



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

THE NELSON ROLIHLAHLA MANDELA INTERFAITH MEMORIAL SERVICE

ZK MATHEWS GREAT HALL

11 DECEMBER 2013

Distinguished guests ladies and gentlemen

We are gathered here this afternoon to honour and celebrate the life of a man who transformed our nation and her people.

It is, therefore, with great honour and a deep sense of pride that I stand before you today to convey our gratitude to the South African State and the Mandela family for acceding to our request to hold a memorial service in honour of the first democratically elected President of the Republic of South Africa, and one of the

great alumnus of our august institution, the University of South Africa, **Dr. Rolihlahla Nelson Mandela**.

We are truly grateful for the opportunity to pay our last respects to “Madiba”, for a life lived with honour and integrity, notwithstanding the numerous challenges, contradictions and pain, including the prolonged period of detention.

Thursday, the 5th December 2013 will be etched in South African and global history as the day that:

- a great leader and statesman of the ages;
- an advocate for human dignity, freedom, justice and reconciliation;
- a key role-player in the dissolution of apartheid in South Africa;
- an activist against oppression and discrimination in the world and an ardent proponent of equality and democracy;
- an acknowledged phenomenal thinker and thought-guru;
- an eminent political leader and participant in the collective struggle against colonialism in South Africa and the rest of the African continent; and above all,
- a towering iconic leader of our times and the great son of the African soil, ...

Madiba departed from this life.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, most importantly however, President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was **our** leader, **our** president, **our** father, **our** mentor, **our** guide, **our** inspiration and **our** example. President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was a South African, whose life was informed and shaped by the same influences, customs and practices that inform the lives of each and every South African – that is us. So, today as we commemorate and reflect on the legacies of the late great Nelson Mandela, we should continue to draw inspiration to deepen democracy, to overcome discrimination, to seek reconciliation and to collectively work for the betterment and development of **our** society, and to live his dream of a truly non-racial democracy built on the cornerstones of the Constitution he struggled for and framed. In that way will can all acknowledge him and pay tribute to that for which he stood and say ‘Tata, your memory and your life’s commitment live on in all of us.’

Over the past few days we have heard countless stories about the way in which he touched lives – always for the better and always with a lasting effect. It scarcely seems possible that one man

could have had such an overwhelmingly positive impact on this incredible national, continental, and global scale – but he did!

And so, I have asked myself many times: What was it that made him the man that he was, that drove his impulse for caring which characterised his every act and deed, that maintained his unwavering commitment to his cause? In the simplest of terms, I come to the conclusion that it was his value system of love, integrity, honour, strength and a deep-seated understanding of compassion and reconciliation. President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was - in my view – the embodiment of love, or one might say, ‘love in action’. He was the consummate servant leader who devoted his life to the freedom and upliftment of others, he had set his beacon and he was always true and honest to his principles.

In *Long Walk to freedom*, President Mandela confirmed this understanding. He wrote (and I quote), “*As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison.*”

He further wrote, “*No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to*

hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”

I would like to suggest that it was his deep love for his fellow man, his unwavering commitment to his cause and dignified perseverance in the face of even the most arduous of challenges that drove his determination to overcome, and to triumph. Madiba had absolute *faith* in his vision for South Africa and her people, because he was convinced of its truth and its justness. He knew that what he and his peers were striving for could and would withstand even the most stringent moral and ethical scrutiny. Theirs was a noble and honourable cause and they chose to pursue it relentlessly, deeply aware that there would be life after that struggle and that our nation would have to be rebuilt by the entire population. Madiba led from the front and he led by example: fearlessly and courageously, but always with discipline, dignity and respect – for himself and for his fellow man.

Madiba’s life embodies, and encapsulates the words of the great novelist and Nigerian literary scholar, Ben Okri who says about life; “The most authentic thing about us is our capacity to create, to overcome, to endure, to transform, to love and to be greater than our suffering.”

Ladies and gentlemen, I have always believed that death is one of the many roads in the journey of life. It highlights our personhood and reminds us of the ways in which we ought to recognize and acknowledge the web of life and the relations between those who have come before us, those who are with us and those who will come after us. It is part of the sojourn in our communities, and understanding the ways in which we are all connected and inextricably bound to each other.

Many of us are familiar with the life and works of our great statesman. Unisa, however, has been especially privileged to have been part of his intellectual growth. Madiba registered and concluded his law degree here at UNISA and will always be one of the most illustrious members of the Unisa alumni. In 2012, Madiba was also a recipient of the UNISA's Chancellor's Robben Island Award in October 2012, where he was honoured by Unisa's Chancellor, Judge Justice Bernard Ngoepe in lieu of his active role in pursuing education and knowledge in spite of the difficult prison conditions he was studying under, as well as the role he played in pursuing other Robben Island prisoners to continue their education via UNISA. He was true to his call that, 'education is the most potent resource in the constructive transformation of society.'

We have so much that we can take from the lesson that was the life of President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. He dreamed of an Africa that was at peace with itself. And so as we celebrate his life and mourn his passing we are called to examine our own hearts and minds and to ask how we are faring – as individuals and as a nation – in shaping our country into the kind of South Africa that Madiba fought and died for. We need to ask ourselves the question: Are we servant leaders or are we selfish leaders? Are we making a difference, and to what extent can we lay claim to engineering the kind of society for which Madiba – and so many like him - have laid down their lives? Our contribution need not necessarily be on a grand scale or of the magnitude and impact of Madiba. The vast majority of South Africans are called on to make a far simpler yet equally impactful contribution. And like Madiba this can and must be done through our daily lives and daily example, of discipline, industriousness, diligence, a deep commitment to our country and our fellow man's wellbeing and above all through our demonstrable love for the other.

I thus want to conclude my tribute to Madiba with a challenge to all of us as true South Africans: Can we, like Nelson Mandela, seek to transform life with the clear understanding that "what counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived: rather it is

what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.”

Specifically as far as Unisa is concerned, as educators and as a university, we have a unique opportunity to honour President Mandela’s memory and to contribute to the realisation of this dream for South Africa and the Continent. But to do so we need to make a conscious and deliberate decision to join together with common purpose and common commitment in pursuit of the quality and impact of an education and education system envisaged by Madiba when he said: *Education is the most powerful weapon that you can use to change the world.*

At a time when self-enrichment and personal agendas are the subject of much discussion, Madiba’s memory and the lessons he embedded in our consciousness should be the lodestar to back to bring us back to the centre and encourage us to re-order our priorities, remembering that the achievement of freedom was not the end of the struggle, but rather an important milestone on our journey to prosperity. We need to take those tools that we have – and in Unisa’s case that is our educational proficiency and capacity - and commit them wholeheartedly and with the utmost determination and perseverance, to the building and shaping of

the society that this nation dreams of. I have no doubt that if we were to emulate Madiba's example, we will succeed – and succeed spectacularly.

I have received many messages of condolence on the passing of our beloved Madiba, from higher education colleagues and friends all over the world, and I would like to share some of these with you because they demonstrate clearly the admiration and esteem in which Madiba and South Africa is held.

- 1. From:** Prof Tian Belawati, Universitas Terbuka: Please accept my (and our/Indonesian people) deepest condolences for the passing of one of the greatest leaders who have set excellent examples of good humanity and equality of people, Nelson Mandela. He has a special position in Indonesian people's mind. May he rest in peace.
- 2. From:** Prof Alan Tait, Open University, Milton Keynes: My deepest condolences on the death of Madiba. He was a hero to all of us.
- 3. From:** Dr. Michael Esselen, IACI Canada: It is a sad day. I am sad to hear about the death of Madiba. He was a great man - a man who projected integrity, wisdom and strength to

all of us. ***Wishing you healing and consolation.
Reflect on your memories of Madiba.***

4. From: Mohammad Tawfiq, representative of 16 Afghan students: “I, on behalf of the 16 Afghan UNISA students pass their deep condolence to South African president his Excellency Jacob Zuma to the people of South Africa and UNISA officials for the loss of great man and former president of South Africa Nelson Mandela. I express my heartfelt sympathy to Mandela’s family on their loss; he was a symbol of peace and an exceptional personality whose wisdom, tenacity, humility and qualities of leadership enabled him to overcome the bitterness of the apartheid era. Madiba was an example of moral courage, kindness and humility influenced his own life and the lives of millions of people worldwide. He fought for peace and prosperity of the nation, hope world leaders follow his ways to bring peace prosperity in other part of the globe and we hope to live in peaceful countries around the globe.

5. From: Javier Miyares, UMUC: “We in the UMUC community join our colleagues and students at UNISA in mourning the loss of Nelson Mandela. His life continues to serve as an

inspiration to all of us and an example of the power of the human spirit and its ability to change the world. We know that as an educational institution, UNISA is dedicated to the realization of Mandela's vision that education transforms human lives and empowers individuals. UMUC shares this belief and like UNISA strives to provide quality and affordable education to all, especially through the use of distance education. Our universities' collaboration to train the current and future teachers in distance learning is an important step in expanding the scope of education in our societies. UMUC's MDE community has already reached out to the UNISA faculty in our courses. I would like to extend our university's sympathies to you and your entire institution."

6. **From:** Emmanuel O Oritsejafor, NCCU: "On the behalf of the entire faculty and staff at North Carolina Central University, I am sending this note to you and other colleagues to extend our deepest condolences on the passing of President Mandela> May his soul rest in peace. This is a moment though challenging we should celebrate is life as a leader and a social entrepreneur. I have been on five local television interviews since yesterday to reflect on the life of Madiba with other colleagues and we will attempt to continue

to celebrate and teach about his social and political philosophy in our classrooms.

Thank you and God Bless

Ladies and Gentlemen, during this time of profound sadness, our thoughts and prayers are with all Madiba's family as they mourn the loss of their son, brother, parent, spouse, uncle, and grandfather and great-grand father. May they continue to find courage and strength in the knowledge that their family was privileged to have been blessed with such a great human being. To all our staff and students, members of the public, visitors from here and from abroad, may you never cease to be inspired by the best that Madiba embodies and stands for in our world today.

Our greatest and most beloved statesman has been called to rest. We can do him no greater honour than to emulate his example and ensure that his legacy is transformed into the realisation of his vision for our country. Let us once again unite in common purpose for South Africa, for Madiba and for future generations who will only be able to enjoy and appreciate his legacy and gift to South Africa through our efforts.

Our audience here today represents many different faiths, and I ask respectfully that we allow each of the religious leaders in this

embracing interfaith service to share their message and scripture with you, all of which I believe speak to the life of President Mandela and to the characteristics that he exhibited and practised in his daily life. I wish us all strength in dealing with this loss and a commitment to honour the memory of our gracious leader President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela – he has left this earth for a well-deserved rest.

I THANK YOU.