



**Mount Kenya University**

**Speech by**

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**Mount Kenya University Founder and**

**2015 World Entrepreneur of the**

**Year Hall of Fame inductee**

**during the**

**40 anniversary celebrations**

**of the**

**Kenya Secondary Schools Heads Association**

## **Salutations**

.The Deputy President of the Republic of Kenya, His Excellency

Hon. William S. Ruto,

.The Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Education, Prof. Jacob

Kaimenyi

.The Governor Mombasa County, Hon. Ali Hassan Joho

.The Principal Secretary, State Department of Education,

MOEST Dr. Belio Kipsang

.The Education Secretary MOEST, Mrs. Leah Rotich

.The TSC Chairperson, Dr. Lydia Nzomo

. Directors of Education

. Directors, Ministry of Education Science & Technology

.All principals

.Ladies and Gentlemen

## **Introduction**

I am extremely humbled and privileged to stand before you today and address you, first and foremost as a teacher, and secondly as an entrepreneur who has found his way in the international Hall of Fame.

I also feel honoured to join you as you celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Kenya Secondary Schools Heads Association, and receive this special award. This award is particularly close to my heart, because it comes from my fellow teachers and professionals in the educational sector. Like every other teacher, my success is based on the academic success of our students. Indeed, thank you for this endorsement.

## **Theme 1: Why do we partner with KESSHA?**

### **Ladies and Gentlemen:**

We as Mount Kenya University are proud to be associated with the Kenya Secondary Schools Heads Association. Every year, we have been meeting here in Mombasa to discuss and share ideas on how we can improve the education sector for the sake of the future of our children. As we celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, it is now time to take stock of our past successes and failures. As the American psychologist Walter Pitkin said back in 1932, “*life begins at 40.*” Indeed, you are now just at the beginning!

But it is imperative to ask ourselves, first and foremost, why are we, as a university, so interested in this partnership with KESSHA?

There is a proverb that says, “*a gourd’s neck cannot be straightened in its old age.*” This proverb means that if you want to change somebody, you must start when they are still young. As a university, we recognize that the quality of the graduates we produce does not start at university level. We acknowledge that moulding quality graduates starts at a very early stage and that is why, year-in, year-out, we have been partnering with you teachers. You are integral in helping us straighten the gourd’s neck!

**Theme 2: The virtue of humility and how a teacher's personality influences success of students**

**Ladies and Gentlemen:**

Allow me to share with you the story of one of the greatest head teachers to have ever lived in Kenya, which illustrates how a head teacher's personality impacts on the academic performance and the future of his students.

The story of Edward Carey Francis, former principal of Maseno and Alliance High Schools, has been told and retold. But the man was so great that every time you hear the story, it sounds just as fresh.

The eldest of four children, Carey Francis came to Kenya from Cambridge, UK, as a missionary and teacher

on October 26, 1928. Immediately he docked at the port of Mombasa –not very far from here-, he had an experience that illustrated his very deep humility, a key characteristic trait that defined him.

At the Port, his luggage was a little mixed up by the African servants. Carey Francis began sorting out the luggage himself, to the utter shock and bewilderment of his fellow white men and women in his entourage. They believed that the manual work of getting hands dirty was for the African natives.

When he arrived in Maseno High School, a colonial government official told him to keep the natives “at arms length”. But Francis freely interacted with the blacks, setting a foundation of a liaison that would last a lifetime.

Carey Francis was as humble in his dealings with pupils as his masters. It is very unusual for a headmaster to begin the notices at the school assembly by saying, "*I have made a fool of myself*", as Carey Francis did on one occasion, when admitting that a ruling he had made in connection with a Sports Day in Maseno had been mistaken.

During the staffroom meetings, he opened with the words, "*when I am angry, I do and say some foolish things; when I do, please forgive me.*"

As a result, many of those who might otherwise have nursed a sense of grievance were encouraged to come and talk it over with him.

If Carey realised that he had been wrong, he would apologize unreservedly; the idea of 'losing face' never crossed his mind.



The outcome of his humility was that the boys in Maseno and Alliance High Schools adored him with fatherly affection. They felt a responsibility to succeed, at least for his sake. In his first years at Alliance, that is 1940-1952, the University College –Makerere- opened in Uganda. The Education Department issued a notice that any of the boys could have a loan of ten shillings a month as pocket money if they applied. Carey Francis ensured that all his boys applied, setting the stage for Alliance and Maseno High School old boys to become some of the greatest politicians, doctors, academicians and businessmen Kenya has ever produced.

### **Theme 3: Reflecting on the theme of this conference**

#### **Ladies and Gentlemen:**

The lessons from great teachers such as Edward Carey Francis have been lost on us. As we deliberate on the theme of this conference, *Re-evaluating relevance and quality education in Kenya*, we must ask ourselves as head teachers:

- *At what extent does our personality influence the outcomes in academic performance of our students?*
- *How do we measure relevance of education?*
- *How do we measure quality of education?*
- *Has our excessive focus on quantifiable subjects such as Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics and English*

*pushed us to define every student's intelligence by their grades in each?*

### **Ladies and Gentlemen:**

The reality on the ground is that even though the Ministry of Education abolished ranking of schools in national exams, we are still in a race to be reputed as among the “Top-10”. But to many of our gifted young students, relevance and quality is not defined by a Top-10 ranking in Maths and English, but rather by other avenues of excellence such as drama, sports, music, history, civic education, carpentry and plumbing.

As leaders in the education sector, do we have strong personalities in the shape of Carey Francis to embrace new ideas with courage and humility, which will empower our students to become successful?

**Theme 4: A call for innovation and to embrace new ideas**

**Ladies and Gentlemen:**

It is amazing that new ideas are frowned upon and discouraged, instead of being acknowledged and rewarded. I was utterly surprised by the reaction last week when one of our local universities launched their own laptop brand in the market. It was met with mockery and abuse. One of the commentators even suggested that he will try using the laptop while wearing a bomb proof suit - just incase it malfunctions and explodes!

Yet, we forget that even countries that have perfected the art of producing such machines went through

several phases of failure before they finally perfected it. In the early 1980s, when Kenya tried to make its own car, the *Nyayo pioneer*, the South Koreans came up with their own, the Hyundai. *Nyayo pioneer* died. But the South Koreans persisted. Now, South Korean car market is the 5<sup>th</sup> largest in the world in terms of production and export volume. They produce over one million cars per year.

**Ladies and Gentlemen:**

For us to achieve Vision 2030, we must be an industrialized country and we have to support innovations such as the Taifa laptop project by JKUAT. It is quite commendable that the government has put a 40% ultimatum for public institutions to buy locally produced equipment. As the Chairman of the Rural Electrification Authority, I support this directive and I

will ensure its full implementation in our procurement process.

At REA, I will also ensure that all rural schools in Kenya are connected with electricity, to enable the successful rollout of computer labs at our schools. This computer project was allocated Ksh17billion in the recent budget, and will go a long way in enabling ICT innovations at our schools.

#### **Theme 4: Teachers and promotions**

#### **Ladies and Gentlemen:**

In the recent past, there has been heated debate over the issue of automatic promotion of teachers who have advanced their education. What is my view about this?

I seriously feel that much as promotions should be based on merit, teachers must look for opportunities beyond their schools. I feel very sad when I see teachers who only look for opportunities within their schools after pursuing further education. Others choose to just idle at home, or pursue areas that are completely out of their line of training.

When the late Prof. George Eshiwani retired from Kenyatta University, he went to be a fish farmer. It really touched my heart to see such a great mind going to waste. I invited him to come and work with us as our founding Pro-Chancellor at Mount Kenya University. He was very helpful and contributed a lot to our success.

Another former teacher, indeed the principal of Nairobi School, left the teaching profession and just retired to a quiet life at home. I could not allow such good brains go

to waste and employed him as our Dean of Students. With the expansion of higher education in Kenya and various Colleges, University Campuses and Centres opening up in the counties, there is absolutely no reason a teacher who has advanced his education should not pursue opportunities at these institutions, rather than waiting for promotion at his station of work. And this is my challenge to you this morning, my dear teachers. If you study up to PhD level, I know of many universities, which will give you a job on the spot – without even an interview. Our Lodwar Campus counts a good number of its lecturers as local teachers who underwent further training. Such should be your long-term goal.

As I conclude, I would like to thank the Kenya Secondary Schools Heads Association once again for this

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distinguished award. As a former teacher, I wish to dedicate it to all of you. Thank you very much.

**May God bless you all!**