



# “No Summit Too High”

**The Chancellor, the Board of Trustees, the University Council, the University Senate, esteemed faculty, students, staff, parents and guardians, alumni, distinguished guests, ladies, and gentlemen and most importantly, the remarkable graduating class of 2023,**

Good morning to you all.

Sir Edmund Hillary the first person to summit Mt. Everest once said it's not the mountains we conquer but ourselves. Class of 2023, you have conquered.



I stand before you today as Dr. Faith Mwendu Christopher, a Certified Investment and Financial Analyst, with a specialization in financial markets, derivatives, risk and compliance and corporate governance. I hold a Doctorate in Finance from the United States International University (USIU) and Columbia University, New York, with my research focusing on derivatives.

Beyond my academic and professional pursuits, I am actively engaged in youth mentorship and motivational speaking. I am also a passionate mountaineer, having conquered numerous peaks in Kenya, including Mt. Kenya, Mt. Kilimanjaro. I have trekked through challenging terrains, from Mt. Meru in Tanzania to Mt. Nyiragongo in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mt. Elgon, Mt Everest Base Camp and Lobuche Peak in Everest region among others. Additionally, I recently attempted to summit the highest mountain in the world, Mt. Everest in Nepal, Asia.

My journey began in the small, hilly village of Kithangathini in Kilungu, Makueni County, where I faced the struggles that come with a humble background. However, I overcame countless challenges and obstacles to become the individual I am today – a scholar, a certified investment and financial analyst, working with the capital markets Authority in compliance, an ISO auditor, a youth mentor, mental health champion, a guest lecturer, a mountaineer-climbing to champion my cherished themes of climate change, mental health and peace, a peer educator, swimmer, and a golfer.

As a child attending Kithangathini, a public primary school located five kilometres from my parents' home, I would trek through valleys and hills each day. The journey included crossing a river that would swell during the rainy season, making it a daunting task. But I persevered, driven by the desire to pursue education and excel in both my academic and professional life.

My parents played pivotal roles in shaping my journey. My father, my hero, always believed in me and instilled confidence in my abilities. His unwavering support motivated me to relentlessly pursue my dreams. To this day, his pride in my achievements continues to inspire me. My mother, a strict disciplinarian, taught me valuable lessons and helped me navigate through life's challenges.

Working alongside my parents and siblings on our family's coffee farms during weekends and holidays allowed me to experience the value of hard work and resilience. Sadly, the devastating effects of climate change have affected the coffee industry, and the vibrant village life that once thrived has diminished. Nonetheless, the memories of those times and the lessons learned endure.

It was my mother who unknowingly ignited my passion for mountaineering. Sending me on countless errands to the shopping centre at the foot of the hill, she inadvertently sparked my love for running and exploring the terrain. Those moments, while seemingly mundane, instilled in me a sense of adventure and a desire to conquer new heights.

As I ventured into mountaineering, I witnessed firsthand the impact of climate change on the natural landscapes I had cherished. Forests that once inspired me and nurtured a love for nature have dwindled, robbed of their beauty by human activities and the effects of global warming. The rivers and waterfalls that brought tranquillity and peace to our lives are now but distant memories.

Dear graduands, it is crucial to acknowledge those who have inspired us and served as mentors throughout our lives. In my case, there was a doctor in our extended family who commanded respect and admiration. People would travel far and wide seeking his advice and passing by our home on their way to "daktari's" (the doctor's-my uncle-Dr. Linge) place was a common occurrence. Although I was captivated by the allure of being a doctor at a young age, it was the guidance and encouragement of my uncle that fuelled my determination to succeed.

My journey to Riara University has brought me back to familiar grounds, but this time, I stand before you to inspire and motivate, just as I was once inspired. In a world often plagued by despair, hopelessness, and economic turmoil, I wondered what message I could share with you, the graduating class of 2023, to restore hope and remind you that dreams take flight and that no summit is too high.

During my doctoral studies, I encountered numerous challenges that demanded perseverance and sacrifice. Balancing work and academic commitments meant burning the midnight oil to meet the demanding thresholds set by my supervisor. The journey was arduous, much like scaling a mountain. But with unwavering mental strength and determination, I successfully reached the summit of my academic pursuit.

Just as the mountains present us with daunting challenges, life too throws obstacles our way. However, we must remember that every challenge is an opportunity for growth and that no summit is insurmountable. The key is to surround ourselves with reliable teams, just as mountaineers rely on sherpas, porters, guides, and fellow climbers. Together, we can achieve greatness.

Moreover, as we ascend a mountain, we often encounter setbacks that require us to descend before pushing forward again. Acclimatization, both in mountaineering and in life, is a vital process. It teaches us resilience and the importance of taking a step back to make progress.

Teamwork and adaptability are fundamental to success. As we transition from the university to the professional world, we must embrace change and adjust our approaches accordingly. We need to be agile and react quickly to the shifting dynamics of the world around us.

Dear graduands, today, we celebrate your remarkable achievements over the past four years. Your graduation is proof that with self-belief and determination, anything is possible. It is a testament to the power of perseverance and the significant impact it can have on our lives.

In a world where joblessness and economic turmoil prevail, I urge you not to be discouraged. Instead, be like the hummingbird, as mentioned by our very own Professor Wangari Maathai. When things get tough as I know they from time to time do, KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE, just as the late African American congress man and civil rights activist JOHN LEWIS once said. Take action and make your move based on the circumstances at hand. Do not let the narrative define you; instead, change the narrative by seeking opportunities to share your values and experiences.

Identify your strengths and be courageous in pursuing your goals. Embrace hard work, integrity, and a life of prayer and love for others. Seek to make a positive impact and influence in the world, not just for yourself, but for others as well.

As I reflect on my own journey, from the village to the world, I am reminded of the invaluable lessons learned along the way. Mountains have taught me the importance of agility, mental strength, and perseverance. They have shown me that failure is not a roadblock but a steppingstone to success.

Finally, dear graduands, remember that success is not solely defined by reaching the summit. It is the journey itself that shapes us and moulds us into the individuals we become. Embrace every challenge, treasure every setback, and continue to soar, for dreams truly do take flight for No Summit Too High.

Thank you.

**DR. FAITH MWENDE**  
**7TH COMMENCEMENT CHIEF GUEST**