



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

OPENING AND WELCOME: NELSON MANDELA DAY CELEBRATIONS

SENATE HALL, MUCKLENEUK CAMPUS

18 July 2018

A very warm welcome to you all on this special day - a day in which the *global* community remembers and acknowledges the life, times and contribution to South Africa and to humankind, of our first democratically elected President – our beloved the late President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. Nelson Mandela International Day (or Mandela Day) was officially declared by the United Nations in November 2009, with the first UN Mandela Day held on 18 July 2010 - President Mandela's birthday.

A synopsis of President Mandela's accomplishments says the following:
*"Lawyer, anti-apartheid activist, banned person, ANC member, SACP member, MK Commander in Chief, 1956 Treason Trialist, Robben Island prisoner, Nobel Peace Prize winner and first elected President of a democratic South Africa."*¹

Even after we have taken the time to absorb the quite staggering accomplishments of a single human being, who in fact spent 27 years (one third) of his adult life incarcerated, we have not even begun to touch on the humanity and wisdom which set him apart from his peers. These are the qualities that gained him such universal admiration and respect, and that turned the rich and famous, the arrogant and powerful and the *hoi polloi* into star-struck admirers, who were inevitably overwhelmed by the charisma, power, humility and warmth that he exuded. No-one felt excluded or "lesser" in any way in the company of this singular human being, and it is this spirit of inclusion and genuine love for his fellow men and women, which continues to be reciprocated in remembrance and emulation, through events such as the ones which we are holding today.

¹ <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/nelson-rolihlahla-mandela>

In many ways President Mandela, and his unique practice of servant leadership, is the antithesis of so much of what we are seeing in some of our leaders in our country today, where such leaders seem to have forgotten who they are serving in their relentless striving for personal power and enrichment. Yet President Mandela most certainly was no pushover. On the contrary, he had a backbone of steel and the courage of his convictions. He was such a principled human being that he was prepared to die for his beliefs – and that commitment came at a cost of 27 years of the worst kinds of deprivation, which he nevertheless bore with great fortitude. He accepted the consequences of his actions and as an attorney, he had an ingrained respect for the law, more so our new Constitution which he understood had come at such a great cost. He said: *“The apartheid regime had put law and order in disrepute... Because of this crude practice, and out of my own convictions, I exploited every opportunity to promote respect for law and order and for the judiciary.”*

But always, always, his focus was on serving the people, on nurturing of our collective humanity and on a vision of inclusion and inclusive development. He was, I would suggest, one of the most genuine and successful humanists in history. Up until the day he passed on he lived humbly, shunning the opulence, wealth and avarice that is such a blight

on our society today. He said: *“Since my release, I have become more convinced than ever that the real makers of history are the ordinary men and women of our country; their participation in every decision about the future is the only guarantee of true democracy and freedom.....*

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, we here today, are those “ordinary men and women of our country” and we have come here today not only to honour the late President Mandela, but to take ownership of his exhortation to participate in our own growth and development and to realise the vision of the democracy to which President Mandela committed his life. We remember his words when he said: *“It is not our diversity which divides us; it is not our ethnicity, or religion or culture that divides us. Since we have achieved our freedom, there can only be one division amongst us: between those who cherish democracy and those who do not.” – Nelson Mandela. Very wise and apposite words indeed.*

I am delighted about our programme today. The *News 24 100 Nelson Mandela’s of the Future* have every right to feel proud, and we applaud them. At the same time, we remind them of the giant in whose footsteps they must follow, and of the fact that as they do so, we will

support them in their respective journeys. We have also come to celebrate our scarf initiative and to acknowledge the CE projects of our College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences. All of these initiatives colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, emulate the example and exhortations of the late President Mandela.

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I know of no other statesman in the world, in living memory, who is globally acknowledged by the UN, through the dedication of an international (Mandela) Day. He is most worthy of honour and emulation. Unisa will play its part.

I thank you.