Chancellor, Members of the Council, Vice Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen

This is a great personal honour bestowed on me. I have a Dutch PhD, a doktoraat, in human geography. Now, at last, I am a real Doctor of Science. Thank you!

This honorary degree is recognising a remarkably productive scientific collaboration between a Kenyan university and the Netherlands. It is rewarding all people who have done so much to make it a success. On the Dutch side I would like to single out my wife and colleague Annemieke van Haastrecht, who is here with me. She was the programme manager on the Dutch side of the collaboration with the School of Environmental Studies. On the Kenyan side I want to mention four people specifically. Of course first Professor Charles Okidi, the great initiator of our collaboration, which started in 1989 and which lasted until 2004. Second, Professor Wilson Yabann: the long-serving dean of the School of Environmental Studies. Third, Professor Joshua Akong’a, who has always been there to secure high performance of the social scientists in Moi University, and who was and is closest to my own research interests. And finally Susan Chebet - within an hour Dr Susan Chebet – who can truly be regarded as the ‘mother of the programme’, and who was a key mediator between both sides when the programme became really big. In 1986 she was my first contact at this university, 21 years ago. In addition I would like to mention my many Pokot friends. They made it possible for me to follow up on my research work in that fascinating part of Kenya: West Pokot.

Scientific collaboration can only work if it adds value to both sides. I think it did for both the Kenyan and the Dutch partners.

When Kenyan and Dutch people combine their talents the result can be a world class accomplishment. Last week, that remarkable Kalenjin lady proved it again. Lornah Kiplagat ran for two world records in one race: 20K and half marathon. She is a Kenyan, but she married a Dutchman. She is still very active in Iten, but she nowadays uses the Dutch colours on her shirt, which - by the way – happens to be the colour orange.

A Dutch newspaper commented upon her world class performance and it can be summarised by saying that Lorna combines the strengths of our two cultures: she is fast, smart, and uses every opportunity that comes her way. And in the interview her Dutch husband added: she sleeps 15 hours a day!

Lorna’s character is a good metaphor for our collaboration as well. Moi University has been fast indeed. It took my University of Amsterdam almost four centuries to have as many students as you have today, after just 20 years. You are smart too. There are so many brilliant people in and from this university and we have seen PhD and DPhil dissertations from your side which can compete with the best in the world. And together we have been opportunistic. We ‘grabbed’ every chance that came to us to find funds for research, and to train doctoral and Master’s students.

OK, you will say, what about the fifteen hours of sleep every day? Indeed, I often experienced that, between your many successes, you are often too invisible, and seemingly dormant. With all the talent gathered in Moi University I think it is time now that you strive for more international visibility.
Teaching many students, and graduating high numbers of them, as you do today, is important. Doing research and serious consultancies is important as well and I know that a lot is going on. But today the international academic community judges your performance by your internet visibility and by your publications.

I would recommend to this centre of innovation that your top-level staff and students join hands with the best scientists from elsewhere and that you strive for joint publications which are relevant for Kenyan development, but which also show your excellence to the world. Your chancellor, Professor Bethwell Ogot, has shown you how to do that. I know Dutch colleagues who want to continue with their contribution to that goal, and I am one of them.

Thank you.