

SPEECH DELIVERED
BY
HIS EXCELLENCY, ADAMA BARROW,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA
AND CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF
THE GAMBIA
AT THE 16TH CONVOCATION CEREMONY OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE GAMBIA
SATURDAY 20TH April 2024
FARABA BANTA CAMPUS

Honourable Cabinet Ministers,
Honourable Members of the National Assembly,
Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,
Venerable Religious Leaders,
Chairman and Members of The University of The Gambia Governing Council,
The Vice-Chancellor and Members of Senate,
Eminent Scholars and Vice Chancellors from Partner Universities and elsewhere,
Staff, Graduands, and Students of The UTG,
Senior Government Officials and Service Chiefs,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Like all other universities, The University of The Gambia (UTG) convocation ceremonies are always significant highlights of university life in The Gambia. They are similarly prominent spotlights on my government's annual calendar, which we look forward to with profound interest and pride. I humbly feel immensely honoured, therefore, to preside over this 16th edition.

As Chancellor, Head of State, and Guest Speaker, it is my singular privilege to begin, on behalf of all Gambians, by congratulating all the graduands, the higher education and UTG family, as well as all the family units, friends, and well-wishers associated with the occasion.

With deep gratitude and honour, I also welcome our distinguished scholars and guests for their esteemed presence. We value your attendance. The graduands and future ambassadors of the UTG should be particularly proud that we are here to celebrate their achievements. We are here to joyfully acknowledge and reward the dedication, perseverance, and hard work leading to this remarkable moment.

In applauding their accomplishments and bidding them farewell at the end of this crucial chapter of their academic journey, we are here also to usher the graduands into another phase of their life story. In this light, the guiding theme of my address is “**Empowering and Inspiring Change Agents through Education and Training.**”

If there are graduands who have never reflected on how to contribute effectively to transforming the conditions of their families, communities, and nation, this is the moment of inspiration for you to devote part of your life to this very challenging aspect of responsible citizenship.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Nation building requires genuine patriotic change agents to identify, initiate, and guide the necessary change processes to shape the future through positive social transformation of our institutions and communities.

Given the current situation, we have to continually groom, inspire, and empower change agents to drive our “YIRIWAA” National Development Plan (2023-2027), while mainstreaming all relevant International Agreements.

Quite naturally, change is an unstoppable trend in life. It takes effect within and around us, but it can be constructively initiated and managed.

As every citizen is affected by change, it is best that we influence it as development agents and be part of the change process; at worst, we must not resist it whenever it comes about for the better.

Because learning or education and training have change implications, change agents generally act on such acquisitions as knowledge, experience, wisdom, and vision. Education and training thus empower people to play vital roles in socio-economic and political change processes. To step up this empowerment drive, my government will continue to create educational opportunities for all, irrespective of socio-economic background or other circumstances.

As Chancellor of the UTG, my commitment to transforming the higher education landscape in The Gambia and nurturing a generation of change agents have no bounds. The country needs a lot more change agents armed with knowledge and skills to purposefully apply their agency to develop a result-oriented culture; a culture of noble service, hard work, discipline, and a high sense of responsibility to initiate positive change and track progress.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you graduate today to join the ranks of the change agents already in action, we urge you to embark on a transformation journey for meaningful impact on life in your communities and nation.

To cite examples, be inspired by the scientists who have transformed the world through technology, the educators who have transformed illiteracy into enlightenment, and the political leaders who have amazingly transformed the lives of their people and the landscape of their countries through impactful projects.

In this direction, who among you here can promise to invent a life-changing device for humanity? How many of the graduands are determined to develop new business models or revolutionise agriculture to transform the Gambian economy?

Remembering that, with strong conviction, nothing is impossible, fill your minds with such noble inspirations. The outcome could surprise you.

The Government recognises the need to build on our successes, accelerate progress and sustainable development, and overcome our challenges. Inspiring and empowering change agents are critical to attaining such goals.

We know that knowledge is a vehicle of change and all human beings are potential agents in the process.

As a result, one is potentially a change agent, a change target, or a change burden, in instances when people try to resist change.

I advise you, the graduands, to be aware that being a change agent involves being proactive, innovative, and resilient in the face of difficulty. For Gambians, it also entails applying the values of integrity, compassion, and empathy as you endeavour to influence lives and create The Gambia we want.

The University consistently illustrates that higher education conclusively influences change.

There is hardly any formal institution in The Gambia without UTG graduates, and they excel in other lands as they do at home.

Many UTG graduates now serve as change agents for institutional or socio-economic transformation, or participate actively in development through their strength of character, creative ideas, and problem-solving mindsets.

The UTG is equally worth citing as a specimen of change in relation to what and where it was years ago, compared to its present circumstances. Through the University, my government has demonstrated unwavering commitment to education and the empowerment of change agents, especially among the youth and female population.

The initiatives employed include providing and improving the quality of the higher education programmes and infrastructure for more impactful outcomes. We support students to fulfil their educational and career dreams without financial bottlenecks.

The recently inaugurated component of the UTG Faraba Project attests to our commitment. As you can see, all the buildings are fully furnished and provided with modern teaching facilities. The research labs are equipped with state-of-the-art equipment to ensure that students are well-prepared to graduate as change agents.

Initiatives, such as the Technical and Vocational Education and Training programmes, do not only arm students with valuable skills but also empower them to contribute meaningfully to the development of their communities.

Furthermore, the government's student revolving loan scheme ensures that financial constraints do not hinder potential students from accessing higher education.

By subsidising bus services to transport students to and from the Faraba Banta Campus, the Government is inclusively facilitating access to education and training.

Additionally, our scholarship schemes and financial assistance systems are to ascertain that no deserving citizen is excluded, as national development efforts and student empowerment progress.

These investments and empowerment initiatives are to ultimately contribute to the development and prosperity of our dear motherland.

Our dear Graduands,

As you leave the UTG, remember that you carry invaluable knowledge and skills, as well as the values and crest of the University.

Thus, you should act responsibly and be of good character wherever you may be.

Whether you choose to further your studies, embark on a career, or initiate your enterprise, remember that you have the potential to influence events around you.

Be bold, courageous, and visionary in your pursuits, but tactful, considerate, kind, and gentle. Dream big, but appreciate those who have contributed to your success. As university graduates, show gratitude to society by supporting our development endeavours and the less fortunate near you.

Change can begin with any one of you, but you must work collectively with other stakeholders to contribute towards creating a brighter, more inclusive, and prosperous Gambia. I implore you to embody and reflect the true spirit of empowerment and selfless service and be the change agents our world desperately needs. Go forth with conviction, confident that you can succeed wherever you may go. In reposing our hopes and trust in you, we pray that your life journeys are filled with purpose, fulfilment, and boundless possibilities.

To every graduand, faculty, and student of the University of The Gambia and to the Honourable Minister and personnel of the higher education sector, I say, thank you for the hard work and for making this day a reality.

By the same breadth, I heartily commend and thank all parents, families, and guardians for supporting the students, thereby contributing to our nation-building efforts.

Finally, while I thank everyone for your presence and wish you success in your noble ventures, I ask that you strive to inspire and empower those around you as change agents, especially through education and training.

I thank you all.