education produces graduates that are submissive and subservient.

It is also true that intellectual arrogance and academic pomposity are not the best-suited capsules in which to package noble ideas that we intend to communicate to the public.

Intellectual contributions to public discourse or criticisms of public policy should not be timid, but they become effective and meaningful when such contributions or criticisms are calm and measured. This is the art of mass communication. This is what we learnt from Professor Francis Kasoma, the founder of UNZA Radio.

Professor Kasoma detested the barking dog type of press. He opined that intellectual contributions to public discourse should be data-driven. Academic opinions should be informed by empirical evidence powered by statistical analysis. Criticism should be constructive and fair. We should therefore reappraise ourselves on Professor Francis Kasoma's inaugural ideals of mass communication and Afri-ethics.

We should also reorient our students to Professor Mubanga Kashoki's ideals of language and culture.

By introducing cultural festivals, we can honour the memory of Professor Mapopa Mtonga through the creativity of *chikwakwa*, and through the imaginations of song and dance.

Through the establishment of a centre of excellence in the study of journalism, the university could honour the memory of Professor Kasoma. This is urgent because the standard of journalism in our country requires urgent transformation.

The works of Kasoma, Kashoki and Mtonga should inspire us to transform our universities towards social entrepreneurship, so that innovative social ideas developed by our universities can be used to solve community problems.

The poems and humility of Dr. Parnwell Mwando Munatamba should remind us that confrontation and academic pomposity shall not win many friends for our universities. The accurate and fair commentaries of Professor Venkatesh Seshamani should remind economists that they can still make seminal contributions without being petty and annoying.

Distinguished colleagues, we should deconstruct, reconstruct and redefine our system of higher education towards those values that we cherish as a nation.

We face a daunting reality. Our universities are in retreat. Our universities are in decline. Our universities are withdrawing from their missionary zeal to reimagine our society.

We ask the university to step forward, to provide intellectual capital. We ask the university to produce new knowledge, to unleash our nation's research, innovation and industrial firepower.

We ask the university to renew and rebuild our national hopes for a better future. We ask the university to re-inspire and restore our self-confidence to surmount the challenges we face as a nation.

We also ask our people to increase their faith in the university. We ask our people to increase their faith in the power of knowledge to turn tragedy into triumph. We ask our people to believe that the sun will rise again. We ask our people to believe that tomorrow shall be better than yesterday.

It is untenable to transform university education in a socioeconomic and political vacuum. University education should work for our collective and public good. The new curriculum you will formulate will have to mirror the current political, social and economic challenges in our country. The new curriculum must be relevant to the needs of our people. Transformation should ventilate and give expression to the knowledge-intensive solutions required to solve the myriad challenges that we face as a nation.

We should all guard erudition, merit, academic rigour and scholarship very jealously. Entrench a culture of research and innovation and deeper learning. The h-index in Google Scholar may not say everything, but it is a good baseline. Every lecturer and professor must have a visible Google Scholar profile.

Pay attention to decaying infrastructure, empty laboratories, inadequate toilet facilities, dilapidated libraries, and the ageing professoriate. Renovate hostels to prevent the death of students charging their cell phones.

Repudiate attempts to transform the university into a public space for intellectual arrogance and academic pomposity.

Repudiate attempts to transform the university into a redundant ivory tower remote from the practical affairs of the host society that the university serves.

Higher education may not be the silver-bullet solution, it may not even be the panacea, but if it is well transformed and targeted, higher education can treat the ills in our society. University education should marinate students in academic citizenship, expert insights, reflective ideas, and creative thinking.

In conclusion, it is disheartening to note that the university has lost its way. It must therefore return to the drawing board.

I have attempted to provide a contemporary philosophical and contextual microcosm of transformation for university education in Zambia. Transform university education on the premise of fact and truth.

A university is a city on a hill. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. You are the luminaries of the truth. Go and serve and defend your university. Go and guard the university against propaganda.

Transformation of university education is complex and demanding. It is a daunting reality as much as it is a beautiful prospect. Put your best foot forward.

The public university is in a very delicate moment, but it must stay strong, it must stand on the truth. In the midst of uncertainty, the role of the Vice-Chancellor is to bring courage to the process of university reform. The resources may be limited, but we urge you to *do more with less*, so that university education responds to the challenges of our time.

We wish you well on this journey to re-inspire our universities to soaring heights of success.

We thank you for your kind understanding and patience.

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