

Speech by Hon. Najib Balala, E.G.H., M.P., Minister of State for National Heritage During the Inter-University Debate on the Black History Month at USIU, Nairobi, 18th February 2005.

The Vice Chancellor, USIU,
University Dons
Students,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I feel greatly privileged to be a guest speaker in this occasion marking the Black History Month in your institution. That sense of privilege is intensified by the fact that you are part of a global group that celebrates and acknowledges the contribution of Black People to the development of the world. More importantly, is the fact that this year's Black History Month is dedicated to the youth.

Throughout generations, black people have struggled against everything that was ugly, mean and degrading to humanity. From the giant of the civil rights movement in the United States, Martin Luther King Junior, from the pioneers of the Pan-Africanism movement, George Padmore and Dubois, the titan of the anti-Apartheid crusade in South Africa to the founding fathers of the African nations, we have a brilliant legacy. One that not only inspires but also drives those of us in the black nations of the world.

These leading lights, some alive and others long gone, are examples for the youth of today who aspire for leadership positions. Their lives are lessons in endurance, hard work, dedication and commitment. As the black youth of today we must arise and shine above the spoils of want and despair; we must move away from the brutal past of domination and neo-colonialism that threaten to drag us backwards. We must forever be committed to move forward, whatever the difficulties we face, with the assurance that our fathers and forefathers stood against odds. They secured a future for us that bespeaks of change, change for the better.

Contemporary black nations are conspicuously in the abyss; they are away from the pedestal of hope, peace, tranquility and progress. Africa is known for violence and insecurity. Since independence virtually every African country has experienced some form of violence or full scale war.

In Kenya the situation is not any better. At independence we were at the same level economically with the so called Asian tigers such as Singapore and Korea. Today the tigers stand at the threshold of becoming developed nations. While they nurtured their youth and opted for inclusive leadership and economic liberation, we stagnated. Instead we consigned our young leaders such as Tom Mboya, Pio Da Gama Pinto and Josiah Mwangi Kariuki into the graves.

I want to let you know young people that we have a mission to pull our nations out of the quagmire of poor and wanting leadership. We are the leaders of today not tomorrow as we have been told always. The black youth have made their contributions to the development of positive leadership in the world. If Barrack

Obama is the present example of such youthful leaders of today, Martin Luther was an example of yester years.

In Kenya over 70% of our population is youth. It is imperative that we take our rightful position in giving direction and vision to this country. We need to encourage the spirit of creativity and innovation that we see among our young people today. The youth, from musicians to young political leaders, have demonstrated their capacity for leading and others follow.

Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, leadership should be our singular aspiration until such time when we will restore the eroded norms of black leadership. We need to have our eyes trained on higher and better things. All is not lost. History is replicate with the remarkable resilience of the black people. They have weathered the storm over the years. We can and will not throw in the towel now.

But as we seek leadership positions we must not forget the challenges that lie ahead of us. To use the words of Martin Luther King in a different context I will say that those who brought independence to Africa gave the future generations a promisory note of good tidings to come. Modern African youth have taken the promisory note to the bank of opportunities, only to be given back their cheque marked with the words insufficient funds. The African dream has aborted.

However, we must not allow the shadows from our past to haunt us. Yes, the task of reviving this continent is so daunting. But I call for a vision and strategy framework for collective renewal. Let us go for our dream. Let us not tire.

In Kenya today leaders steal our money; robbers kill our brothers; greed has become our religion; our neighbours die of hunger; AIDS is decimating our people. And yet we go round singing the scintillating old melody that '*Kenya Nchi Yetu, Hakuna Matata!*'

Behold I want to say to you that there are problems in this country! Ours is a nation dominated by self-aggrandisement, political expediency and self-serving power brokers whose stock in trade include relentless efforts in self-preservation. These are vices we must overcome if we want to be a great nation.

And therefore as young people we have a role to play in the eradication of these ills in our society. In times like this we need to say no! We need to say no to the songs and lyrics that glorify obscenity and violence; we need to say no to whatever extols alcoholism, drugs and rape, the triple tragedies that are driving us into a morally bankrupt society; not only that, we need to say no to corrupt leadership that has constantly deprived our country of opportunities for development.

On the other side, my fellow brothers and sisters, we need to say yes to what builds us. Let us say yes to an information society where every one can create, share and receive knowledge; let us say yes to the path of moral uprightness as a way out of the Aids pandemic; let us say yes to social democracy, liberty and justice; we must indeed say yes to the aspirations of the highest level and work towards achieving them.

As we do that we will endeavour to build a country where the best wins irrespective of tribe, race and creed; a country that permits us to debate, struggle and fight for what we believe is right; one that is devoid of the despicable craving for instant material gratification.

Ladies and gentlemen, I challenge you, as young people, to appreciate the need for good leadership based on the rule of law. For us to enhance transparency and accountability in the management of public affairs, it is extremely useful to strengthen vibrant and youthful leadership in our country.

Thank you.