

ADDRESS BY THABO MBEKI AT THE AFRICAN STUDENT LEADERS  
SUMMIT MEETING: UCT, SEPTEMBER 6, 2010.

**“THE ROLE OF AFRICA’S STUDENT LEADERS IN DEVELOPING THE  
AFRICAN CONTINENT.”**

**CARTHAGE MUST BE REBUILT!**

Programme director,  
Delegates to the Summit Meeting of Africa’s Student Leaders,  
Vice Chancellor, leaders, staff, students and workers of the UCT;  
Fellow students:

First of all I would like to join in welcoming all the African Student Leaders to this important Summit Meeting. I am also pleased to welcome to South Africa those of our leaders who come from the rest of Africa.

We must also congratulate the All-Africa Students Union (AASU) for taking the initiative to convene this Inaugural Summit Meeting, and thank the SRCs of the Universities of Cape Town, Fort Hare, the Western Cape and Witwatersrand for taking on the responsibility to host the meeting.

The agenda of the Summit Meeting conveys the unequivocal message that our Continent’s student leaders are, as they should be, determined to position themselves among the forces that should play their role as the change agents which Africa needs.

I do hope that you will find the ways and means to disseminate the results of your deliberations as widely as possible to make your important contribution to the continuing struggle to answer the important question – whither Africa?

The students of history among us will be familiar with the protracted struggle that took place between Africa and Europe in ancient times, covering a period of more than a century. This period includes the so-called Punic Wars which broke out during the years 264 – 146 BC, involving a titanic struggle between the African Carthage and European Rome.

I am certain that even those among us who are not students of history will have heard of the great African general, Hannibal, who, during the Second Punic War from 218 to 201 BC, invaded Italy from Spain and brought Rome to the brink of defeat.

Though Rome emerged victorious from both the First and the Second Punic Wars, it entertained intense hostility towards Carthage and in the end decided that permanently to defeat the Carthaginian empire, Carthage itself had to be destroyed.

A famous Roman senator of the day, Marcus Cato, Cato the Elder, led the campaign for the destruction of Carthage. It is said that whenever the Senator spoke on any subject, he would end with the words, in Latin – *ceterum censeo delendam esse Carthaginem* - 'besides which, my opinion is that Carthage must be destroyed'. The ominous words of Cato the Elder were also rendered in a more direct form – *Carthago delenda est!* – Carthage must be destroyed!

And indeed the Third and last of the Punic wars ended in 146 BC with the destruction of the ancient African city of Carthage, which the Romans carried out with extreme barbarity. This marked the destruction of African independence in this part of our continent, which now became the Roman province of Africa.

The ruins of ancient Carthage are today part of Tunis, the capital of Tunisia.

The first Assembly of the Organisation of African Unity, the OAU, which Nelson Mandela attended as a Head of State, was held in Tunis in 1994, signifying the historic achievement that Africa had finally ended the epoch of colonial and white minority domination.

In his Address to the Assembly, Nelson Mandela took advantage of the fact that the meeting was taking place in Tunis, the original Carthage, to refer to the history of Carthage which I have mentioned.

Specifically he said:

"In the distant days of antiquity, a Roman sentenced this African city to death, saying "Carthago delenda est!" - Carthage must be destroyed!

"And Carthage was destroyed. Today we wander among its ruins, (and) only our imagination and historical records enable us to experience its magnificence. Only our African being makes it possible for us to hear the piteous cries of the victims of the vengeance of the Roman Empire..

"During the long interregnum, the children of Africa were carted away as slaves. Our lands became the property of other nations, our resources a source of enrichment for other peoples and our kings and queens mere servants of foreign powers."

Nelson Mandela then went on to say:

"The total liberation of Africa from foreign and white minority rule has now been achieved...

"Finally, at this summit meeting in Tunis, we shall remove from our agenda the consideration of the question of Apartheid South Africa.

"Where South Africa appears on the agenda again, let it be because we want to discuss what its contribution shall be to the making of the new African

renaissance. Let it be because we want to discuss what materials it will supply for the rebuilding of the African city of Carthage.

“One epoch with its historic tasks has come to an end. Surely, another must commence with its own challenges. Africa cries out for a new birth; Carthage awaits the restoration of its glory.

“If freedom was the crown which the fighters of liberation sought to place on the head of mother Africa, let the upliftment, the happiness, prosperity and comfort of her children be the jewel of the crown.”

He then identified some of Africa’s challenges as economic development and the eradication of poverty, the nature and quality of governance, peace, stability, democracy, human rights, co-operation and development.

He concluded with the words:

“We are certain that you will prevail over the currents that originate from the past, and ensure that the interregnum of humiliation symbolised by, among others, the destruction of Carthage, is indeed consigned to the past, never to return.”

As you will have seen, Nelson Mandela used the fact that South Africa had now joined the OAU, to underline the point that now that the goal of the total liberation of Africa had been achieved, our Continent had to unite to attend to the other challenges which we share, which he summarised as peace, stability, democracy, human rights, co-operation and development.

Taking advantage of the fact that the Summit Meeting was taking place in Tunis, historic Carthage, he presented the metaphor that whereas Africa’s misfortunes started with the destruction of Carthage and the subjugation of North Africa into a Roman province, the eradication of colonialism and apartheid from our Continent meant that we should now rebuild Carthage.

Basing ourselves on this metaphor, speaking to the topic you have asked me to address - “The role of Africa’s student leaders in developing the African continent” – I dare say that as our student leaders you should take up the call that Nelson Mandela made, and therefore say to yourselves, setting this as your task – Carthage must be rebuilt!

As students you occupy a special place in our African society. First of all you constitute an important part of our youth. In addition to this, you also constitute an important addition to the intelligentsia of our Continent.

To underline the latter, in 2006 Paul T. Zeleza said there were 120,000 students at African universities in 1960. This had grown to 3, 461, 822 in 1995 and had “probably grown to 5 million” four years ago.

As young people it is inevitable that you will and must be concerned about the future. You have a duty and every right to ask yourselves questions about the

societies into which you were born and in which you are achieving your maturity. Similarly you have a duty and every right to ask yourselves questions about what could and should be done to change society for the better, and act on the answers you give to such questions.

As students your principal task is to acquire knowledge as well as the capacity to generate new knowledge. That process exposes you to the world of ideas and therefore the habit of critical inquiry. It would therefore be unnatural that you do not question the present and develop your own vision about the future.

In any case history demonstrates that virtually in all societies, students have regularly played an important role as agents of change, in many instances providing the catalytic role in revolutionary processes.

Accordingly what I am saying is that as student leaders and as students you too have an historical responsibility not only to understand the African society but also to change it, to play an active role in what Nelson Mandela metaphorically described as the rebuilding of Carthage.

I am convinced that as your starting point in this regard you must focus on the area that is of immediate and daily concern to you – the area of higher education.

In this regard, before I present to you the rest of what follows, I must say that I know that often our university students throughout Africa often feel obliged to engage in various forms of mass action to advance their demands relating to such important issues as student poverty, study and living conditions, and bad governance in the particular institutions of higher education to which the students belong.

I must say that I have no quarrel with such public and active expression of their displeasure and demands by the students of Africa. However, I must add to this that I will certainly quarrel with any actions which result in the destruction of university property and physical abuse of the university administration and staff, given the challenges which the African university already faces, on which I will comment later in this Address.

Having been a student and youth activist, I cannot and will not argue that Africa's students should not act to draw attention to their concerns.

Rather, when I say that you, as student leaders, should focus on the area of higher education, I address you as African patriots who have a vision that transcends your immediate interests, informed by a firm determination to help fashion the kind of new Africa towards which all of us aspire.

I am therefore arguing that you should also take action to promote the birth of that new Africa, especially as such action relates to what I describe as the renewal of the African university and the expansion and accumulation of Africa's intellectual capital.

In this context, I hold the view that with regard to the achievement of these objectives, your guiding principle will be that you will be part of what you urge should be done, avoiding the dishonest motto – do as I say, but do not do as I do!

In his 2006 paper on “Staff Retention in African Universities”, Wisdom J. Tettey says:

“Africa is losing, in significant numbers, a fundamental resource in socio-economic and political development i.e., its intellectual capital. As the processes of globalisation take shape, it is becoming abundantly clear that full, effective and beneficial participation in the world that is emerging will depend, in no small measure, on the ability of societies to build and take advantage of their human resource capabilities. In the absence of such capabilities, African countries cannot expect to compete at any appreciable level with their counterparts, not only in the industrialised world, but also from other developing areas which have made the investment and developed the relevant capacities...A solid higher education base is crucial for (social) transformation to take place.”

*(World Bank: January 2006).*

I would like to believe that all of us here agree with Prof Tettey about the critical importance of intellectual capital for the achievement of the objective of the renaissance of Africa.

And yet all of us are aware of the parlous state of the African university, the institution without which it is not possible to produce the intellectual capital we need.

In his 2008 paper, “Student activism, structural adjustment and the democratic transition in Sub-Sahara Africa”, Leo Zeilig writes:

“Much of the commentary (on higher education in Africa) finds unanimity in the description of the university as a neglected institution, a crumbling edifice housing impoverished students and lecturers. The physical decay of higher education is a feature common to many Sub-Saharan African universities”, characterised, among others, by:

- inadequate infrastructure facilities, accompanied by ever increasing numbers of students;
- understaffing;
- inadequate libraries and outdated books, with students who are too poor to buy their own books;
- underpaid lecturers who are forced to earn money even by selling to the students photocopies of their lecture notes;
- staff attrition among others through the brain drain; and,
- even inadequacies in the supply of such basic services as water, sanitation and electricity.

*(SAIH: International Student Conference, September 2008.)*

Further to underline the challenge we face, one study notes that only two (2) countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have significant student loan programmes, with 46 having no such programmes. Thus the poor, despite their academic competence, are obliged to find the means to finance their access to higher education.

*(arp.harvard.edu, Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa.)*

A 2007 article in the New York Times presented a graphic picture of the challenges facing the African University. Focusing on Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, Senegal it said that "60 000 students are crammed on a campus with just 5 000 dormitory beds. Renting a room in Dakar is so expensive that students pack themselves into tiny rooms by the half dozen...(The library) only has 1 700 chairs. Students study in stairwells and sprawled in corners...In the chemistry lab...students take turns carrying out basic experiments with broken beakers and pipettes."

*(New York Times: Africa's Stories Colleges, Jammed and Crumbling by Lydia Polgreen, May 20, 2007.)*

One consequence of all this is that, according to UNESCO, "students from Sub-Saharan Africa seeking higher education are the most mobile in the world, with one out of 16 studying abroad."

*(UNESCO Institute for Statistics Global Education Digest 2006.)*

Perhaps of greater concern is the difficulty the African universities are experiencing to recruit and retain the properly qualified teaching staff. This is further compounded by the declining numbers of post-graduate and doctoral students, which means that our universities are not producing the adequate numbers of graduates empowered to serve as lecturers, replacing those lost through retirement.

Add to this the enormous brain drain to which Africa is victim. In the paper by Prof Tettey we have cited, he says that for instance, by 2000 Ghana had lost 42.9% of its total educated labour force. In 1998 South Africans constituted the largest group of foreign dentists in the UK. Only 50 out of 600 doctors trained in Zambia since independence were still practising in Zambia. More Malawi doctors were practising in the city of Manchester in the UK than in the whole of Malawi.

One estimate says that Africa lost \$1.2 billion of investment on the 60 000 professionals who left the Continent between 1985 and 1990.

All this tells the truly frightening story that even as we are confronted by a weakening capacity of our universities to generate the new intellectual capital Africa needs, our Continent continues to lose much of this capital through the

brain drain caused by the emigration of our University and higher education graduates to the developed countries of the North.

All contemporary demographic projections point to the reality that because of the 'aging' phenomenon, the developed countries will depend on ever increasing numbers of foreign workers, especially professionals and skilled workers, to meet their economic and social needs.

This means that we must expect that there may very well be an even higher demand for the services of Africa's professionals, resulting in an intensification of our loss of the intellectual capital that is so vital for the renewal of our Continent.

I have dwelt on this matter at some length because of its importance and because I believe that the African student community is well placed to take up the challenge to rescue the African university from its unacceptable position as "a neglected institution, a crumbling edifice housing impoverished students and lecturers."

Our Continent arrived at this position not by accident, but by design. It was the joint outcome of the structural adjustment programmes of the International Financial Institutions which, among other things, insisted on the reduction of the role of the African state in higher education and therefore the transformation of education into a commodity that could be sold by private capital for a profit.

This was accompanied by the then growing hostility of the ruling African elites towards the universities, which they saw as centres of opposition to their predatory rule, which centres of resistance had to be destroyed as focal points of progressive thought and activism, as Carthage was by the Romans.

It was this pincer movement which produced the crisis in African higher education we must now address. In the context of my own upbringing, that crisis expressed itself in painful and dramatic ways manifested by the virtual disappearance from the African transformation processes of eminent centres of learning, progressive thought and action, such as the Universities of Fort Hare, Ibadan, Makerere, Khartoum and Dar-es-Salaam.

In this regard it is also important to make the point that in many instances in the post-colonial period, the universities became a centre of struggle as the means dried up in terms of which the then African University was but an extension of a self-serving ruling elite.

In this regard the paper by Leo Zeilig we have cited says:

"Following independence in Africa, university students were part of a privileged and transitory social group, waiting to be allotted graduate employment in an expanding civil service and across the state sector. Some describe a social pact between students and the state, seen as an implicit guarantee that had ensured

employment for in the formal economy for university graduates. The period corresponded to a brief moment of state-led development across much of the continent, with university students overwhelmingly living comfortably on government grants and scholarships. University students enjoyed generous grants, lived easily in subsidised accommodation and ate like kings...

"The university was a rarefied space of material privilege and political debate...But in a very brief period they became oppositional, regarded in the commentary of the day as 'rival politicians rather than students'. By the mid-1970s...countries that had attempted state-led development faced international recession and internal corruption and decay. Higher education was but one of the areas that were forced to go on a starvation diet...Student activism was affected: while students clung onto a self-conscious elitism, the reality of student poverty and the financial crises of African universities transformed their activism."

*(Leo Zeilig, op cit.)*

In its Communiqué, the World Conference on Higher Education held from 5 to 8 July 2009 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, included a special section on Africa in which it said:

"Participants underscored the critical need to confront emerging challenges relating to gender and racial inequality, academic freedom, brain drain and the lack of graduates' preparedness for the labour market. They underlined the urgency for the adoption of new dynamics in African higher education that work towards a comprehensive transformation to sharply enhance its relevance and responsiveness to the political, social and economic realities of African countries. This new momentum can provide a trajectory in the fight against under-development and poverty in Africa. This will demand greater attention to higher education and research in Africa than has been given for the last eleven years. Higher education in Africa should foster good governance based on robust accountability and sound financial principles...

"Education remains a public good, but private financing should be encouraged. While every effort must be made to increase public funding of higher education, it must be recognised that public funds are limited and may not be sufficient for such a rapidly developing sector. Other formulae and sources of funding, especially those drawing on the public-private partnership model, should be found.

"Students should be given a voice in governance of higher education at all levels."

This followed an earlier and important section which reads:

"As a public good and a strategic imperative for all levels of education and as the basis for research, innovation and creativity, higher education must be a matter of responsibility and economic support of all governments. As

emphasised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 'higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit'. (Article 26, paragraph 1)...

"At no time in history has it been more important to invest in higher education as a major force in building an inclusive and diverse knowledge society and to advance research, innovation and creativity...

"Higher education must not only give solid skills for the present and future world but must also contribute to the education of ethical citizens committed to the construction of peace, the defense of human rights and the values of democracy."

To return to a point I made earlier, I believe that this Inaugural Summit Meeting of African Student Leaders which begins today, should make it a point to address the question of what should be done to position the African university where it should be, given its centrality to the task of achieving the renaissance of Africa.

In this regard it will be important that the Summit Meeting takes on board the comments made in the Communiqué we have just quoted, in part because all our Governments adopted it at the World Conference. Indeed it would serve the Summit Meeting well if it gave itself an opportunity to study the Communiqué as a whole, and not just the excerpts I have cited.

Drawing on the Communiqué, and as you discuss what you should do to respond to the higher education crisis in Africa, I believe that you should include in your decisions the considerations that:

- education, including higher education, is a public good and that higher education should be equally accessible to all on the basis of potential and demonstrated academic merit;
- governments have a responsibility to finance education, consistent with their ability;
- beyond this, other means should be found to supplement government funding, without turning education into a commodity;
- higher education should be transformed sharply to enhance its relevance and responsiveness to the political, social and economic realities of African countries, especially focused on the eradication of poverty and underdevelopment as well as the development of the ethical citizen;
- the system of higher education must address the challenges relating to gender and racial inequality, academic freedom, the brain drain, the dropout levels, and the lack of graduate preparedness for the labour market;
- greater attention should be paid to original research as well as the expansion of the cadre of post-graduate students; and,
- students should be included in the governance systems of the universities, enjoying the right to organise and to express their opinions.

I dare say that it will take a sustained, protracted and conscious struggle to achieve these results, partly because in truth Africa faces many other and equally pressing challenges.

But we must emphasise the point that Africa will overcome the challenges of poverty, underdevelopment and global marginalisation not because of its wealth in natural resources, but because of its intellectual ability properly to manage and utilise these resources for the benefit of the peoples of our Continent.

In this sense the resources embedded in Earth Africa may turn into a curse if Africa does not develop the intellectual capital to empower the African masses and the governments they elect to exploit these resources for the greater good of the citizen.

Inherent in what I have said is the proposition that you, Africa's student leaders and our students as a whole, are informed by a progressive world view founded on respect for the dignity of the African, commitment to serve the people of Africa, loyalty to principle, the truth, independent thinking and ethical conduct, and love of humanity as a whole.

These sentiments were expressed in our country's historic document, the Freedom Charter, adopted in 1955, which says – "The aim of education shall be to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, to honour human brotherhood, liberty and peace."

In this context, over the years various African intellectuals have made critical comments about the African intelligentsia. Some of these have been made by the renowned novelists and thinkers, Ayi Kwei Armah of Ghana and Ngugi wa Thiong'o of Kenya.

With your permission, I would like to quote relatively extensive comments by these two eminent African thinkers.

For instance, in an interview in 1983, Ngugi said:

"In history, economic and political control have never been complete without cultural control...In my view culture is the carrier of a people's values...Unfortunately, the colonial phase of imperialism did produce an African elite with the mentality that was in harmony with the needs of the ruling classes of the imperialist countries. And often it was this African elite, nurtured in the womb of imperialism, with the cultural eyeglasses from Europe, that came to power or who held the reins of power during the neo-colonial phase of imperialism. And it means that this class, because of the cultural-mental outlook it took from the imperialist ruling classes, does not see any contradiction between itself and the needs of the ruling classes of the imperialist nations.

"In fact that goes so far as to say that cultural control, as a means of economic and political control, is the most dominant factor during the neo-colonial phase of imperialism, and we as an African people must address ourselves to this if we are really serious about the liberation of the productive forces of African people."

*(The Commitment of the Intellectual by Ngugi wa Thiong'o: Review of African Political Economy, No. 32. (Apr., 1985), pp. 18-24.)*

This year, more than 25 years after the Ngugi interview, to mark the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Berlin Conference which balkanised Africa into European colonies, Ayi Kweyi Armah wrote:

"(During the imperialist and colonial era) Africans were encouraged to describe our society as thoughtless, rhythmic, playful, child-like, and irrational.

"An entire industry of Berlin-style African Studies grew up luxuriating in these facile - and false - assumptions. African intellectuals have played a shameful part in this hoax.

"We have helped to strengthen the stereotype of African studies as essentially mindless by grabbing opportunities to acquire lazy degrees in anthropology, after presenting our grandmothers' lullabies instead of studying new historical information, by focusing heavily on drumming and dancing (humorously tagged dondology) to the exclusion of more serious but less entertaining aspects of African culture, such as philosophy.

"In the process, we have helped cover up the fact that the European claim of proprietary rights over rationality is a-historical...

"In many ways, our universities and schools in Africa today are intended not to help our society live, but to fix it in a quasi-permanent state of half-life, half-death, as its vital resources get steadily drained away. Our universities, set to help us vegetate, are national universities; to help us live, they would have to become, or to be replaced by, African universities...

"The work of removing the divisive Berlin barriers, bringing African resources under African control, and making sure that the continent's resources serve to lift the continent's population into a humane life, will no doubt be more complicated than the straightforward anti-colonial struggles of the mid-20th century.

"It will require a knowledgeable generation of conscious Africans, able to turn themselves into skilled organisers, and determined to keep working steadily until they reach their goal: a united Africa, home to a people that knows its history from the beginnings of recorded time, and which knows enough about its cultural resources to understand that in order to find the intellectual resources any society needs to build its future, it need not go cadging concepts from alien sources.

“What we have to do, to start with, is to remember our dismembered heritage.”

*(New African, March 1, 2010.)*

The comments I have quoted made by Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Ayi Kwei Armah, constitute an immense challenge to you, Africa’s young and emerging intelligentsia.

They pose the question you must answer practically - are you ready to break with and distance yourselves from the kind of African intelligentsia they described and denounced, to constitute yourselves as thinkers who ‘know enough about our cultural resources to find the resources African society needs to build its future, with no need to go cadging concepts from alien sources’?

You, Africa’s student leaders, have convened at one of our venerable centres of learning, the University of Cape Town. Those who were here in 1998, four years after our liberation, will tell you of a famous debate that broke out bearing on the same matters raised by Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Ayi Kwei Armah.

A vigorous debate took place among the intelligentsia at this University focused on the teaching of the subject described as African Studies. One of the eminent protagonists in this important battle of ideas was the renowned Ugandan and African scholar, Professor Mahmood Mamdani.

In remarks he made at this University on April 22, 1998, Professor Mamdani said:

“The key question before us is: how to teach Africa in a post-apartheid academy. To answer this question, I will begin with some remarks on how Africa has been taught in the past. Historically, African Studies developed outside Africa, not within it. It was a study of Africa, but not by Africans. The context of this development was colonialism, the Cold War and apartheid. This period shaped the organisation of social science studies in the Western academy. The key division was between the disciplines and area studies. The disciplines studied the White experience as a universal, human, experience; area studies studied the experience of people of colour as an ethnic experience.”

He continued:

“I am aware that sections of the press have tried to sensationalise this (university) debate, and package it as a race issue. I am also aware that some in the university have helped them do so. I want to be honest. Race is not absent from this issue, but this is not a question that pits black against white. Broadly, it is a question about curriculum transformation, and about who should be making these decisions. Narrowly, it is a question about how Africa is to be taught in a post-apartheid academy.

“Students are being taught a curriculum which presumes that Africa begins at the Limpopo, and that this Africa has no intelligentsia worth reading. This version of Bantu education, of Bantu Studies called African Studies, is already being taught to every entering student in the social sciences, and will be compulsorily taught, force-fed, to every first year social science student from here on unless we, the faculty, say no.”

Earlier in his Address he had said:

“Universities, I hope we all agree, are about the pursuit of excellence, the reason why universities like to recognise, honour and encourage expertise. That, in my view, does not rule out democracy in an intellectual setting, for democracy combines acknowledging expertise alongside keeping it open to question, professorships along with peer review. This is why scholarship needs to go hand in hand with humility. Expertise is never final. Debate is never closed.”

As I am certain you can imagine, this debate about how Africa is to be taught in a post-apartheid academy touched some raw nerves, hence the degree of acrimony it evoked.

I refer to it because it provided a practical example of the struggle you might have to wage to turn yourselves into the kind of African intellectual Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Ayi Kwei Armah said Africa needs.

Unless you become this kind of intellectual, who dares to break loose from what Armah defined as the Berlin consensus, you will fail to achieve the objectives we detailed earlier, relating to the transformation of higher education in Africa.

Thus this self-definition of the African intelligentsia constitutes one of the most important tasks of Africa’s student leaders for the development of Africa.

Another, which follows almost automatically, is the positioning of the student leaders and the students they lead among the ordinary African masses, as allies with these masses in the common struggle for the progressive transformation of our Continent.

It was obviously not a pleasant thing that more than three decades ago the African university lost its privileged place as a pampered home of a young elite.

That loss of privilege provided our students with the opportunity to look more realistically at their place in society, no longer part of a predatory caste, but as a specially empowered segment of African society, which society owes itself the duty and responsibility to engage in sustained and protracted struggle to achieve progressive change in its own interest.

This means that one of the tasks of our student leaders and the students they lead is finally to break the mould in which the university is defined as an “ivory tower”, thus to project the African university in the eyes of the African masses

as a critically important part of the common patrimony they should value, positioned to help these masses to rid themselves of the ills that afflict them, including illiteracy, death from curable diseases, exploitation and abuse by a self-seeking elite, poverty and underdevelopment.

Inevitably this would increase the public accountability of the university, not as prescribed by statute or regulation, but by reason of the expectations of the people.

Professor Mahmood Mamdani addressed this issue when he spoke about what the Makerere Institute of Social Research he now leads would do to enhance its relevance to the people. He said:

“Today, the whole teaching focus is on how you solve a problem. (There should be a shift in focus), from looking for answers, to learning how to formulate a problem. About 90% of the solution lies in the problem. You cannot import a solution.

“I cannot take the design of a Swedish architect to build a house in Uganda. My design must reflect local conditions, use local resources in response to local problems. Anything from outside must be complementary to this. This is what we call sustainable development. Sustainable development requires research that leads to long-lasting solutions. Research means knowing the society you live in and knowing yourself.

“(At the Institute) we plan to do two things. We plan to address two different audiences. These include the scholarly communities and the public.

“We will have seminars for the scholarly communities and we will organise public policy forums on key issues, where we plan to bring together policy makers, the media, advocacy groups, religious groups, business – in short all sectors of society that influence public opinion which ultimately bears on decision making. This way, we shall be able to inject researched information into the public debate.”

*(USA Africa Dialogue Series: Mamdani on 'Commercialisation is Killing Makerere.)*

Thus to position the African university as an agent of change will require that you, our student leaders, take it as your special responsibility to engage in struggle for the renewal of the African university, the sole institution which will provide Africa with the critically important intellectual capital without which it cannot achieve its renaissance.

It is exactly this intelligentsia, including yourselves, on which we must rely to help us address correctly all the important matters on the agenda of the Summit Meeting, exactly the issues we must address to achieve the development of Africa.

Let me close by leaving you with a heartfelt plea made by Ayi Kwei Armah in the article to which we have referred. He says:

"To wake up from (the) spell (of Eurocentrism) and remake our society and our continent, Africans will have to retrieve our suppressed ability to conceive of our wholeness in both spatial and temporal terms;...we can begin doing this by rearticulating our dismembered society and remembering our suppressed history, philosophy, culture, science and arts;...for this awakening, all necessary intellectual information exists here and now, though in scattered form;...it requires the work of groups of determined researchers to bring it together, to process it, and to make it widely available in forms accessible to all - these being the requisite preparations for Africa's intellectual awakening."

*(New African: February 1, 2010.)*

The regenerated African university must be the principal driver of that intellectual awakening, which awakening will empower the peoples of Africa to remake our societies and our Continent. You, our student leaders and the students you lead, must, through your actions, place yourselves among the principal architects of the new African university.

Were you to succeed in this historic task of the renewal of the African university, with the benefits that would flow from this, all of us would rise and sound an ovation that would reverberate across the oceans, proclaiming that you, our student leaders, had succeeded to lay the foundations for Africa at last to rebuild Carthage, more than two millennia after the Roman Senator, Cato the Elder, declared that it must be destroyed and with its destruction, that Africa should be attached to the rest of the world as a hapless appendage.

Like the rest of the African masses, I am convinced that you, our student leaders and the students you lead, will not disappoint our expectation that you will use your considerable capacity as young African intellectuals both to comprehend and educate us about our African past and contemporary reality, the better to empower us to understand what we need to do today and tomorrow, together with you, to rebuild the glorious and magnificent city of Carthage!

Thank you.