

SPEECH BY ABE KASOZIAS GUEST OF HONOUR AT LIBRARY
DAY CELEBRATIONS AT MAKERERE UNIVERSITY, 21 MAY 2010.

Vice- Chancellor,
University Council Members,
University Librarian and your library colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am happy to be here to associate myself and the National Council for Higher Education with the celebrations to mark Library Day. On the outset I want to thank the University Librarian for inviting me as Guest of Honour at this function. We at the National Council believe that a library is a very important component of a university and that no university can be greater than its library. In other words a poor university service simply translates into a poor university and vice versa.

One of the major functions of the National Council is setting standards for higher education institutions. We have so far set a number of standards in areas of establishment of higher education institutions, institutional standards, the equating of qualifications issued by higher education institutions, minimum entry requirements for admissions to higher education institutions, quality assurance, curriculum, and minimum standards for courses of study. Libraries are so important that one of the first set of regulations we issued as the National Council as far back as 2005 are on University Libraries. This was before we pronounced ourselves on who can be admitted, who can teach or what can be taught in a university. If anybody had any doubt about the vital role of a university library in the provision of quality university education, he/she should perish that thought

In our regulations of 2005 on university libraries, we deal with library information resources, access to information, space and security, library staff, quality of service, information systems, reference services and last; but very important, information technologies.

I was privileged to be on the Visitation Committee to Public Universities appointed by the President in.....One of our findings was that libraries of public universities were in a very sad state. For many years money had not been provided for purchase of library resources. Even where money was voted for libraries, it was not always released and in times of hardships like when university staff or students threatened to go on strike library budgets were invariably the first casualties. The standards set by the National Council require that 10% of the university budget should be spent on the library. The library expenditure as a percentage of the university budget ranged from 1.3 % to 3% for this university between the years 2003/04 and 2005/06. The National Council standard for student to book ratio is 1:40. Findings in the Visitation Committee Report are that your ratio was 1:34. For Gulu University and for MUBS the ratio was as low as 1:5. A great

deal still remains to be done to make university libraries reach the required standards so that they can adequately serve the needs of the university communities.

There is, I am happy to note, some glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel with regard to the library services at Makerere University. The recently opened library extension and the planned further extension of the library are very encouraging developments. The digital information resources the library has shown us today also augur well. As the premier university library service in the country, you have played a leadership role in the Consortium of Ugandan University Libraries (CUUL). Through this consortium university libraries have been able to access scientific journals at a highly subsidized rate. By virtue of your being the oldest university in the country, you were given legal deposit rights and that has enriched your Africana collection. Given that unique position you need to reflect on how you can give access to the public to this unique collection, much as you may find it difficult to satisfy the needs of your university communities. I would therefore remiss in my duty as guest of honour and member of the National Council if I did not publicly applaud the tremendous work Prof. Maria Musoke and her colleagues have done to turn round the university library services. I am reliably informed that at the level of the University Council, the Vice-Chairperson, Mrs. Christine Kiganda has been an ardent supporter of the library. Mrs. Kiganda your support is greatly appreciated.

The cardinal role of the university is to offer the best opportunities for learning and teaching; research and publication; and community engagement. I am glad that the theme for this year's celebrations is "Makerere University Library : Beyond the Campus Walls". Simply put the focus for this year is university extension service or community engagement. The National Council strongly believes that a university exists in a community, is supported by the community and must, therefore, give back something to the community. A university is supposed to have the best brains and skills in the country and it is only fair and proper that the skills and brains of the university should be used to develop the community. How then can the university library get outside its campus walls to serve the community, when in the first place it may not be in position to fully meet the needs of the university community? That is a big challenge; but one you must confront.

In the 19560s and the 1970s during the days of Extramural Studies and the days of Centre for Continuing Education many Ugandans, especially those living upcountry got higher education through library collection Makerere had in places like Mbale, Fort Portal, Jinja, Kabale and Arua. In this digital era what can the university library service do to enable people outside the campus wall access information resources to enable them to acquire information or higher education? I leave that to you to ponder and to find a solution. A number of people, organizations and communities are setting up rural or community libraries all over the country. I put it to the university library staff to reflect on what you can do to support these efforts so that there is improved literacy and better education in rural areas, especially at the primary school level. There a scarcity of indigenous and appropriate books in Uganda because of the infancy of the publishing industry. As librarians you need to work with other players in the book industry to ensure that there are in place policies that favour the development of a vibrant indigenous publishing industry. How you will do that I leave to your imagination and resourcefulness. Illiteracy

is a scourge in this and other countries. Is that an area where you can be engaged? Is that too low for you?