



Office of the Principal and Vice Chancellor

PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

NELSON MANDELA BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

KGOSI MAMPURU II CORRECTIONAL CENTRE, TSHWANE

18 JULY 2018

Programme Director, it is my singular honour and privilege to have been invited to speak on this august occasion. Today, as the University of South Africa we join millions of other South Africans, and indeed the whole world, in celebrating the legacy of one who is, without dispute or doubt, the Father of our Nation.

The choice of the venue, and therefore focus for this year's celebration is striking in more ways than one. I therefore wish to commend the organisers for coming up with the idea that we

celebrate Madiba's birthday here in the female section of the Kgosi Mampuru II Correctional Centre.

The University of South Africa was born in 1873, as the University of the Cape of Good Hope, in Cape Town. Therefore, the university was established under British colonial rule, and modelled after the University of London. Of course, it underwent many changes over time, from British colonial influence, to apartheid influence, and, since 1994, democratic rule. Like Madiba, we are a product of the history of this country. It is for this reason that we are constantly reflecting on our relevance, asking the question: how do we become an African University in the service of all humanity?

To achieve this, in part, we are grappling with what we call coloniality. This means that, whereas we are no longer a colony, there are still elements of how we do things, what we teach, how we relate to our students and so forth, which suggest that we are yet to realise our potential. As such, the university continues to advance a transformation agenda, under the aegis of a decolonial programme.

So, UNISA is 145 years old.

I am mentioning this history in order that I can also refer to another piece of history. Kgosi Mampuru II, the son of Kgosi Sekwati I, was

executed here in 1883, exactly ten years after Unisa was founded. He was killed by the Transvaal Republiek for refusing to recognise the then Transvaal government and refusing to pay taxes. Thus, whereas the Cape was under British rule, the Transvaal was under Afrikaner rule. In both cases, black people had their humanity taken away from them when Unisa was formed, and Kgosi Mampuru II was killed.

Like Kgosi Mampuru II, many of our heroes either died here or were hanged here. The two notable ones are arguably Steve Biko, who died here in 1977, and Solomon Mahlangu, who was hanged here in 1979.

On the other hand, and like Kgosi Mampuru II, Madiba refused to recognise an unjust government. And he paid a heavy price for that; spending 27 years in prison, away from his loved ones. Deprived the privilege to practice his chosen profession, law, for which he qualified from Unisa.

What brings all this history, and what we learn from Mandela, is the resilience of the human spirit. Like I said earlier today when we launched the first leg of this celebration at the Unisa Campus, what we need to do on a day like this, in addition to giving our 67 minutes, is to reflect on the meaning of Mandela.

What does Mandela mean for those of our mothers, sisters and daughters who are incarcerated here, for having been found on the wrong side of the law?

The lesson we get from Madiba, just like Mampuru, Biko, and Mahlangu, is that we should never let adversity break us, or stand on our way. While in prison, Madiba remained focused on a vision that was far bigger than the situation that he faced while incarcerated. He focused on ideals that were higher than the prison walls.

It may be that your stay here is at times, in fact most of the times, very hard to bear. It is during those times that you must draw inspiration from Madiba's life lessons, and resolve to remain hopeful that your situation is but a passing phase.

There can be no doubt that being thrown into prison, and made to leave a young wife and small children behind, made Madiba angry. That is but human. Yet, it is evident that throughout the many years that he spent in prison Madiba did not allow the harshness of the treatment that he received in the hands of the apartheid system to make him bitter. As he sat in prison he allowed himself to love even those that had sent him there. This is what we at Unisa are focused on with regards to the life of Mandela.

It strikes us that as someone who can be regarded as a decolonial activist, meaning that he fought against all the manifestations of coloniality, Mandela remained a deep humanist. He can best be described as a radical African nationalist-liberal-decolonial humanist who dedicated his life to a struggle against racism, imperialism, colonialism and apartheid. He was therefore an uncompromising agent of peace, instead of conflict.

It may be that some of you came here and remain here while harbouring deep anger against those who may have hurt you, led you to commit certain acts that were found to be unlawful, or simply betrayed you. I am not qualified to tell you how you need to resolve that sense of anger that you may still have. What I may suggest though is for you to reflect on the life of Madiba; and perhaps to become like him.

So, what does it mean to be like Mandela? To be Mandela. Again, we tried to address this question earlier today.

One of the lessons that spring up from Madiba's life is that of resilience and focus on a vision that he set for himself, which was, of course, not an individualistic vision. While in prison, faced with many challenges, Madiba's eyes remained trained on the vision of freedom.

This side of Mandela, being resilient and focused, is what should motivate you. The fact that you find yourselves in this place should not serve as a barrier to you reaching for your dreams. Use this time to refocus your energies and become an even better person than you were before the unfortunate incidences that landed you here. To this end, the University of South Africa would like to be a partner to those who may wish to pursue their formal studies. As Madiba once said: “Education is the most powerful weapon which one can use to change the world.”

The university signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Correctional Services last year. That was to take the long relationship that saw many inmates over the years, including Madiba, being afforded opportunities to further their studies and complete their diplomas and degrees, even up to Masters and Doctorates. So, it is possible for some of you to emerge here being called Doctor. Go for that dream!

As part of the relationship that the university has with the department, and once fully rolled out to all centres, offenders will be afforded the opportunity to have access to “laptops with Internet, UNISA library materials, tutorial services and on-line submission of assignments.” The department will provide the infrastructure, while

Unisa will provide the access and support. I therefore wish to take this opportunity to invite you to consider some of the many options made available by the university, and ensure that you apply when the 2019 applications open very soon.

I make this invitation with another motivation in mind. One of the lessons that Madiba left is or was his commitment to remove barriers against women emancipation and progress. That, Programme Director, is another side of the decolonial Mandela. Let's listen to him when he talked about challenging barriers: **“As a tribute to the legions of women who navigated the path of fighting for justice before us, we ought to imprint in the supreme law of the land, firm principles upholding the rights of women.”** This call to action, and indeed a challenge to us, was underpinned by his firm belief that: **“Freedom cannot be achieved unless the women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression.”**

By encouraging you, as female offenders, and committing ourselves as the university and the Department of Correctional Services, we are trying to understand the meaning of Mandela. Not just understanding; we are trying to give effect to that meaning, so that it is a lived meaning. We are trying to develop a practical understanding of what Mandela, and many of his comrades, meant when they said in 1955: **“The Doors of Learning Shall be Open to All.”**

Programme Director, allow me to amplify a point I made earlier, when I spoke about anger. During his lonely and painful journey of life, restricted to his prison cell, Mandela formulated a programme to rehumanise all of us, the peoples of South Africa. He did not let anger stand in his way. Instead, he wrestled with himself and came out a man of justice and peace.

As you do your time for some of the mistakes that you committed, it is important to formulate a programme that you will implement once you come out of here. Such a programme will obviously not be as big as the one that Madiba had to undertake. But it will still be important.

We live in a world where most of our young people are dehumanised by the conditions under which they live. Yet, it is within our power, even as we live in townships, villages or rural areas, where there is poverty; or as we may be staying in the suburbs, where there are unique challenges, we need to face these challenges and emerge triumphant against adversity.

As you continue to do time here you are learning many life skills. I know that some of you, for instance, are offered Anger Management as a life skill. Like Mandela, you need to be planning on how you will

assist young people in your communities on how to deal with anger. Some of you might be here because you had an abusive partner and could not take the abuse any longer. As you get out of here, have programmes to assist young women on how to identify the 'early signs' of an abusive relationship, and how to gather the strength and courage to walk away before they are hurt, or before they hurt someone.

By engaging in this, and other small initiatives which you can do as an individual but preferably with other mothers, sisters, and daughters, you will be living up to the legacy of Mandela. That is a mission and legacy of rehumanising our communities. A legacy of creating peace within our communities. Let us listen to Madiba talking about this peace: "Peace is not just the absence of conflict; peace is the creation of an environment where all can flourish regardless of race, colour, creed, religion, gender, class, caste, or any other social markers of difference."

The best way, therefore, to celebrate the birthday of this Statesman is to reflect on his life and ask deeper questions around and about the meaning of Mandela. We will discover that Mandela meant focus and resilience, and reaching for your dreams. Mandela meant revolting against adversity. Mandela meant overcoming anger and

displaying love. More than anything, Mandela meant remaining human, and continuing with our humanisation mission.

I wish you all a Happy Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela Birthday!

Let us all be Mandelas!