



ADDRESS BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR

PROFESSOR NQOSA L. MAHAO

ON THE OCCASION OF THE NUL's 70TH

ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION HELD AT

ROMA CAMPUS

ON 6TH NOVEMBER, 2015

Your Majesty And Chancellor

Your Majesty, 'Me Masenate

The Right Honourable The Prime Minister

Honourable President Of The Senate

Honourable Speaker Of The National Assembly

Honourable Chief Justice

Honourable Deputy Prime Minister

Honourable Cabinet Ministers

Honourable Judges Of The Court of Appeal and High Court

Morena Oa Ka Oa Manonyane Le Marena Ohle A Sehloho

His Grace The Archbishop Of Maseru

**Excellencies, Members Of The Diplomatic Corps And Heads Of
International Organizations**

Chairman And Members Of The University Council

Former University Vice Chancellors:

Dr Masholugu

Dr Setsabi and

Professor Mothibe

Members Of The University Senate

Former University Pro Vice Chancellor, Professor Ndebele

Provincial of Oblates of Mary the Immaculate

Distinguished Guests

The Alumni

Ladies And Gentlemen

I have the honour and privilege to welcome your Excellencies to this celebration of the **platinum jubilee** of our esteemed National University of Lesotho.

History lessons instruct us that somewhere in 1833 at an informal encounter at Thaba-Bosiu between the founder of this nation and a griqua adventurer named Adam Krotz, given the ravages of lifaqane the previous decade, the conversation turned to the important subject of peace. Adam Krotz broached the idea to the king about another breed of adventurers, who came to be known as missionaries, whose vocation was to preach the word of God and peace. The King, it is said, was so enchanted with the idea of importing into his Kingdom these “messengers of peace” that he instinctively tasked Adam Krotz to find him missionaries urgently while also indicating his readiness to pay any price they may demand for them to come to Lesotho. As history has it, the first batch of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society arrived in Lesotho in 1833 and sojourned at Thaba-Bosiu and Makhoarane. In years to come two

other batches, *albeit* of different denominations of the Christian faith, the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England (Anglicans) also joined the kingdom to reinforce Moshoeshoe's legendary quest for peace and nation-building. If the truth be told, between them these three church institutions laid the foundation of present day Lesotho, each contributing according to its strength. Schools, hospitals and clinics were built even in the most remote and inaccessible recesses of Lesotho, and thereby changing the life circumstances of our people. We owe them a vote of thanks ... **Rea leboha.**

From the high hill where we stand today, with the hindsight of history, and especially in the context of today's thanksgiving occasion, we can say without being indulgent, that in obtaining "the messengers of peace", King Moshoeshoe got more than he had bargained for. If intermittently peace still eludes this nation, there can be little doubt however that the integration of the nation and the country into the global community firmly commenced with the arrival of the missionaries. Steadily

seeds of a new future, and for better or worse, of a trajectory of another civilisation, germinated their roots deep in our country and our people became forever part of the changing whirlwinds of the global village.

Down the line, and on the wings of this epoch-making cultural importation, was to be born an institution that evolved to be the National University of Lesotho. In all humility we are assembled here today to thank God, the Almighty, for the inspiration He gave its founding fathers 70 years ago. Legend has it that having failed to reach agreement with the Presbyterian owners of Fort Hare University College in South Africa on what would appear to have been an innocuous doctrinal issue, the Hierarchy of the Catholic Church decided to establish their own university in Basutoland.

Seldom is disagreement a harbinger of good things to come. But few in our midst today would contest that the ill-fated failure of the meeting of minds at Fort Hare was fortuitous for this country and for many others in our near

and far neighbourhood. Pius XII University College was thus born in 1945. It evolved around the mid-60s to be the University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland and soon became the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland which in 1975 gave birth to the National University of Lesotho. We have gathered here today in jubilation to celebrate all these historic metamorphic incarnations.

As we celebrate, this our platinum jubilee, we are enjoined to dip our banners with founding giants such as Rev. Fathers Paul Emile Beaulieu, Romeo Guilbeault and others. These great men toiled under extremely difficult circumstances to carefully craft the foundations of this pride of our nationhood. May their memory and indeed vision, be immortalized in our collective commitment to never let go the faith to consolidate it and make it grow from strength to strength, adversities notwithstanding. Recall and tribute must also be to the names of Paramount Chieftainess 'Mantšebo Seeiso and Morena Seeiso Maama who in their far-sighted

embracing of progress enabled the University to be established in this beautiful valley of Tloutle. May we not defile their memory by rendering this history-making project fail in our hands!

In all of the years of its existence there were institutions that sustained the University. During the epoch of Pius XII University College, the Oblate Missionaries of Mary the Immaculate stood surety for its financial sustenance often augmenting their commitment with support from a range of well-meaning philanthropists abroad. When these sources were no longer sustainable the colonial government stepped in and ensured the involvement of the three High Commission Territories, hence the birth of the transnational University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland (UBBS) which at the independence of these territories assumed the name: the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS).

In the aftermath of the split in 1975 successive Lesotho governments unfailingly saw to it that the university remained financially viable through government subvention and bursaries for Basotho students who increasingly became by far the majority in its enrolments. We cannot forget the role of foreign governments and international organisations that contributed in various ways to the University's growth in its academic as well as infrastructural development. For all of these efforts of support the University is indebted and ever grateful.

The story of the journey of the University is a worthy story to tell, a story of a determination to make reality of an ideal and of the unbounded generosity of spirit humans are capable of when they dig deep in their souls. The milestones and achievements tell the story.

Starting with six students in 1945 the enrolment had grown modestly to 52 students at end of the 40's, 288 at the end of the 50's and 439 at the end of the 60's. By the

end of the 70's it had broken the 1000 ceiling reaching 1364 by the end of the 80's. Phenomenal growth however occurred subsequently peaking at just over 12,000 in 2012.

Tracking graduation figures also confirms similarly laudable output in light of the modest beginnings. For example, in 1967 when UBLS held its first graduation ceremony, 28 students graduated. Ten years later in 1977, during the National University of Lesotho's maiden graduation ceremony a total of 130 students graduated. Almost two decades later in 1996, the number had more than quadrupled to 624. About two months ago we were at this very venue to celebrate the success of 2110 students, being awarded diplomas and certificates and conferred with degrees. While we cannot be complacent about the successes, especially in light of the huge demand for higher education in the country, the steady growth of opportunities provided by the university to Basotho and nationalities of other countries cannot go unnoticed.

Our University has also played its part as a continental institution. Over these 70 years it has embraced students from various parts of Africa; from Botswana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Namibia, Uganda, Mozambique, Ghana, Gabon, Swaziland, Sudan, Rwanda and Kenya. In solidarity with nations struggling to overthrow the yoke of colonial oppression in our region this University made an important internationalist choice unmatched by many others. In the 70s it allocated more than 20% of its yearly intake to students either fleeing oppression or simply denied opportunities to receive education in countries such as South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe. Many of them retain fond memories of that generosity of spirit and solidarity and continue to hold the institution in high esteem.

The quality of education it provided is amply evident in the illustrious careers of its alumni. It lays claim to Lesotho's own first female Governor of the Central Bank, first female Chief Justice and first female Speaker of Parliament. Ours is an institution that takes pride in

having produced the first post independence Governor of the Reserve Bank of Malawi, the first African Governor of the South African Reserve Bank, first Prime Minister of Uganda and that country's one time Chief Justice, the current and past Prime Ministers of Lesotho, the current Prime Minister of Swaziland, and the current United Nations Under-Secretary General and Women's Executive Director.

In addition, amongst those who received their education in this institution are former Vice Chancellors of the universities of Cape Town, Western Cape, Fort Hare and Tshwane University of Technology. The list is indeed inexhaustible and includes leading industrialists, state technocrats of high calibre and thought leaders who have driven the development agenda of many countries.

Your majesty and chancellor,

If the past represented by the achievements just outlined, looks rosy and fulfilling, it is the future that must worry us. The greatest challenge must be how NUL strengthens

its relevance into the future. There are challenges and opportunities in that scenario.

The government of Lesotho through the Higher Education policy has made a clarion call to higher education institutions to double access in all spheres of academic education, technical, professional and vocational training. We embrace this challenge as central to our social mandate to respond to the growing thirst for university education in the country. Hence NUL's Strategic Plan 2015-2020 commits us to expand enrolment, embrace the open and distance learning mode and vigorously build postgraduate offerings. These initiatives are concomitant with on-going efforts to modernise and introduce new programmes more in synch with the National Development Strategic plan 2012-2017 and National Vision 2020.

Secondly, we are truly concerned at the growing problem of our graduates who go for extended periods unable to find gainful jobs. By the way, this is not just a local, but

a global problem and needs to be understood as such. This challenge has forced us to explore creative ways of enhancing prospects of the employability of our students by working towards integrating entrepreneurial skills into learning programmes as well as scouting for placements and internships for our students during their studies. We also remain ready to engage his Majesty's Government with creative ideas as to how it too, can innovatively play a role in containing the spread of graduate unemployment.

There is of course also the crisis of funding. Of the two principal sources of funding universities, students' fees and direct government financial support, ours leave much to be desired. NUL fees remain far lower than of any university in our sub-region while the government subvention has declined by about 30% from the 2009 level at the time when the cost of education has exponentially risen higher. The main drivers of the high costs of university education include the soaring exchange rate for imported teaching and learning aids

such as books, laboratory equipment and consumables. Technology, now a necessary package of any learning and teaching environment, while an enabler, has shot up the costs to levels that would not have been imagined a mere twenty years ago. Add to this, the soaring levy the University has to pay to meet the statutory compliance imperatives of the Council on Higher Education!

The working conditions for our staff are by any comparative measure in the region deplorable. These are compounded by poor facilities, unbearable teaching workloads and extremely low remuneration packages. All these, taken together do not lend themselves to high performance and they are primarily responsible for the University sliding in continental and global rankings. Our plea is that the question of public funding for the University and other public higher education institutions in the country needs serious reflection if we are to invest wisely in the country's future.

Finally, our physical infrastructure, whether it be staff offices, dwellings, roads and pathways are in a sorry state and need massive rehabilitation. Only 20 percent of full time students can be accommodated in our student hostels. Well over 5000 students live in sub-standard facilities which compromise academic pursuit in the villages surrounding the University where they are exposed to all manner of security and safety risks. This further deprives them of a holistic campus-life experience and the flexibility to engage in extra-curricular activities that help them develop holistically. Recently the university made a clarion call to the general public and the private sector here at home and elsewhere to respond to this challenge in the form of possible public-private partnerships, grants and other efforts. Up to now we are encouraged by the responses that have come through and we are hopeful that they will mature into viable projects that will overcome the university's infrastructure deficits.

Your Majesty and Chancellor,

In conclusion, I feel bound and obliged to acknowledge your tutelage with heartfelt gratitude and, pay homage to you personally for your unwavering support to this your, *alma mater* university. I am equally and sincerely indebted to your Majesty's Government for its sustenance the University.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the efforts of our staff and students, the alumni, the UBLS association, especially the hard-working and ever resourceful Chapter in South Africa, individual corporate citizens and private citizens in Lesotho, South Africa and beyond who in their appreciation of the challenges facing the University, have truly become innovative and patriotic partners worthy of our praise. We are convinced that your commitment and dedication to NUL is ample testimony that the brand retains its historic appeal and will most certainly sustain long after all of us are gone! Also by some in this Assembly travelling long distances to come and commune with us in this celebration, you affirm that this University has strong pillars of friendship

to lean on as it forges ahead into the rough seas of a future filled with uncertainties.

I particularly thank those individuals and companies who contributed with their hard-earned resources to the hosting of this august Assembly. May God, Almighty and Ancestors, give back unto you many folds what you gave.

To our staff and students; let us seize the opportunity provided by this solemn occasion to re-dedicate ourselves to rebuild this University. Let us recommit to ensuring that NUL is truly a centre of excellence in pursuit of knowledge creation and the moulding of leaders of thought for our people. Let us hold firmly to the values we have chosen for ourselves: client-centeredness, professionalism, ethical conduct, innovativeness, diligence and social empathy.

Once again, it is my singular pleasure to welcome you all to this solemn but jubilant celebration of our 70th

Anniversary. Enjoy the Rovers and Manonyane hospitality.

Khotso! Pula! Nala!