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| **TOWN HALL REMARKS**  UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE  Tuesday, February 19, 2013 |
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Good Morning UMES Family.

Thank you all for coming out this morning to discuss our recent losses and to support and reinforce our UMES community.

When I was a little girl, I was my father’s “pet.” You might say I was spoiled. Whenever something didn’t go my way, I would complain to my father and he would try his best to fix it. One day, something happened and my father was not around. I went to my mother crying and said, “It’s not fair.” My mother looked at me and said, “Life is not fair. Get over it!” I thought that was the meanest response ever. A few years later, when I was 13, my mother went to church one Sunday and never came home. She died at the age of 36 of a cerebral hemorrhage right there in the church kitchen.

Over the years, that harsh and stern admonition, “Life is not fair. Get over it,” has helped me through many, many rough times in my life. That advice came back to me this weekend as I learned of the murder of one of my students, Edmond St. Clair, right here on campus and then again yesterday, after learning of the death of former student, Dickson Muiruri.

It’s not fair that a bright young man was taken away from us. It’s not fair that Edmond’s family and friends have lost a loved one and we have lost a member of our family. It’s not fair that this senseless act occurred on our campus, during homecoming. It’s not fair that despite all of the great things happening at UMES, we have been thrust into the spotlight under such negative circumstances. Its not fair that while we are still grieving one loss, we have to endure another loss in the death of Dickson Muiruri. And its not fair that another family has lost a loved one.

Life is not fair. But, we have to get over it. While this is a defining moment in the life of our campus, we cannot allow ourselves to be defined by the violence that took the life of Edmond or the despair that ended the life of Dickson.

Just as I was able to survive the loss of my mother when I needed her most, we will survive our losses. Just as I have grown stronger with each injustice that I have overcome, we will get stronger from this injustice. We must and we will get over it. And we will grow stronger as individuals and as a UMES family.

Until this past Saturday, we have sympathetically mourned with other communities in their own tragedies and have been humbled that we were spared. Then, when one of our own was killed in an unspeakable and tragic act of violence, we were reminded that despite our efforts to remain a place of safety, sanctuary and learning, we are not immune to the tragedies of the world. UMES is a microcosm of the society and the world in which we live. We do not have a bubble that we can lower to protect us from the outside world, or even from the ills of the world that sometime enter here with us.

These are turbulent times for us, but today I want to talk about Edmond and Dickson. I want to talk about you; and I want to talk about how we move our community forward.

Edmond was a student who professors said stood out in a class. He dreamed of becoming a doctor; he had a passion for producing reggae-style music. Although many of you may have known him, I did not. However, I have learned a lot about him in the days since his death. Like many of the more that 4,000 students here, he came here to pursue an education that would provide him with a career of his dreams. He had passion and he had potential.

Dickson was a veteran who upon his discharge chose to pursue a degree in Aviation Science here. While he might have faced some challenges, he also was seeking opportunity for a better life.

In the wake of these tragic events, you may ask, “How do we get over it?”

The next part of our journey must be one of empowerment. While this is a defining moment in the life of this university, we cannot allow this violent act to define us. I stand before you a different person than I was three days ago. We are all different now. We are more aware of both our surroundings and of our feelings of well being; we are going on with our lives while trying to process our loss; we are challenging ourselves as a community to offer support to one another; we are shocked, and pained, and angry, and sad as we are moving through the stages of grief.

But, we are also a vibrant community of over 4,000 students and hundreds of faculty, staff and administrators. We are smart; we are resilient; we are tough; we are powerful. We are not victims.

We must, and we will, take steps to ensure the continued safety of those within our care and within our employ. Indeed, we are comitted to doing more than just “promising to tighten security measures,” we **have** tightened security measures. We will explore all avenues to ensure that our campus is safe and secure, to the best of our ability, within the society in which we live.

We must encourage one another to act when we see or hear about violence on our campus and in our community.

We must support one another in times of crisis like this. Yes, this journey involves the realization that the strong seek help, the strong seek support. Stop for a moment and look around, we are all here to support you. We are our brother’s keeper, we are our “Hawks” keeper.

Talk to someone, your dean, a faculty member, or me. Allow us the opportunity to provide the support that belongs to you, our most precious resource.

We must inspire each other and our community to make a difference. We must overcome the inclination to retreat inwardly and live in fear. We must find the strength to move forward, and to move on, in a society that isn’t always safe, where people hurt others, and don’t always act the way that we may want them to, or treat us the way that we would like. We must remember that in times like these, we can do something. We can choose to do something.

If you are here today and you are angry, upset, and afraid…

If you are discouraged, concerned…

Turn those emotions into a force for good. Help us make our campus intolerant to violence…

impatient of disrespect for the lives others

…and inconsistent with injustice.

Let us turn these days into a motivating force and embrace the words from the poem “Invictus”----

“in the fell clutch of circumstance

I have not winced, nor cried aloud

under the bludgeoning of chance

my head is bloodied, but unbowed…

beyond this place of wrath and tears,

looms but the horrors of the shade,

and yet the menace of the years,

finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how straight the gate,

how charge with punishment the scroll,

I am the master of my fate,

I am the captain of my soul.”

This is a challenging time for the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. This is where we find out what “Hawk Pride” is made of. This is the time for us to take the lead in creating a new reality for our University, our community, and ourselves. John F. Kennedy explained,

When written in Chinese the word crisis is composed of two characters.

One represents danger, and the other represents opportunity.

Today we embrace our opportunity. Yes Hawks, we are bowed, but I stand here this morning to affirm that we are not broken.

*“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”*

*Martin Luther King Jr.*

*Thank You.*