**Welcome speech by the Vice Chancellor – Dr Daniel Tau at the 2nd BOU Graduation Ceremony held at the Ditshupo Hall, Gaborone 22nd November 2019**

***Theme: Embracing Technology-enhanced Open and Distance Learning***

* **Your Honour, Former Vice President and Chancellor of BOU, Dr Ponatshego Honorius Kefaeng Kedikilwe;**
* **Honourable Minister of Tertiary Education, Research, Science and Technology, Dr Douglas Letsholathebe;**
* **Members of Parliament present;**
* **Chairman of Ntlo ya Dikgosi, Kgosi Puso Gaborone and Dikgosi Present;**
* **Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps;**
* **Chairperson of BOU Council, Mr Charles Coyne and Members of Council Present;**
* **PS – Ministry of Tertiary Education, Research, Science and Technology – Dr Theophilus Mooko and Deputies;**
* **Vice Chancellors of Sister Universities and Members of the Wider Academic Community;**
* **Commissioner of Police – Rre Mokgophe;**
* **Chief Executive – NAMCOL;**
* **Chief Executive, Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSSI);**
* **Senior Government Officials and Chief Executives present;**
* **The Reverend Ministering at this Ceremony, Bishop Dr Habibo;**
* **President of BOU SRC and Members of your Council;**
* **Graduands and your Families;**
* **Members of the Fourth Estate; and**
* **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.**

**It is my distinct pleasure, honour and privilege to welcome you to the 2nd Graduation Ceremony of the Botswana Open University. This 2019 convocation stands out as a uniquely celebratory occasion. As we reflect on the milestones and initiatives towards the consolidation of our status as a university, founded on what we believe to be well thought-out and benchmarked standards and systems, today we take recognition of two hallmarks of success; the 2nd graduation itself and the strides we have made and continue to make towards “embracing technology-enhanced Open and Distance Learning”.**

**This morning, we present for conferment with various academic distinctions, a total of 1627 graduands deriving from 20 academic programmes. The graduation output represents a 16% increase over the output of 1368 in respect of 2018. As was the case in the previous year, the programmes constituting this year’s output span certificate, diploma, undergraduate and graduate degree as well as post graduate certificate levels. What is of greater significance is the increase of graduands at the under-graduate degree and post-graduate levels, where the output has risen by 20% and 34% respectively. This emergent growth coupled with diversity of programmes, does not only entrench our status as a competent tertiary education provider within the context of the obtaining regulatory and legislative frameworks. It also represents a strong indication of our inclination to embrace an orientation reminiscent of the desire to cultivate university culture and practice.**

**Distinguished Chancellor, Honourable Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen, the theme adopted for this year’s graduation is “Embracing Technology-enhanced Open and Distance Learning”. The adoption of the theme was motivated by among other things, the National Vision 2036 ideals of a knowledge-based society, the central intent of our university’s 2036 Strategic Framework as well as the overarching objective of our 2019-2023 Strategic Plan, all of which perceive technology as the nexus of human pursuits into the future. All the referred frameworks have profound influence on our programming and pedagogical modalities given the fact that Open and Distance Learning, as a field of study, is driven by technology in more ways than one.**

**Botswana Open University has made significant progress towards integration of technology in its teaching and learning processes. Applications for study, registration into our tertiary programmes as well as payment of fees thereto, can now be done from any place in the world where there is access to internet. We have also institutionalised virtual teaching and learning between our Headquarters and four out of five of the supporting Regional Campuses. The outstanding campus in Palapye cannot for now access the latter services because of the absence of customised infrastructure. All but two of the programmes for which we will be conferring awards are technology mediated. Most of the graduands have therefore used technology to receive instruction and have received learning support *vide* e-resources available in our institutional on-line portals as well as international portals and platforms to which we subscribe, or are participants in the development thereof. We are therefore pleased to state that the graduands we are presenting are technology “savvy” and have significantly metamorphosed from the downright digital immigrants many of them were on admission for study.**

**BOU recognises that whilst technological changes precipitating from the emergent industrial era will pose challenges to existing labour market arrangements, the same dynamics of technological change will become “the primary drivers of opportunities for new growth”. It is with this in mind that the university is keen to develop its students into digitally literate and adaptable graduates who should be able to leverage the opportunities precipitating from technological advances. We are convinced that as a newly instituted open university, operating within a rich network of mature, accessible and technology-enabled open universities, we have an opportunity to “frog leap” into advanced technologically based education development and delivery for the eventual benefit of Batswana as they brace themselves for the inevitable and irreversible era of disruption.**

**Director of Ceremonies, Batswana should be encouraged to increasingly embrace BOU and take comfort from the fact BOU is grounded on its ODL pursuits, and that it works in partnership with mature and reputable open universities under the auspices of the International Council on Distance Education, African Council on Distance Education and the Commonwealth of Learning to ensure quality and dependability of its programmes, systems and pedagogical approaches. The same networks and organisations assist the university in its internationalisation pursuits.**

**It is in this aura of commitment to achieve that I warmly welcome the Guest of Honour, Dr Douglas Letsholathebe, Honourable Minister of Tertiary Education, Research, Science and Technology and his Executive Team led by the Permanent Secretary. We congratulate you Sir, for your ascendance to the Office of Minister, and thank you for gracing this graduation. We await your address with bated breath. We acknowledge the presence of our Distinguished Chancellor, Chairperson and Members of the BOU Council, Vice Chancellor of Zimbabwe Open University whose institution has over the years, remained our solid strategic partner, Chief Executive of NAMCOL - Our long-time Quality Assurance Peer Reviewer, Vice Chancellors of our sister Universities, and Members of the wider academic community as well as Stakeholders on whose shoulders we have ridden and continue to ride. To us, your presence represents a gesture of appreciation and moral support; and is symbolic of the assurance that in you, we have a pool of trusted and loyal friends.**

**Most significantly, I wish to welcome the 2019 graduating class which is at the centre of today’s event. We commend graduands for their resilience and tenacity. We thank them most heartily for their perseverance as they did not despair even during the tumultuous storms of having to juggle between a maze of obligations. Many of the graduands will testify that their study was not a bed of roses, owing to the fact that over 80% of them are workers in stations situated hundreds of kilometres from the physical site of the university. In the case of the MEDEL graduands from NAMCOL, the distance is over 1200km. The graduands have had to meticulously plan for allocation of time for study, family and leisure in addition to their permanent employment. Discipline, commitment, sacrifice and other hard-to-possess human virtues therefore, account for the success we celebrate today. We welcome them to another milestone of life-long learning, and urge them to follow in the footsteps of some of our graduates who have gained admission to read for doctoral degrees at the University of Botswana and South African Universities of Pretoria and Johannesburg. May we, ladies and gentlemen applaud the graduands for their individual and collective efforts!!**

**Distinguished Chancellor, the profundity of my hearty welcome is difficult to express in words. Let me thus qualify my remarks with some few observations. Our Government has been exceptionally supportive of the establishment of BOU. This continues to be the case even against socio-economic challenges that have been and continue to be cataclysmal at local and global levels.**

**Clearly, Government recognises the significance of Open and Distance Learning in an environment where conventional education would not, on its own, accommodate the many potential learners in quest of further education and training, and satisfy the desire to raise the national tertiary enrolment rate to a level commensurate with Botswana’s status as an upper middle-income country. Thus, the resourcing of ODL and BOU in particular, should be conceptualised in tandem with projected statistics within the population growth matrix. It is envisaged that the steadily increasing population of Botswana will have nearly doubled by 2036, the target year for the country to have attained “developed economy or high-income status”. Unfortunately however, economic growth for now, and predictably into the foreseeable future, will be constrained by limited inflow of revenue. For that rationalisation, the Government has repeatedly emphasised investment in “low-cost, high-impact projects”. Admittedly, education is the single most expensive social obligation on the national fiscus; hence the need to promote cost-efficiency requires no emphasis. Given this reality and the fact that ODL is cost-effective, its consolidation as part of the core-strategy for education and training deserves prioritisation going forward. Given sufficient support, ODL clearly has the potential to increasingly make tertiary education a public good and could also help Botswana to expeditiously realise the ideal of inclusive education within the context of the United Nation’s SDG4.**

**Through your Office Honourable Minister, we wish to appreciate Government for the National IT infrastructure upon which we have, as a decentralised Open University, anchored our Wide Area Network which in turn supports our virtual teaching and learning activities. It would be appreciated even more if the existing infrastructure could expeditiously be extended to areas that lie outside the current national grid, so that institutions like BOU could reach out to population segments that currently remain unreached.**

**Distinguished Chancellor and Honourable Minister, as we go forward as an institution of higher learning, our *modus operandi* will continue to be anchored partly on the core principles of the strategy of our parent Ministry, which revolve around collaboration, co-production and consuming. We shall continue to leverage the strengths and capacities within our local, regional and international contexts to bring to Batswana best practice in the provision of education products and services. We should profoundly appreciate the presence of our partners at this convocation, being; Botswana Police Service, REPSSI, local universities, Zimbabwe Open University, NAMCOL, MoTE Parastatals, Retired Academics and Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development for the special contributions they have made towards this graduation. We are truly humbled!!**

**With those remarks, allow me to once again express my exhilaration at your presence distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen. You are most welcome!!**

**Thank you.**