

Convocation Address

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COL-Coursera Virtual Convocation Africa 2020

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We are very fortunate to be part of this historic occasion where we can see the future of education unfold before our eyes. This virtual convocation is a sign of the times when we have had to adopt new models of teaching and learning almost overnight. Since the students cannot go to the university, the university is coming to the student and that too free of cost!

And for this, we must thank Jeff Maggioncalda, and his team members, in particular Kevin Mills and Chad Pasha, for making this possible for 50,000 Commonwealth citizens across the globe. As you know it is a young Commonwealth with 60% of its population under the age of 30. Africa is even younger with a median age of 19. Youth unemployment in the Commonwealth at 17% is already higher than the global average. The covid-19 pandemic is expected to further exacerbate youth unemployment in the 54 Commonwealth member states which need skilling and reskilling of their work force. That is why the “Coursera Workforce Recovery Programme” is both timely and critical.

Let me also thank the Hon Ministers from Botswana, Ghana and Namibia for joining us today to encourage our learners. In Botswana, Hon. Minister, the helpdesk we established at the Botswana Open University, is supporting the learning needs of close to 500 unemployed citizens. In Ghana, Hon Minister, you will be pleased to note that more than 1,200 learners are graduating today. In Namibia when this free offer was first announced, some responsible citizens, who could not believe that such an offer was possible and that it was all a scam, complained to the police.

Warm congratulations to the 2000+ from 17 African countries on your well-deserved success. I hope this will encourage you to complete many more courses before the new year. I am especially happy to note that over 40% of those graduating are women and girls. In my view, individuals who have understood the power of online learning are any employer’s dream. If I were interviewing and you presented your Coursera certificates, I would certainly find that impressive. Why? Because you have demonstrated that you are motivated, focused, disciplined, digitally literate and above all lifelong learners. All these are attributes for success in the uncertain world that lies ahead.

It is also my pleasure to thank our partners who have provided on-site academic and administrative support to our learners. This has been especially valuable for first-time online learners, many of them located in rural and remote areas. I am sure this has also been a very pleasant experience for you as it was for me—a Coursera graduate. What I really liked was the variety of the well-researched course content taught by top professors; the small chunks in which the content was presented, instant feedback, interesting assignments and of course success which is always a great motivator!

I hope this partnership with Coursera, which is making a difference to the lives of thousands of Commonwealth citizens and their families, will be a long-term project with an even greater impact. Hon Ministers, we will continue to need your help to promote this initiative in your countries. Political will is critical and a circular coming from the ministry is always taken seriously.

As we celebrate your success, let us try and go beyond individual achievement to accomplishment, an important distinction that Marc Prensky makes. Individual achievement is about earning certificates and personal success but accomplishment is about making the world a better place and helping others. Let us resolve to embark on the path of accomplishment.

Concluding Remarks

Congratulations once again. Having successfully completed the courses, doesn't mean that your relationship with us ends today. I hope you will continue to learn and acquire additional skills until the end of the year. I am pleased to announce the formation of an Alumni group for Africa and each one of you will be invited to join. Let us make this a vibrant community of lifelong learners who support each other with knowledge, empathy and care.

We look forward to seeing you as our ambassadors in the field, committed to national development. COVID 19 is not the only disaster that we'll face—there could be many others—let us skill ourselves to become resilient to face the future with confidence.

Once again let me thank you Hon Ministers, Jeff Maggioncalda and his team at Coursera, our partners in the field and all the learners and invisible audience that have joined us today. I am most grateful to my own team at COL for making this such a special occasion. Special thanks are due to my colleague Shadrach who has taken this as a personal mission and has worked almost round the clock to ensure that it reaches the last person in the queue.