

# UNISA

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## WE WILL HELP UNISA WHERE WE CAN — President Mandela

*Unisa News interviewed one of the University's best known alumni, President Nelson Mandela.*

**Q: In the early years of the struggle for equality for everyone in this country, did you always believe you would succeed?**

**NM:** Yes, we always had confidence in the victory of the cause of democracy. What underpinned our hope and our confidence was essentially that our cause was just, and that the ideals we stood for enjoyed the support of the overwhelming majority of South Africans.

Even during the darkest moments, we were reinforced by the preparedness of the people to sacrifice for their liberation. Added to this is the collective of leaders in the ANC and other democratic formations who formed such a formidable team at the head of the struggle. So we knew that, no matter how long the struggle would take, the people's will would finally triumph.

We understood our efforts to be against not any particular racial group but against a system of racial domination, and we were convinced that the attainment of democracy would be in the best interest of all South Africa's people - black and white. You will agree with me that recent events have vindicated this approach.

**Q: When you were jailed and sent to Robben Island, if someone had said to you that one day you would hold the highest office in this country, would you have believed them?**

**NM:** The struggle for democracy and a better life for all our people has always been and will remain a collective effort of the people of South Africa. It is therefore erroneous to view it as an effort of one individual, with attendant personal rewards.

I have always been part of a team of able men and women, outstanding leaders in their own right. If at any stage any individual seems to stand head and shoulders above the rest, it is because of this collective effort. Therefore, I had never viewed my participation in the struggle as one that would result in me personally assuming the highest

office in the land. But, as I said earlier, in so far as the struggle as a whole is concerned, we always had confidence that democracy would ultimately triumph.

**Q: Looking back, are there any decisions you would have changed, or things you would have done differently?**

**NM:** I think it would be safe to say that it is the totality of all the events of history that accumulate into the ultimate result, in our case, a democratic South Africa and this transitional Government of National Unity. At the same time, those events would be a result of objective circumstances as well as decisions and actions of individuals and organisations. Decisions, in particular, about forms of struggle, are dictated to by the policies and practices of the oppressor.

In that sense, one cannot change history in retrospect, for the removal of one factor - even in one's own imagination - would bring about a totally different set of circumstances. It is true, that on reflection, one could feel that something could have been done better here and there. But in the overall, our history as a nation is as it is - good and bad.

But I do feel that South Africa should not have gone through all this agony before we reached the stage at which we are today - a united nation of equals. This is what the ANC called for many years ago. The bloodshed, the pain and suffering, the mistrust and suspicion within our society, would have been avoided.

**Q: It would seem that you completed all your academic qualifications**



*A pencil sketch of the President done by prof Marinus Wiechers*

**through Unisa. How did you find studying through distance education?**

**NM:** Yes, most of my senior academic qualifications were done through Unisa. Studying, especially from prison, had an irony of its own. The difficulties presented by some of the warders and the prison system, would fade into insignificance compared to the tranquillity in which one was able to

study and reflect on issues. So there was that unnatural environment in which one could immerse oneself in studies.

But looking at distance education as such, one should take into account the circumstances in which most students have to study: in the townships and even other homes, with all the pressures of life. Of course, for working adults, there is an added advantage of interacting with society out there and relating one's studies to a real working environment. However, this cannot substitute for the advantage of studying at an early age, among peers, and in constant direct contact with the lecturers and supervisors.

**Q: What did Unisa mean to you then, and now?**

**NM:** Unisa has been a great window of opportunity, not only to me, but to many, many South Africans of all colours. When President Robert Mugabe was here on a state visit, he did emphasise the role that Unisa has played and continues to play also in southern Africa. Throughout the sub-continent and even the continent, there are many leaders in politics and in the legal and other professions who owe

their achievements to Unisa.

This role Unisa continues to fulfil, and I am pleased that the University is also re-examining its role in the light of the changes that are taking place in the country. As you do this, particularly with regard to the position of students from disadvantaged communities, there will be difficulties and sometimes flare-ups. But like all great and healthy births, these are the necessary pangs. I am confident that together - as students and as the administration - you will find the best solutions to the problems that present themselves from time to time.

**Q: How do you see Unisa's role in the future of South Africa?**

**NM:** As in the past, and more so now, Unisa has the responsibility of providing society with leaders of quality in all areas of life. Our times demand that both students and lecturers should be searching, critically and independently in pursuit of excellence. This will enable us to handle the challenges of a changing society.

Distance education, in a situation in which new vistas have opened up for the majority and where there is great demand for skilled personnel, will become even more important. Unisa therefore has a crucial role to play in this period and in the future. And the requirements of reconstruction and development also dictate that we pay particular attention to those fields of study that will directly contribute to this effort.

I should assure you that, as you grapple with these new challenges, the Government will assist wherever it can.

**Q: What message do you have for Unisa's alumni and students?**

**NM:** The issues I have raised earlier on do capture the message I have for the Unisa community - the administration, alumni, students and workers at the campus. But I wish to add that there is no solution to any issue but hard work and an honest application to matters at hand. If South Africa needed you during the years of struggle for change, it needs you even more now, as we build a new society. I am confident that you will meet the new challenges with a new determination.

### EREDOKTERSGRADE

Unisa gaan aanstaande jaar aan drie van Suid-Afrika se leiers, President Nelson Mandela, Adjunk-President FW de Klerk en Aartsbiskop Desmond Tutu, eredoktersgrade toeken. Beide President Mandela en Aartsbiskop Tutu is Alumni van Unisa. President Mandela het in 1989 die LLB-graad verwerf en

Aartsbiskop Tutu 'n BA-graad in 1954.

Adjunk-President De Klerk is 'n Alma Mater van die Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, waar hy 'n BA- en later 'n LLB-graad verwerf het.

