SPEECH OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MAKENI
(PROFESSOR JOSEPH TURAY) DURING THE CONGREGATION CEREMONY
MARKING THE AWARD OF DEGREES, DIPLOMAS AND CERTIFICATE ON
SATURDAY 11TH FEBRUARY 2017

Our Chancellor, Bishop of the Diocese of Makeni,
Bishop Emeritus, and Founder of the University of Makeni
Chairman and Members of the University Council
Chairman and Executive Secretary of the National Council for Tertiary Education
Honourable Minister of Education Science and Technology
Director of Higher Education Science and Technology
Honourable Ministers of State and Members of Parliament
Your excellencies, members of the diplomatic and consular corps
Pro Vice Chancellors of Sister Universities
Colleague Vice Chancellors of the University of Sierra Leone, Njala University, and Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology
Registrar and Registrars of Sister Universities
The Principals of other Tertiary Institutions
The Mayor of the Municipality of Makeni
Our Paramount Chiefs and other Traditional authorities,
Priests and Imams
Deans of faculties and heads of department
Members of the academic and administrative staff
Alumni,
Graduands and Parents
Members of the Press,
Distinguished invited guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I join the Pro Chancellor in welcoming you to the University of Makeni and to the Fifth Congregation Ceremony. In a very special way Mr. Chancellor, we are privileged and honoured to have in our midst the founder of the University of Makeni, Bishop Emeritus George Biguzzi. Welcome back home Bishop!

The presence of colleague Vice Chancellors and Principals demonstrates the cordiality and cooperation amongst tertiary institutions in Sierra Leone. Chancellor sir, the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals of Higher Education Institutions in Sierra Leone was recently inaugurated at the Njala University. *Universities in Sierra Leone face peculiar challenges ranging from strategic development direction to the basic resources and expertise required for effective service delivery. And these challenges can be addressed through consultations among each other. This Committee, will be a platform for the process of forming joint policies and practices around higher education (Prof Ernest Tom Ndomaheni).*

Let me also take this opportunity, Chancellor Sir, to congratulate the University of Sierra Leone as it celebrates a hundred and ninety years of academic excellence in contributing to the growth of this county. No wonder it was referred to as the,” citadel of independent thought and action but without which Sierra Leone could be poorer”. We salute the Vice Chancellor of the University of Sierra Leone, Professor Ekundayo Thompson.
In today’s ceremony, two hundred and ninety seven graduands will be conferred degrees and awarded diplomas. I warmly congratulate all graduands, families, friends, guardians and sponsors.

Today’s ceremony is also unique because we are recognising the efforts of very distinguished friends who have accompanied the university since its inception. We are indeed grateful to them for their invaluable contributions to the growth of our university. They are our:

- Mr. Alie D. Kamara, Resident Minister North
- PC Bai Shebora Kasanga II (Paramount Chief of the Bombali Shebora Chiefdom)
- Mr. Abdul K. Mansaray, Managing Director, National Agricultural Development Company Sierra Leone (NADECO)
- Posthumously, the late Mrs. Mary Umu M. Turay (Special Needs Lecturer of The University of Makeni)

From abroad,

- Amici della Sierra Leone, Parma, Italy
- Posthumously, the Late Lawyer Giorgio Pavarani, Italy
- Associasione Rondine Cittadella della Pace, Italy

I am grateful to the Chancellor and Board of Trustees for the confidence reposed in me to serve as Vice Chancellor for the next five years. With the help of God, I will continue to discharge my duties diligently. Most sincerely, we extend our thanks to the University Council for providing strategic direction and stewardship. You continue to provide the right environment for us to adequately discharge the objects and functions of the university. I also wish to greatly appreciate our faculty and staff for serving the university diligently.

A report of the status of the university has been summarised in the VCs report. However, permit me to remind our Congregation why this university was established, the role it has played in national development and its future strategic direction.

After the ten years civil war in Sierra Leone, the Church in the Diocese of Makeni had to interrogate itself by asking the following questions: what were the root causes of the civil war? Where were our best minds? The University of Makeni (UNIMAK) was established in a bid to address the root causes of the war wrong economic policies, unemployment, mismatch between the needs of the people and tertiary education, bad governance, inadequate social services, centralization, corruption and so on.

The Fatima Institute, now the University of Makeni was to engage in training, research and community engagement in order to lift our people out of poverty, enhance economic growth and social development. This millennium university was to play its role in the search for peace, stability and promote democracy to bring about shared prosperity for all. In the words of Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities, “A Catholic University, as any university, is immersed in human society... it is called to become an effective instrument for cultural progress for individuals and society. Included among its research activities therefore will be a study of serious contemporary problems in areas such as the dignity of the human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, a more just sharing in the world resources and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at a nation and international level. University research will seek to
discover the roots and causes of the serious problems of our time, paying attention to their ethical and religious dimensions.

And so our programs in the university ranging from the Social Teachings of the Church, Good Governance and Social Transformation to research around infectious disease and community engagement with Makeni City Council to improve urban planning are part of the narrative of who we as a University.

During the Ebola crisis, we leveraged opportunities around us to mobilize partners in establishing a Makeni Bio-Tec platform an set up an infectious disease laboratory for research. This laboratory was fully utilized for the genetic sequencing of the Ebola Virus and thereby informing decisions on the origin of pathogens. This research centre continues to build capacity at the national level for rapid response in emergencies for both national and international researchers.

Last March, a National Conference on the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the SDGs was organised to take stock of our achievements, challenges as a nation and map out smart, green and clean solutions to the economic, social and environmental problems.

Mr. Chancellor Sir, the narrative of this university must always be rooted around the pains, sufferings and aspirations of our people for a better, peaceful and peaceful life.

We have designed a new strategic plan for the next five years aim at achieving excellence in academic formation, research and community engagement by:

- strengthening existing courses and introducing relevant academic courses with special reference to the sciences and technology;
- improving staff capacity;
- review and enhancement of policies to guide university operations;
- improvements expansion of university structure,
- increase student enrolment, mainstreaming of ICT and embedding entrepreneurship in our education.

Mr Chancellor, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, our university is young with many challenges. The challenges and problems in a University are a reflection of the wider society. Here also at UNIMAK, we have to contend with building better work ethics, strengthening systems, policies and procedures…. The famous mantra of institutionalising, advance the core values of prudence, the I can do it mentality, engage and be proactive.

Dear Graduands, it had been an honour and a privilege to allow us share your lives during your studies at UNIMAK. Congratulations for a work well done!. Permit me dear Graduands to congratulate in a special way our first cohort of MBA students in Impact entrepreneurship and those of the Faculty of Agriculture and Food Sciences. Our deepest appreciation to the State University of Milan for providing leadership in commencing the Faculty of Agriculture and Food Sciences and the Sacred Heart University of Milan for establishing the MBA in Impact Entrepreneurship at UNIMAK.

The theme of Sierra Leone’s 2017 budget is about recovery through economic diversification and a people centred entrepreneurship. Economic diversification through agriculture is a sure path towards sustainable development. UNIMAK is prioritizing Agriculture and Food Sciences and Social Entrepreneurship. Some of our graduands in the Agriculture and Food Sciences Faculty would be employed by the Social Business Development SBD organisation,
initiated by St Lawrence foundation. Some of our MBA graduands have already their start ups and some scaling up around agri business and energy.

Mr. Chancellor Sir, if we take a look at the average tuition for an undergraduate in the United States, United Kingdom and some of the best universities in Africa we are talking about huge sums of money. Average fees in the UK is: from £ 22,000 to £42,000 annually. In the US is: $ 33,000 to $60,000 annually and In South Africa and Ghana is: $2,800 to $5,600 annually. Converted to leones it is about Le 247,500,000 in the US and UK and Le 21,000,000 annually for the average in some African universities. The University of Makeni is charging only Le 5,500,000 annually. I acknowledge that we are talking about different contexts.

Distinguish ladies and gentle men, the majority of Sierra Leoneans, will not be able to send their children to these universities abroad. Therefore I am appealing to us all, especially our men and women of good will, hard working Sierra Leoneans, friends of Bombali to make our university a centre of excellence so that our children would have a decent place to study. I acknowledge and appreciate all our numerous friends, partners and benefactors who have supported us in diverse ways in our journey. Let me borrow a leaf from the budget speech from the 2017 Sierra Leone budget. We are asked to support and patronize the MADE IN SIERRA LEONE BRAND. I quote: “we will support Sierra Leoneans to open new business; we will support the production of Serra Leoneans goods....... I therefore urge everyone to patronize the made in Sierra Leone brand”. Mr. Chancellor, distinguish ladies and gentlemen, this university is a Made in Sierra Leone brand. These graduands sitting in front of you are Made in Sierra Leone.

The January edition of the African Business Magazine has its cover page captioned “outlook 2017 for Africa: just more of the same?”. The following questions were raised in the article: when are we going to see leaders turning talk into action? Will we see political changes translate into real economic change in 2017? The author ends the article by affirming what Africa actually needs. I quote: “hoping that countries will meaningfully diversify their economies is not a strategy. Hoping people will learn from past mistakes is not a strategy. What Africa needs are major structural reforms, not hope”

Dear Graduands, Your education at UNIMAK was in a bid to prepare the enabling environment that will facilitate innovation, creativity, thinking out of the box, ability to create jobs and not only seeking jobs, and leveraging partnership. These are the values and mindset for major structural reforms in Africa and more so in Sierra Leone.

As you engage with your communities, do not be just more of the same. Add value to your communities, be the change you want to see, and be “champions” in your communities. You are made in Sierra Leone and therefore not just more of the same.

God bless you all.