

# **OPENING ADDRESS**

## **Vice Chancellor Prof. Francis J. Gichaga, University of Nairobi**

Prof. Dr. Hierold, Rector, University Bamberg; Prof. Heinrich Beck; Principal, College of Humanities and Social Sciences; Dean Faculty of Arts; Chairman, Department of Philosophy; Distinguished Guests; Ladies and Gentlemen.

I have great pleasure in welcoming you all to the University of Nairobi. I am also happy to have the privilege of opening the Sixth Annual Conference of the International Society for African Philosophy and Studies. At the University of Nairobi, we consider African philosophy to be one of our central areas of concern. We have had prominent and published philosophers in this field on our staff, such as the Late Prof. H. Odera Oruka, as well as Professors J. Nyasani and C. Oniang'o, who are still with us and Dr. Gerald Wanjohi who has retired. We like to think of University of Nairobi as a trend-setter in this emerging field. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the several graduate theses (both M.A. and Ph.D.) in our Department of Philosophy. We have had scholars from Europe, the U.S., and other parts of Africa visiting our campus here for many years, some of whom are with us now for this event. We fully support this branch of study within our curriculum, and are happy to play a role in strengthening it worldwide.

We are also happy to have the chance to offer the University of Nairobi as a venue for the continuing efforts of the International Society for African Philosophy and Studies. We extend our greetings to your Society's President, Prof. Olufemi Taiwo. This is your second conference on our continent Africa. We take heart that your society has not forgotten Africa as well as abroad. We look forward to this chance to have an exchange of ideas between Kenyans and those from different parts of Africa as well as between Africa and the U.S. and Europe. We also look forward to the publication of the conference's proceedings, facilitating this global exchange of ideas.

We look forward to hearing from Prof. Dr. Heinrich Beck of Otto Friedrich University, Bamberg, Germany, who has come here with his Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Hierold, to begin what we hope will be a long and fruitful exchange between his university and ours.

There will be several presenters at this conference who will explore the issues of mutual understanding between cultures. Such topics are important in our ever-increasingly interdependent world today. The conference's theme is "Thought and Practice in African Philosophy." This emphasis shows that philosophers are not just satisfied with merely thinking about abstract issues of little relevance to others, but instead that the current crises are also addressed. I understand that there will be papers on a wide range of topics, including papers discussing constitution-making, as well as those sorting out the moral dilemmas facing our law-making, problems with corruption, and the continuing legacy of colonialism. Also, there will be issues of women's equality and the implications

for Africa, as well as topics from Environmental Ethics to Democracy. This shows that philosophers here are not stuck in their ivory towers, and we are happy to note that.

While some may not know, African Philosophy has actually had a very long history, spanning back to ancient Egypt and continuing in medieval and early modern times throughout North Africa and also Ethiopia. We are happy to have with us Prof. Claude Sumner of Addis Ababa University, whose works have done so much to further our knowledge of the existing Ethiopian Philosophy literature. Many of you attending are of course familiar with the growth of the field of African Philosophy in the last century, beginning with Fr. Placide Tempels, who wrote his book *Bantu Philosophy*. Many scholars have been writing in the field since then, often criticizing each other, but always moving the debate forward. Those of you attending who are not familiar with the issues raised in African Philosophy, have chosen well to come here. For by listening to the scholars assembled here, you will get a good introduction to this field of study, and learn many details as well. I am sure that you will find that Philosophy as a whole, and African Philosophy, is worth your further time and attention. I look forward to the ideas to be presented here, and you must know that you are fully welcome at the University of Nairobi, the City of Nairobi and our Country.

As I conclude let me once again thank the organizers of this conference for bringing it to Nairobi because by doing so they assisted the University of Nairobi in achieving one of its objectives, namely that of developing and disseminating knowledge. I also must thank those who have provided the finance for the conference, especially Konrad Adenauer Foundation, and of course the distinguished participants, for without them there would have been no conference. I am now pleased to wish you successful deliberations.

Thank you.