

Varsity hosts Peace Conference targeting student leaders

The University of Nairobi hosted the 2017 Universities for a Sustainable Culture of Peace and Security, May 24-25, 2017 at its main campus. The two day Conference which drew participants from 50 public and private universities had the theme “the role of student leaders in a sustainable culture of peace and security in Kenya.

Speaking during the opening ceremony, Prof. Judith Bahemuka the UNESCO/UNITWIN Chair, who were the organizers of the Conference, , noted that the universities have been recognized as fore in promoting a culture for peaceful co-existence and to ensure that the community has responsible citizens. Universities are central to peace building and sustainable security through engagement in critical research that bridges the gap between research, policy and practice and the development of a curriculum to address peace and security.

The University of Nairobi’s Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Peter Mbithi observed that one major challenge facing our universities and the country in general is radicalization of youth. The output of radicalization is extreme violence, and at times terrorism. This is an area where Universities have to vigorously counter, with knowledge, technology and determination, all attempts to radicalize our youth in order to secure our country and national institutions. The other challenge is the increase in cyber crime. The pain experienced by ordinary Kenyan citizens due to cyber bullying, misguided information, and down-right stealing of funds from banks and other financial institutions can be minimized if the universities, particularly, the students, can play their part.

Prof. Mbithi reiterated that the most valuable resource that we have is our students. It is critical then that universities move away from looking at our students as a problem, but rather, as an asset, a great strength and a major resource for leadership and transformation of the Kenyan economy. Mbithi challenged the students to realize that they are critical thinkers, dynamic and energetic members of the University fraternity, and it was out of that conviction that the University of Nairobi had convened the Conference.

Other speakers at the Conference were unanimous in calling for youth to be engaged in peace and security given their high social competence, flexibility, exuberance and ability to challenge leadership. Indeed it was noted that students are great communicators and problem solvers, and thus they have a positive influence in the community and can write great stories that teach their peers that violence has an alternative solution of dialogue and communication.

Among the outputs of the Conference was bringing together university student leaders to become ambassadors of peace and security, well equipped with knowledge and skills to tease out solutions to violence and extremism, and to come up with mechanisms to stop violence.

The Conference drew expertise from university chancellors, the ministry of interior and coordination of national government, UNESCO, and the Office of the President.