

ADDRESS BY STATE PRESIDENT NELSON MANDELA AND CHIEF JUSTICE ISMAIL MAHOMED ACCEPTING THE HONORARY DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF LAWS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

Paper 10

Centre for Human Rights

University of Pretoria

December 1998

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT MANDELA ON RECEIVING AN HONORARY DEGREE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA ON 4 DECEMBER 1997

Kanselier;

Visekanselier;

Voorsitter en Lede van die Raad;

Lede van die Senaat en Fakulteite;

Voorsitter en Lede van die Studenteraad;

Die Algemene Studenteliggaam;

Administratiewe en Dienspersoneel;

Dames en here,

Dit is baie maklik om lee woorde te gebruik, en gewoon om hoflikheidsomhalwe te sê wat 'n groot eer 'n mens aangedoen word. Ek sou egter vandag wou hê dat u moet weet hoe diep geraak ek is deur hierdie eerbetoon wat u as universiteit aan my bring.

Dit is goed dat ons die verlede agterlaat het en nie te veel daarvoor tob nie. Maar miskien vergeet ons, aan die ander kant, ook te gou en te maklik hoe verdeeld en verskeurd ons was, en watter wonderlike prestasie dit was om daardie verdeeldheid sonder vernietigende bloedvergieting te bowe te kom. Hierdie byeenkoms vandag behoort ons, al is dit net vir 'n oomblik, te herinner aan die pad wat ons in hierdie kort tydjie geloop het om 'n verenigde samelewing te bou. Hierdie inrigting en sy ere-graduand kom uit sterk uiteenlopende geskiedenis en agtergronde. Vandag is ons hier bymekaar met 'n groot mate van eensgesindheid oor die visie en ideale vir ons land en sy mense.

I am proud to be thus associated with the University of Pretoria. I am honoured to be the recipient of an award through which you are paying tribute to our nation as a whole, for their achievement in overcoming our past of conflict and division and joining hands to work for shared ideas. I humbly accept it in their name.

In its past this University had a reputation for serving a particular ideology which inflicted great suffering upon the majority in our country. Today it is a transformed and transforming institution, providing further testimony to my conviction that in spite of a political past that dealt terrible cruelty to fellow citizens with great insensitivity, Afrikaners when they change, do so completely, becoming people upon whom one can trust fully.

As our institutions transform, changing their composition to reflect the diversity of our rainbow nation, we must not be too surprised or disheartened if and when tension and conflict come to the surface, as it has on some occasions on this campus. We have not fallen from heaven into this new South Africa; we all come crawling from the mud of a deeply racially divided past. And as we go towards that brighter future and stumble on the way, it is incumbent upon each of us to pick the other up and mutually cleanse ourselves.

Our institutions of higher learning should stand at the centre of this process of eradicating all remnants of racism and creating a culture that is hostile to racism. In a country which had been so steeped in structured racism and racial discrimination, it is surprising that there is so little research, theoretical work or informed public debate on the subject of racism and its elimination.

It was encouraging to learn of the firm disciplinary steps the university has taken against manifestations of racism and discrimination, and its public messages to the campus community on this issue. This combination of concrete action and public education shows the way for us to tackle the ugly legacy of our past and construct a new future. It illustrates the true meaning of reconciliation in our country, which is not simply a matter of putting the past behind us, but of working together in practical ways to redress the legacy of the past.

Die Afrikaanse woord "regstellende aksie" is so 'n pragtige en raak beskrywing van een van die take waarvoor ons staan om die onbillike rasse strukture van ons verlede ongedaan te maak. Die openbare gesprek oor hierdie onderwerp is dikwels in soveel mistasting, vooroordeel en opsetlik kwade bedoelings gehul en versluier dat daardie betekenis wat Afrikaans so beskrywend oordra, heeltemal verlore gaan.

Daar word soms op ligsinnige manier opmerkings gemak oor die sogenaamde ironie dat in die nuwe nie-rassige Suid-Afrika, regstellende aksie na ras en kleur verwys. Dit word dan aangegryp as voorbeeld van 'n nuwe vorm van rassisme. Sulke argumente vertoon 'n growwe onverskilligheid tenoor en miskenning van die werklike onreg en lyding wat beliggam is in die oorgeerfde rassestrukture van ons samelewinginstellings. En dit is in hierdie opsig dat die Afrikaanse begrip van "regstel" vir ons almal 'n morele rigting wyser behoort te wees.

Of course like all human endeavours - especially those that courageously tackle serious issues of our lives - this attempt at redressing our past has its difficulties, pitfalls and challenges. One looks towards the application of the common pool of our knowledge, skills and wisdom to tackle and address these and other important societal debates. One assumes a new common commitment to building a society free from racial discrimination, and a joint pursuit in examining all the practical, ethical and theoretical questions that are raised by this nation-building project.

It has often been said in recent years that university-based intellectuals in South Africa - whether anti-apartheid or apartheid supporting in thrust - had arrived so much of their focus from the fact of the apartheid society, that they have now somewhat lost their way. There is a sense that the voice of the universities has fallen quiet in the larger debates of our society. That vibrancy in our intellectual life, which was so much a feature of internal challenge to apartheid, seems to have largely disappeared. One trusts that our university-based intellectuals - staff and students - will soon once more take up the role of critical partners in building and developing our new society - identifying through research, scholarship and debate the burning issues at the heart of our new society.

It is through such engagement that our national efforts of reconstruction and reconciliation, of nation-building and development, will reap the full benefit of the prestigious achievements of this university, across the disciplines.

Having been so graciously granted an honorary doctorate by yourselves does not make me your intellectual peer. And I should be very careful about treading on the domain of trained intellectuals but let me nevertheless be so foolish as to venture a final thought.

It does seem as if South African intellectuals - whether in the universities or in the media - at times allow themselves to be impeded by a fear of appearing to be co-opted progressive intellectuals have traditionally and rightly been very suspicious of the concept of "patriotism", so often abused by demagogues and autocrats to suppress criticism and independence of thought. One fully grants our intellectuals the right to share that attitude. Our own call - including to intellectuals - for a New patriotism is, however, not a call to compromise anyone's independence. Pride in national development and commitment to it do not stand in any necessary contradiction to critical independence. A professional fetish about "criticalness" at all costs may, on the other hand, hamper intellectuals in playing the real and full role they should be playing in recording, describing, analysing, evaluating and criticising our efforts at building and developing the new society.

Ek het waarskynlik nou reeds te veel gesê. Laat ek afsluit voor die Universiteit besluit om die doktorsgraad terug te trek. Nogmaals baie dankie vir hierdie groot eer ek trots daarop om nou 'n lid van hierdie universiteitsgemeenskap te wees. Ek sê dit in die volle vertoue dat hierdie inrigting sal voort gaan om sy rol te speel in die opbou en ontwikkeling van ons nuwe samelewing.

ADDRESS BY CHIEF JUSTICE I MAHOMED ACCEPTING THE HONORARY DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF LAWS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA ON 4 DECEMBER 1997

Your Excellency the State President, the President of the Constitutional Court, the Honourable Chancellor of the University of Pretoria, the Vice Chancellor Professor van Zyl, distinguished members of the university community, learned colleagues, esteemed guests and friends.

In many respects Pretoria is the city closest to my heart. It has given birth to all my siblings and their children. It has been my one and only real home. Within its soil rest the bodies of my most beloved ancestors. It has nourished some of my most enduring memories, and conditioned the deepest of my emotions.

Marabastad - dusty, vibrant and alive on the Western periphery of the City - gave me my first education and my first glimpses into the scintillating nuances of African and European history, the rich appeal of English literature and Afrikaans poetry, the commanding rationality of Mathematics and the exciting frontiers of science.

Almost my entire childhood and a substantial part of my adult life was spent growing up, laughing, weeping and dancing in the Prinsloo Street area within the very heart of this sprawling metropolis; absorbing the pulsating energy by African commuters from impatient busses and taxis; the continuing gurgling sounds from their exhausts competing with the hypnotic lament of township jazz and the rhythm of the Kwela amplified through record bars purveying their music from bicycle shops and hairdressing saloons amidst the faint aroma of exotic spices - all in strange contrast with the forbidding silence of the imposing building on stilts which made up the external division of the University, less than 50 yards from my home.

To receive an honorary degree from the primary University of my native city is therefore for me a very special honour, very different in important respects from the honours bestowed upon me by other Universities.

I am deeply grateful.

The occasion unpacks within me emotions of real pleasure, of nostalgia and romance. But the package of emotions is also complex; the pleasure mixed by memories of the pain and the humiliation which the city of my first love imposed on my generation, piercing the sweet innocence of our childhood and the idealism of our youth by crassness of institutional racism.

The brutality of apartheid decreed that for me and a whole generation of others in my position, there was no place at the University next to my home, no right to practice as an Advocate at the Local Bar a few metres down the road, no right to the colourful swings in the public parks shaded by Jacaranda nearby, no seat on the Municipal busses which passed us all the time, no right to share in the green plain fields at the Caledonian or at Loftus, no right to frequent the inside of the many restaurants and hotels which we passed everyday and most cruelly of all, eventually no right for our families to continue to live and to trade in that part of the town in which they had invested their very souls.

And yet even the recollection of this pain oscillates and mutates as it is overtaken by other emotions - the sheer privilege of having lived in a decade during which the sweetest vision of a noble leader in Robben Island became articulated at last in a brave new Constitution which enables us to walk tall among the free nations of the world; and the thrill of being at the Union Buildings with the rise of the midday sun when powerful military jets released their trails of colourful smoke to salute a new President expressing his fidelity to that Constitution, in the presence of a nation imbued with hope and pride.

The memories escalate as the pain and the pleasure blend together in the celebration of the human spirit with its glorious capacity to transcend the vicissitudes of its own limitations into the heavens beyond.

This graduation and the important statement this potentially great University makes by honouring the State president and the Chief Justice of a renascent South Africa is part of the same celebration.

But the "celebration" sometimes suggests an end, a moment of happy finality. The truth is very different. What the Constitution in truth promises is not an end, not even the beginning of the end but perhaps the end of the beginning of a process of civilizing universalism.