

**'The Role of Universities in Transforming Communities', address by Professor Jacobs, President and Vice-Chancellor UNSW Sydney, at Gulu University, Uganda, 6 August 2016**

Thank you, Minister, Chancellor, Vice Chancellor Pen-Mogi Nyeko, friends from Gulu University and the Gulu community, students, colleagues and the UNSW team.

It's a great honour to be here among our friends in Gulu. As many of you know, I'm no stranger to Uganda – since 2005 I have been here approximately 20 times and this is my 2<sup>nd</sup> visit to Gulu. My previous visits have been to work with colleagues in Uganda on the Uganda Women's Health Initiative which I set up whilst based in London, a programme which focuses on prevention of obstetric and neonatal complications, provision of palliative care and screening for cancer of the cervix and breast cancer. It is exciting to be back on this occasion as President and Vice Chancellor of UNSW, the University of New South Wales which is in the great city of Sydney, Australia where I have been based for the last 18 months. During the last decade I have fallen in love with your country and it is wonderful to be back meeting with Ugandan colleagues and friends. Every time I return, I'm struck by the warmth and enthusiasm of the people of Uganda. We had a memorable welcome yesterday at the airport with wonderful traditional dancing and singing and in our initial discussions yesterday afternoon with the Vice Chancellor and senior team of Gulu University I was struck by the passion to embrace change, to move forward and get things done.

Today we are progressing that spirit, with the signing this afternoon of a Memorandum of Understanding between our two universities. Yours, Gulu University, which is so important for this community, has made remarkable progress in a very short time. Since you commenced teaching in September 2002, you've awarded degrees to thousands of graduates, who are making an impact in areas from medicine to agriculture and are improving their lives and the lives of the people of Gulu and Uganda. This is an extraordinary achievement and a great example to us all of progress in action. I was privileged on my last visit here to attend a graduation ceremony and see 80 medical doctors awarded their degrees from the Gulu School of Medicine. That alone is an immensely important and satisfying development, given the demand for health services here in Gulu and I know that Gulu University is contributing much more in other areas.

My university, UNSW Sydney, the University of New South Wales, is fortunate to be in a country, Australia which has great wealth and resources. As a result we have over 50,000 students, 6000 staff and nine faculties. Now in its 67<sup>th</sup> year, UNSW Australia is recognised as one of the world's best universities - in the latest QS Rankings, we're 42<sup>nd</sup> in the world for academic reputation. We have 14,000 visiting international students from around the world and partnerships with over 400 universities in 39 countries. Recently we've joined up with Kings College London and Arizona State University to form the PLuS Alliance, which will maximize our global reach and impact. We *aspire to be* Australia's global university. As part of that effort we have set up a new Institute for Global Development and set ourselves the goal of reaching out to improve the lives of one-million people. We recognise the need to focus our efforts by engaging with communities in a limited number of areas around the

world. We will be working close to Australia in the South Pacific, a bit further away in Asia in Myanmar, and with your agreement we would also like to focus our efforts here across the other side of the world in Gulu, Uganda.

Our Global Development effort, already involves includes more than 250 projects in areas such as public health care, climate science, energy and water, AIDS/HIV, post conflict trauma and migration. These are all potential areas of value to Uganda, as is our expertise in sustainability, engineering and science, sexual and reproductive health, maternal health, and defence and security.

So this is the story of two universities Gulu and UNSW separated by vast distance, some 12,000 kilometres across land and sea, and by differences of scale and history, yet with a very common bond: to create a better world for all of us to live in. Some of the many options for collaboration we will be exploring today are development programs for academic staff, and visiting research fellowships in both directions in areas of shared interest such as mental health, justice, renewable energy, and infectious diseases; training for staff in areas of strategic priority, including library services, research infrastructure, and communications; and exchange PhD scholarships for Gulu and UNSW staff. We'll also be generating programs to give students from both universities a richer learning experience, including curricula reviews, best-practice teaching methodology and e-learning. And, importantly, UNSW will be working with colleagues at Gulu University to contribute to positive change here in northern Uganda, linking up the university, government and business, and supporting Gulu's aim to become Uganda's leading sustainable city.

In short, what we're going to do collectively is harness our most valuable resource - our people, in Sydney and Gulu - and allow innovative ideas to flourish, to strengthen resilience and stability, and help create the conditions for progress and prosperity. That's the project we're both committed to, and that's surely what universities are all about.

My view is that great universities are servants of their societies and of the global community and have a responsibility to play a major role in transforming societies. A truly great university doesn't stop at the edge of campus, but moves into its surrounding society and is, in turn, influenced and shaped by the society and its needs. Universities should be role models for the communities they serve: displaying transparency and openness, sound governance and a rigorous meritocracy, and encouraging freedom of thought and expression and a wide diversity of views.

But to explore the role of universities in transforming societies is to raise many questions, some of which appear simple but are not. Who for a start should get a university education? That's about access, and equity. And the curriculum - what should be taught and for whose needs? The individual, the nation, the economy, the future of humanity? Add to that the research question - what to research, what to prioritise, who makes those decisions, for what reasons - and we see that running and *shaping* a university is no easy task.

As the world faces unprecedented challenges, universities are expected to fill many roles.

They're seen by governments as providers of professionals and creators of wealth, as drivers of innovation; they're expected to solve endless crises - above all, economic problems. The President of Harvard, Drew Faust, highlighted this when she said, "There is a danger the focus on higher education as the fundamental engine of economic growth is proving so powerful it will distort our understanding of all that universities should and must be."

Human capital is the main product of great universities. That *can* be economic, enabling people to get better jobs, unlocking entrepreneurial activity and creating new enterprises, generating productivity. But it can also be social, helping to eradicate age-old problems in health, addressing inequality and prejudice and generating community interaction. It can be political, providing the leadership to build and sustain state institutions and inclusion. It can be cultural, developing national identity through history, languages, literature and the arts. And it can be personal, producing graduates who take pride in what they've achieved and becoming role models for others to follow. These are all forms of transformative human capital that celebrate the power of knowledge, and make us *all* more human.

A progressive university brings value not only to the national agenda but to the region it serves. Gulu University is already a major driver of ideas and expertise in your region, generating knowledge applicable to local problems - as well as providing regional perspectives on vital national issues. I was excited to hear that Gulu University is facilitating new higher education colleges in the region and spreading its impact.

Uganda has seen much suffering since independence in 1962, but it has also displayed remarkable strength - its people have overcome enormous challenges to reach a point of solid growth and relative stability. And here, today, I'm sure everyone agrees on one thing: that the absolute key to Uganda's future *is* education, at all levels. Gulu is leading the way and our team at UNSW will do all that we can to work with you.

Our strengths at UNSW are the considerable knowledge and expertise we have, and our willingness to work around the world; your strengths at GU are your incredible resilience, your determination to learn and progress and the remarkable achievement of creating a new university from such difficult circumstances. On that note I cannot finish without acknowledging the remarkable example of your vice chancellor Professor Pen-Mogi Nyeko. I am full of admiration, respect and awe for what Professor Nyeko has achieved over the last 14 years. There are few greater contributions an academic can make to his community and I know that this university will go on with the ethos of service to the community that he had put in place. That ethos is so clearly reflected by the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Bursar, deans, Directors and other university officers I have met. It is also shared by the eight colleagues I have brought with me to Gulu: Fiona Docherty, Professor Julian Cox, Professor Robyn Richmond, Marian Surgenor and Shahina Mohamed who have visited Gulu previously and professor Prem Ramburuth, Paula Bennett and Emily Waller who are making their first visit. The combined Gulu and UNSW teams working together will exchange our strengths, build our relationship and learn from each other, to generate outcomes for the people of Gulu far bigger than the sum of the parts. I care deeply for your country and through this partnership commit to working for the good

of the people of Gulu.

This is an exciting initiative -and again, I thank you for welcoming us into your lives, and for the opportunity to be part of what we all feel so passionately about: higher education, and Gulu itself, a wonderful place with a truly inspiring community.

Thank you.