



The Office Of The Principal and Vice-Chancellor

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PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA
ADDRESS TO GRADUATES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND
SCIENCE GRADUATION
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Honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen and most importantly, our graduates this morning

For most in our country, life is really tough. Each new day brings us stories of misery and suffering and it is not really surprising that at times, we feel really despondent and even quite hopeless and negative.

As parents we wonder: “What kind of future does my child have in this country of ours?” “Will he or she be able to carve out a successful career and flourish?” “Will my grandchildren have the kind of life that they deserve?” “What will life be like when I grow old and I am no longer able to take care of myself?”

As young South Africans we wonder: “Will I be able to achieve success in my country when at times I feel that I am not valued or wanted?” “Will my skills and qualifications be put to good use and will I be able to make a contribution to the growth and development

of South African Society?” “Will my children be able to realise their potential in a safe environment and in a country that values education and place a premium educating its population?”

Ladies and gentlemen these are vital questions and we are most certainly not being disloyal or subversive in asking them. We should in fact be asking them, because if we aim to grow and develop as human beings, if we aim to grow and develop as a society and as a country, then we simply cannot accept the status quo and say: “Well that’s how it is and there is nothing I can do about it.” Growth and development occur through questioning, critical interrogation and most importantly, action.

As students you have first-hand experience of this. You embarked on your studies and progressed from year-to-year through the very process I have just set out – questioning, critical interrogation and action. And today you have achieved a goal and one of the most important milestones in your lives. That lesson and that process need to become the template for much of what you do in your lives.

As young men and women you cannot afford to be passive recipients of life. You cannot merely let life happen to you. You need to go out and make it happen. You need to set goals and work steadily towards them in much the same way as you have approached your studies. And that, as you know by now, takes self-sacrifice, self-discipline, diligence and application. If you do not exercise these qualities consistently, you will live lives of mediocrity. And in a country that is desperately in need of excellence that will simply not do.

In South Africa we are too prone to saying “The government must do this – the government must give that...” My challenge to you this morning is to ask: “What will you do - what will you give to improve not only your own lives but also the society in which you live? And if you think that I am perhaps being a little harsh, then let me tell you what the government is doing when it comes to higher education and then decide for yourselves - through critical interrogation - where the need for increased effort lies.

Education takes up the largest share of government spending – 21 per cent of non-interest allocations – and receives the largest share of the additional allocations. The

government spend on education is in excess of R189 billion for the 2011/2012 period, up by 9.7% over the 2010/11 period.

- An amount of R8.3 billion over the MTEF period is added for schools infrastructure. A programme to address backlogs in school facilities over a three-year period will be administered by Minister Motshekga's department, that is, the Department of Basic Education.
- Just under R1 billion is added for *funza lushaka* teacher bursaries and bursaries for postgraduate students in natural sciences.
- R9.5 billion is provided for expanding further education and training colleges and skills development.
- Including adjustments for the remuneration of teachers, a total of R24.3 billion will be added to education and skills spending over the next three years, which rises from R190 billion next year to R215 billion in 2013/14.

Higher education's allocation of that amount has grown from 7, 1 billion in 2001/02 to 15.3 billion for 2010/11 with an extra 1 billion over the next three years to increase subsidies and 5.6 billion to the National Students Financial Aid Scheme.

Our Further Education and Training colleges will receive 12 billion in 2010/11 and a further R1.3 billion to improve the salaries of educators over the next three years.

I can assure you that at a national, continental and - I assert quite confidently - global level, South Africa's spend on education is significant. It is certainly much bigger than the majority of its peers on the Continent and easily comparable to its international peers. And yet, we know for example, that recent language and literacy test conducted nationwide amongst our primary school children demonstrated that we are lagging far behind these same peers. We also know that in many instances the graduates we are producing are not have the required levels of what I like to call "graduateness" that will ensure their success and progress in their careers. That graduateness is about competence, enthusiasm for one's field of interest and expertise, and an ethic of

honesty, integrity and hard work. Certainly there is no place in the notion of graduateness for the attitude of entitlement that is so prevalent today. Probably one of the most enduring and valuable lesson that we must all learn on the road to adulthood and personal growth and development is that there is indeed, no such thing as a free lunch. There is always some kind of *quid pro quo*.

So we have to be honest and ask ourselves: Why is it, when our government has committed so much of our country's taxes to education; when the role and importance of education for the growth and development of South Africa is so clearly acknowledged, do we continue to struggle with such serious problems in our education system?

I would like to suggest that the difficulties we face have accrued and compounded over decades. In moving from a system that deliberately disadvantaged that majority of its citizens, we have been faced with the complete restructuring of our education system to achieve greater equity at the same time that our country has been involved in major and ongoing reconstruction and development. It is incredibly difficult and complex to effect change and deliver quality education in a transformation context that seeks simultaneously to redress and progress. It becomes even more difficult to do so when expectations are high.

Obviously education is seen as the key to growth and prosperity and so it should be. But going back to my earlier point, education implies so much more than a qualification. Let me re-emphasise - It requires self-sacrifice, self-discipline, diligence and ongoing application.

Quite clearly our government places a very high premium on education. But do we as South Africans similarly place a high premium on education? Do we as parents support our schools and universities or do we expect everything to be handed to us on a plate? How many of us here this morning are involved in school governing bodies? How many even attend parents' evenings? How many actively encourage their children to participate in sport and cultural evenings – and support them in doing so?

And when our children neglect to hand their assignments in on time, skip lectures, or arrive late for examinations do we allow them to suffer the consequences or do we support them in their demands that their lecturers or their university should “give them another opportunity.” How many “additional opportunities” is enough and at what cost to the university and incidentally the state? When we engage in these behaviours are we encouraging responsible behaviour and a respect for education?

Do we as parents and students give our teachers and lecturers the respect that they deserve? Of course the onus is on teachers and lecturers to behave in a professional manner and on the state to ensure that they are being properly trained. But I can assure you that there are many initiatives underway to achieve precisely that. But more importantly, the question that any critical thinker has to ask, is that where lecturers are well trained, where teachers are well trained, where institutions are well run – why are so many students still underperforming? For every one of you who is graduating today, many others have dropped out or failed. Why?

I would like to suggest that it goes back to those basics I keep on mentioning – self-sacrifice, self-discipline, diligence and ongoing application – by both parents and their children.

And ladies and gentlemen, that is why I am so delighted to be here today - why I am equally delighted every time I preside over a graduation ceremony at my own institution. Because every time I stand in front of a group of graduates and their families and friends I know - *they got it right!* They understand and respect education and what it can and should do, not only for themselves and their families, but also for our country.

To our young men and women here this morning, you have been given an opportunity and you have made the most of it. And for that, you and your parents who have sacrificed so much for this day, must receive our commendation and congratulations. Not only that, but you are receiving your qualification in an area that is top of the list when it comes to much needs skills and qualifications the world over - Science. I trust

that you take what you have learnt and apply it with the same discipline and application that brought you here this morning.

Families and friends, ladies and gentlemen, please give the Science Class of 2011 a resounding round of applause [applause]. And last but not least, I ask you, our graduates this morning, having been acknowledged and congratulated by our audience, to rise, turn to your families, guardians and friends and raise your mortar boards in acknowledgement and respect for the sacrifices that they have made and the support that they have given you, on your road to this achievement. [applause].

Please be seated. Our very best wishes go with each and every one of you as you proudly face a new chapter in your lives as university graduates. May you return again as post graduate students and lifelong learners. I thank you.