

**Launch of the Bachelor of Science in Leadership & Management Programme.  
Strathmore University  
Intercontinental Hotel, 28 March 2008**

**Remarks by H.E. Ambassador Elisabeth Jacobsen**

Honourable MPS. Government representatives, The Chancellor and Vice Chancellor of Strathmore university, faculty members, students, friends from Non Governmental Organizations, ladies and gentlemen.

First of all let me thank the leadership of this prestigious university for being innovative and creative in launching a new Bachelor of Science in Leadership and Management Programme. Having thought about it – I realized that choosing a diplomat to make some remarks on the importance of innovation and creativity is quite appropriate. These are the two crucial virtues that diplomats should be inspired by in the continuous struggle to find possibilities, solutions and agreements in situations characterized by distrust, deadlock and seemingly incompatible interests.

On the other hand – diplomats are generally not thought of as leaders – but more as people who facilitate cooperation between governments at various levels and know how to convey the decisions that their governments make to other governments. Recently a political leader described us as “junior officers in the order of pecking”. That, however, does not detract from the fact that leadership is exerted at every level of society – every day – every hour – including by diplomats.

With this as a backdrop I am very honoured and pleased to share some thoughts with you this evening.

It has been said that “*management is doing things right – while leadership is doing the right things*”. If we move beyond elegant quotes, many will agree that it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what it is that constitutes good leadership. On the other hand, it does not take a much trained eye to identify cases where good leadership is in short supply. Who in this audience would not like to have seen more and better leadership everywhere in Kenya during the first two months following the 27 December elections?

Then, on 28 February we all witnessed what a difference real leadership at the highest political level can make. Many will argue that this needed political leadership came late, not without certain pressure and that even firmer leadership is needed in the weeks to come. My point, however, is that the political courage the two principals demonstrated in the afternoon of 28 February conveys some lessons of great value for future leaders in this country – whatever sector of society they may aspire to exercise their leadership and management skills within.

There may be some natural talents that are born to lead, but even such people must hone, develop and modernize their leadership and management skills according to the shifting environment they are working within. From my experience, good leadership and management is always a result of hard work and the constant ability and willingness to ask critical questions about the way things are being done in an organization. Without the leadership asking or accepting the critical questions – organizations are seldom successful. Rather they tend to become irrelevant.

As I have already used examples from Kenya in my remarks – it is my instinct as an ambassador to balance the picture by also pointing to shortcomings from my own country. My own employer, The Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is grappling with the challenges of innovation and adaptation to new realities as we speak.

Our own ‘wake up call’ as an organization was as abrupt and massive as it was tragic. It was nothing less than the December 2004 Tsunami which killed more than one hundred and twenty thousand people and caused havoc from South East Asia to the shores of East Africa. Many Norwegian tourists, mostly in Thailand, lost their lives.

While nobody blamed the Norwegian Ministry of foreign Affairs for the death and destruction caused by the Tsunami – we were unable to meet the high expectations of the Norwegian society at large when it came to assisting victims and family members of those killed by the Tsunami.

As a service consisting mainly of generalists, we were not trained, equipped or deployed in a way that made us able to deal efficiently with a consular catastrophe of such a magnitude.

And this is where the issue of good leadership comes up. Training, equipping and deploying employees according to the goals of the organizations – and the needs of the clients – are at the very core of good leadership and management.

This is where we had failed as nobody had asked the critical question whether we were “doing the right things”. Nobody had been busy innovating our service as a large number of Norwegian tourists shifted travel habits from Southern Europe to South East Asia. No-one had been creative enough to establish a roster of crisis management experts to draw upon for contingencies like this one.

After the Tsunami the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was subjected to a major external and internal scrutiny – and it became evident that a thorough modernization exercise was long overdue.

As a result of this exercise the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs came up with a list of criteria for good leadership. These are highly relevant for this evening’s topic and I would like to share some of the points with you.

The three overarching themes for the new leadership criteria are:

- Courage
- Transparency, and
- Team spirit

I have already mentioned the importance of courage in the context of the 28 February political accord struck by the two principals. I see courage as a crucial leadership criterion-also in the context of creativity and innovation. It takes courage to accept and promote change, to break away from the conventions. – from what has always worked – to something new, unknown, uncertain – but, nevertheless, necessary.

In good times it may be easy to demonstrate leadership and to be accepted as a leader. It is in critical times and times of transformation where good and courageous leadership is indispensable. That is when leadership may involve sacrifices. And leaders must choose what principles to stand up for. Courageous leaders fight for specific and often long-term objectives and goals they believe in, not only to be liked or to gain short term personal benefits.

To take the situation of Kenya as an example – these are the times where leaders will have to rise above ethnic loyalty and for political leaders to demonstrate loyalty to national values or for leaders of institutions and organizations to demonstrate leadership according to the core value and objectives of these institutions.

Transparency and team spirit are two vital management criteria. In the domain of information sharing my own ministry only recently went from “need to know” as a general management reflex to “nice to know”. As a result of this new thinking, by way of the Ministry’s intra-net, any Norwegian diplomat – anywhere in the world – can almost instantly access the minutes from the foreign Ministers strategic meetings with the Ministry’s Director Generals. This is transparency – this is concrete and really useful innovation – this is an example of good leadership and management.

The other side of transparency coin is accountability. When information is free and decisions are made public or known to everybody within a certain organization, it is possible for citizens to hold their leaders accountable and for members of an organization or a company to hold their leaders to account. Some leaders don’t like to be scrutinized, but I would argue that this is necessary for genuine dialogue between those who lead and those who are being led. And without this dialogue it is hard to promote innovation and sustainable change and for countries and organizations to grow and prosper. Good and accountable leaders don’t only talk and make nice speeches – they also follow up on promises made. They ask questions – what happened in the past? - And they learn from past experiences and past mistakes. They follow up on what has been unaccomplished.

Of all the seminars I have attended since I came to Kenya, there is one I will always remember. It was a discussion among researchers and civil servants on the comparison between Kenya and Malaysia as regards economic development. After independence these two countries had approximately the same economic scores, but 40 years later Malaysia is far ahead and Kenya is lagging behind the Asian tigers. After having looked

into many factors the seminar concluded that the reason was not lack of human resources, and it was not lack of development strategies and plans, but rather the lack of follow up to all the strategies, plans and reports that had been issues. In short there has been lack of accountable leadership willing to ensue proper follow up to strategies and decisions already made.

**Team spirit** has a lot to do with transparency as in sharing of information that others need to do a good job – but it is much more. Team spirit is leadership that truly recognizes how the efforts of every individual are indispensable to the organizations results. Team spirit is a mode of work where the leadership and management give due credit to those “walk the walk” rather than taking the credit themselves.

Leadership based on team spirit means working together and achieving results through others. It means talking with people, not to people. And it means listening. It does not mean exercising power over the employees or the mwananchi, it means that leaders must earn respect and loyalty from their followers. Leadership must be earned, not bought. And it means leadership by practical examples. Leaders who are willing to serve and care for their people or their employees instead of showing off their wealth, will gain more respect and will be able to reach far when it comes to achieving results.

Those of you who have listened to Julius Kipng’etich, the managing director of KWS will now what I am talking about. By attending to small things like untidiness and uncleanliness in the offices he managed to change the working moral and getting the staff involved in transforming the organization.

The example from the Norwegian ministry of Foreign affairs has served as an entry point fro what I wanted to say about leadership, but there is of course much more to say. Let me just mention the need for visionary leadership. It is not enough to do things right if you don’t do the right things. It requires courage, but also visionary leadership.

As I conclude my remarks I would like to congratulate Strathmore University with the launch of their new Bachelor of Science Programme. With this launch you are adapting your organization to meet the needs of the people of Kenya. With the emphasis you put on critical thinking, creativity and innovation in the curriculum, I am sure that in ten years from now – you will celebrate the success of this programme. I am also sure that in 10 years, many of the graduates will be busy leading a more peaceful, prosperous and progressive Kenya.