**VICE CHANCELLOR’S OPENNING REMARKS DURING THE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY CELEBRATIONS ON 27TH AUGUST 2021 IN TAIFA HALL AT 2.30PM**

**Theme: The power of SMEs and Cottage Industries in spurring Regional Development**

Amb. Karimi P. Kaberia, Principal Secretary, State Department for Industrialization(SDI),

Dr. James Mwangi, Group Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Equity Group Holdings,

Mr. Julius Kirima, Director of Industry, SDI

Dr. Juliana Mwose, Secretary and Organizer, Association of Kenyan Diaspora Organizations, Inc.

The Panelists,

Faculty,

Entrepreneurs,

The Youth,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you to the University of Nairobi, Taifa Hall, to celebrate the International Youth Day 2021.

The International Youth Day is celebrated annually on 12th August in appreciation of the role the youth play in tackling global issues and achieving sustainable development. We belatedly join the global community in raising awareness on problems affecting the youth.

In furtherance to the 1999 resolution by the United Nations General Assembly endorsing recommendations by the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth in Lisbon, we together with the government and other stakeholders have found it befitting to engage the youth in the conversations about the issues affecting them and how they can be part of the solutions because nobody understands the youth better than the youth themselves.

As the saying goes: “If you are not on the table You are on the Menu”

It is imperative that we put the Youth issues on the table. We must empower the youth with skills to solve problems. We need to nurture their abundant talents and create a conducive environment for Youth innovations and entrepreneurship. Government policies should be geared towards ensuring that the youth have full access to education, healthcare, employment, financial services and that they are able to improve their wellbeing.

The University will continue to work with the government to support the Big 4 Agenda. We especially look forward to working the State Department for Industrialization to promote local manufacturing through implementation of the One Village One Product(OVOP) initiative.

As the government continues to disperse more resources to rural areas through devolution, there is hope that each region shall identify unique products for export and involve the youth in taking advantage of lucrative opportunities in international trade.

I challenge the youth to focus on improving the quality of local products through value addition in order to spur socio-economic development in rural areas of Kenya and support locally manufactured products especially from the rural areas in order to gain more access to international markets.

For this dream to be realized, the issue of attitude of our youths is critical. The youth must change their attitudes towards agriculture, attitude on entrepreneurship, attitude on informal employment and attitude about the consumption of locally manufactured products.

I want to encourage the government and the financial institutions to support the youth to have greater access to financial services, to have access to local and international markets and to help the youth to be self-reliant by being able to generate profits while increasing employment opportunities and playing their part in addressing the rampant state of joblessness among the youth in Kenya.

A World Bank (2013) report on skills development in the informal sector in Kenya concluded that the informal sector is the most important employer of youth in the non-farming sector. The youth account for a large percentage of those employed through the Jua Kali Sector. This report found that workers 15-24 and 25-34 years of age represented 42 and 41 percent respectively of those that were employed in the informal non farming sector. Thus, informal sector employs a huge percentage of the youth; the likelihood of a young worker being in the informal sector is higher than that of an older worker.

In this regard, I look forward to the One Village One Product(OVOP) to create numerous opportunities to the youth by supporting the leather cluster, textile market, metal cluster, agro processing and many more clusters.

The University of Nairobi is firmly committed to playing her part in transforming our country Kenya. We will continue to train and produce holistic young people with competency in Professional skills and soft skills that will catapult them to create impact and contribute to sustainable development in Kenya, in Africa and across the globe.

Finally, I would like to give special thanks to State Department of Industrialization and the University of Nairobi staff that put this event together; your efforts were not in vain. We look forward to establishing different partnerships and collaborations on initiatives such as the OVOP that seek to enrich the lives of the youth and those of our communities.

In the words of Robert Kennedy, “This world demands the qualities of youth: not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the love of ease”

The secret message communicated to young people today by our society is that they are not needed, yet the fact is that the society is not running itself nicely because we have ignored the energy, brains, imagination and talent that the young people can bring to solve our problems.

**Thank You and God Bless You All**

**PROF. STEPHEN KIAMA GITAHI, PHD**

**VICE CHANCELLOR**