

REMARKS BY PROF. GEORGE A.O.MAGOHA, VICE CHANCELLOR UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI AT THE LAUNCH OF THE PAN AFRICA CHEMISTRY NETWORK AT CHIROMO CAMPUS ON 27TH MAY, 2008.

HE Mr. Adam Wood, the British High Commissioner to Kenya
Dr Simon Campbell CBE, Past-President RSC
Dr David Lawrence, Head of Research, Syngenta
Professor Mohamed Hassan, President of NASAC and CEO of TWAS
"Promoting Science, Technology and Innovation in Africa"
Dr Richard Pike, CEO RSC
Professor Lucy Irungu, Principal, College of Biological and Physical Sciences
Professor Shem Wandiga

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Very few projects have the distinguished pleasure of being born twice. The Pan Africa Chemistry Network was first launched in the United Kingdom on the 21st November, 2007. The launch we are celebrating today is to welcome home the project and make it known to the public and scientists resident in Kenya and in Africa. It is my pleasure to join the distinguished personalities gathered here today on this occasion.

We are delighted that the Royal Society of Chemistry and Syngenta chose to have the Network Hub located at the Department of Chemistry, University of Nairobi; the university which has served the continent for 38 years. During this period the University has made a mark in the sands of history as an institution of high caliber scholarship. This honour is due to the efforts my predecessors and colleagues have put in promoting chemical sciences nationally, regionally and internationally.

The university is very willing to shoulder the responsibilities that come with the prestige this function bestows on us. I on behalf of the government and the entire university fraternity thank the Royal Society of Chemistry, Syngenta and the United Kingdom government for the assistance given not only to my University but also to the continent.

Africa is less endowed in sufficient scientific knowledge and digital technology that drive the present globalized economy. The challenge to make Africa self sufficient in areas of weakness is so great that we cannot pretend to correct it with one effort as noble as this one. However, the efforts that PACN will make towards achievement of alleviation of poverty, improved food security, industrialization, and protection of the environment will be the yardstick for judging the success of our action today.

African governments desirous of rapid socio-economic development under the New Partnership for Africa Programme (NEPAD) Comprehensive Development Plan have agreed to creation, improvement and mobilization of financial resources and the necessary policies for science and technology to be produced and used to solve specific African problems. To this end the Kenya Government has set aside KSh. 200 million for support of scientific research. The resources that will be made available through the PACN activities will strengthen our secondary schools and university chemical sciences education.

I am aware that PACN activities alone will not solve all our academic and societal challenges but it will generate new knowledge and ideas that will accelerate the finding of solutions that assist the at risk societies in our midst. There are available technologies in the public domain that would be very practical and useful in lifting African people from the bondages of poverty and desperation. Translating these technologies into languages understandable by the at risk communities is the challenge of chemical scientists. Identification and improvement of access to technology that can be paid for or offered through deferred payment is a second responsibility that must be achieved by our chemical scientists. Such technologies are unknown to private sector players in the continent or if known it is not clear how to best package them for the benefit of the national economic growth.

A third area which is grey to most governments and industrialists is improved access to protected technology through negotiated rights. Knowledge of patents and patent pattern recognition is best achieved by scientists.

Lastly, chemical sciences have received notoriety in the public eye for its pollution of the environment. Yet it is chemistry that must find solution to pollution challenges. Every society desires to live in a clean and safe environment. The Network must assist us develop sustainably with due care for human health and the environment.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is now my pleasure to introduce and invite HE Mr. Adam Wood, the British High Commissioner to launch this important Network.