



**A SPEECH BY PROF JOACHIM OSUR, VICE CHANCELLOR, AMREF INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY (AMIU) ON THE OCCASION OF AMIU 4<sup>TH</sup> GRADUATION, 14<sup>TH</sup> OF JULY, 2023**

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The Chancellor, His Excellency Festus Mogae, former President, Republic of Botswana,

The Cabinet Secretary, MoH, Kenya, Hon Dr Susan Nakhumicha

The Minister of Health, Malawi, Hon Khumbize Chiponda

The PS State Department for Public Health and Professional Standards, MoH – Ms Mary Muthoni Muriuki HSC

The Secretary- Administration, Higher Education and Research - Mr. Fredrick Ndambuki

High Commissioner, Republic of Malawi to Kenya represented by the First Secretary for

Administration and Education Desk, Mr Benson Ojesi

Representatives of regulatory bodies from the MoH and MoE

AMIU BoT members present

AMIU Chair of Council, Mrs Muthoni Kuria

Council members present,

VC Muranga University of Technology; colleagues from other partner universities

University management and staff

Students and parents present,

Our partners

Ladies and gentlemen

It is with great humility that I welcome you to our university.

Thank you for honoring us with your presence in this auspicious occasion.

Our university was formed as a response to a need that Amref Health Africa noted as we worked with vulnerable communities across Africa. As you may be aware, AHA has been in existence for over 67 years. During these years the organization has worked in many countries and developed contextualized models for increasing access to health services in those communities. As we did this, we learnt several lessons. On human resources for health, we noted that in communities where access to a trained health worker is difficult, members of the community similarly lack access to training in health courses. In fact, in such communities training in a health course is seen as privileged.

Secondly, we note that a number of communities have been left behind because of lack of trained health workers and this is a serious impediment to dealing with the issue of inequitable access to healthcare. The problem of inequitable access to care in Africa is so bad that we visibly have two health systems: one for the poor and marginalized and another for the middle and upper classes of society. As such, two people suffering the same disease but separated by the class divide will receive different types of care with the poor having higher risks of severe morbidity and death. This for us is social injustice that we must face as a continent.

Third, and this has also been noted by WHO, we are not safe until we are all safe. If we do not deal with the issue of inequitable access to healthcare, we will face similar consequences when the next pandemic strikes irrespective of our social classes. Nature is quite unforgiving and we will jointly pay for the injustice in healthcare if we do not deal with it now as a matter of urgency.

It is as a result of these realities that AHA decided to start AMIU and mandated it to focus on building HRH for PHC where 80% of Africans access services. The strategy is to have fit for purpose health workers at PHC level providing quality services that bridge the equity gap.

Our training delivery model integrates virtual, face to face training and practical mentoring of students in health facilities and in community health projects most of which are run by Amref. In this way students are able to contextualize knowledge to the situation on the ground and innovate ways of dealing with challenges in PHC. This model ensures that by the time students graduate, they understand the issues that affect PHC and are prepared to go and create the needed change.

Another important aspect of our training is that it exposes students to global thinking. We have noted that diseases know no borders and that health policies are made globally and implemented locally. By providing global exposure, graduates become global thinkers as they act to contextualize interventions locally.

The approach the university has taken ensures that we produce fit for purpose leaders who go out and transform PHC in their communities. As we continue churning out graduates, we believe that the dream of the African fathers which they so well articulated at independence will be met: that disease is an enemy to be defeated.

Another important role of our university is to develop evidence for strengthening PHC. This is done through health systems focused research. Over the years, Amref has noted that research in health in Africa is not always driven from Africa and that practices at PHC level are not always based on local realities. AMIU generates evidence for making PHC effective and works with partners to translate the evidence to policy and programs.

And now to our graduands: We are confident that we have prepared you enough to carry forward the mission of creating lasting health change in Africa. I cannot promise you that it will be easy for you to play the change agent role out there; expect many obstacles along the way. Remember that Nelson Mandela had to wait for 27 years in Jail for his mission to be accomplished, be patient and press on; **patience pays**. Remember the power of networking and carrying the community along as you travel the path of change, alone you can move quickly but with people behind you, you will go very far; the **power of social capital** in creating change is a great weapon that you should always remember. Finally, practice your profession skillfully and carry yourself around with decorum. A **skilled and respectable** health worker earns the respect of the community and this makes you a trusted agent of change. It makes you achieve your objective much more easily.

I wish you well as you go out to carry on the vision of lasting health change in Africa and thank you for buying into the dream that the Amref community believes in. A special congratulations to our MPH graduands, you are the pioneers in this course, you have done well and some of you did it in a record two years.