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SPEECH BY THE CHANCELLOR,

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PROF. MAHMOOD MAMDANI

Prof. Mahmood Mamdani - Chancellor Kampala International University (KIU)

It warms my heart to see these flowing gowns. I congratulate you on a successful journey and on work accomplished! For over a millennium, these gowns have been a symbol of high learning from the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic. Should anyone ask you where they came from, tell them that the early universities of Europe - Oxford, Cambridge, *le Sorbonne* - borrowed them from the Islamic *madressa* of the Middle East. If they should seem incredulous, tell them that the gown did not come by itself: because medieval European scholars borrowed from the *madressa* much of the curriculum, from Greek philosophy to Iranian astronomy to Arab medicine and Indian mathematics, which is why they had little difficulty in accepting this flowing gown, modeled after the dress of the desert nomad, as their symbol of high learning. Should they still express surprise, ask them to take a second look at the gowns of the *ayatollahs* in Iran and Iraq and elsewhere and they will see the resemblance. Education has no boundaries. Neither does it have an end. As the Waswahili say: *elimu haina muisho*.

The Europeans were on the periphery of the world system in the 15th century. Their journey to the center involved learning from the centers of civilization, which in the 15th century included China, India and North

Africa. The Arabs and the North Africans were mainly intermediaries between Europe and the countries to the east. Whether they wanted silk from China, spices from India or gold from West Africa, Europeans had to go through Muslim traders. What they called 'voyages of discovery' from the 15th century were in reality a search for ways to go around the Arab middlemen to find direct routes to their supply centers in West Africa, India, China and other places.

The West - Europe and America - have dominated the world for over five centuries. We are in an era when new powers are emerging, especially China, India and Brazil, in that order. They bring with them new ways of understanding the world. But their rise to dominance will bring a time pregnant with various and contradictory possibilities, including the danger of wars and the promise of new departures. If they are wise, they will understand that they cannot make this journey alone. To make the journey, they will need to build alliances with those who have been marginalized by Western power. You need more than good words and promises to build alliances. You need to convince those you hope to partner that the change will also be in their interest. Rather than wait for them to tell us what will be in our interest, we need to tell them our interest. That is where we, including you, come in.

The European story teaches us that one must stand on the shoulders of others, not claim to wipe the slate clean and start afresh. We have been under European tutelage for centuries, one century in some places, five in others. We have to sift through that experience. Identify what is in our interest, but also what keeps us from opening our eyes. We also need to open our eyes to the rest of the world. Not just inwards nor just outward. But also to our own past. Not so we may try and recreate that past. But so we may learn something from roads not taken.

Last time, you graduated in the midst of a pandemic. This time, it is in the aftermath of extreme violence. Elections, it seems, are less and less about choice, more and more about compulsion, and force. Many do not vote, why not? In America, most times nearly half the voting age population does not vote. Why not? In American political science, there has been a long standing dispute: why does such a large proportion of the electorate abstain from voting? One side says: people do not vote because there is no choice. People do not vote because they are satisfied; because they do not want change. It seems democracy is not about participation, it is about consent, not about activism but passivity. If democracy becomes an exercise in no change, where do we look for change?

Hegel has an answer to this: institutions, he says, are hard and fast, cast in mortar and stone, like buildings, not easy to move - and yet the ground underneath is always shifting, always moving - Since the ground cannot be forced to *not* move, no matter how impressive the structure above, it will crack sooner or later.

So do you wait for it to crack, or do you built a shelter as you wait?

I am over 70. Can people of my generation meet this challenge? Human beings can be both selfish and generous. Both traits are found in all generations, from the youth to the elders. Historically, societies have looked to elders to prepare for the future, in spite of the fact that they will likely not be alive in that future. Why then do societies look to elders? For two reasons, a combination of experience and the possibility that since they will not be alive in the future, they may help prepare for it with less selfish motives.

Elders can advise, but they cannot do it. The youth have to do it. For that effort to succeed will need more than impulse, more than sheer force; it will also need a sense of direction. My advice: do not be taken for a ride by those who say only the youth can change the world. Change takes a joint effort from all of us - the young, the mature and elders.