

Tribute for President Mandela at the occasion of the Nelson Mandela Youth Commemoration (Global Shapers Community – Tshwane), on the 14 December 2013, Unisa, Senate Hall, by Osmond Mlonyeni.

Programme Director,
Distinguished guest,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
All protocol observed,

For the peoples of South Africans, Africa and the World, nothing could have ever prepared us for the nerve wrenching, much speculated yet undesired and inevitable thunder – uTat’omkhulu Mandela – has passed on. This heart-ripping sound struck at midnight, 5th December 2013. Coincidentally, the birth-day of uTat’omkhulu Robert Sobukwe, a fellow freedom fighter and giant of South Africa’s struggle. Therefore, there can be no doubt in anyone’s mind that this day will come to represent The Day of the Titans.

Ladies and gentlemen, unimaginable as it may seem, today, the 14th December 2013, is the day before the mortal remain of uTat’omkhulu Mandela are laid to rest. Similarly, today is exactly 5 years and a day, to the day when the Mandela Rhodes Scholars of the Class of 2009 (to which I belong) had the rare privilege of meeting with our fallen Baobab! As you all may now imagine, words fail to fathom our emotions – and to this end may we please hold the Mandela family, his comrades, political home - The African National Congress, Charitable foundations – Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory, Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund and the Mandela Rhodes Foundation in our prayers.

Much has been said to honour this gallant son of the majestic soil of Africa and much will be said. At this juncture, as the youth, we are charged with the privilege to add our voice cognisant of the responsibility that befalls us – that being, How will we carry forward the values, ethos so aptly epitomized by Tat’omkhulu Mandela’s generation to define, fulfill or betray our generations mission? In trying to answer our commemorative service’s question – What is the relevance of Madiba’s life & values for South Africa’s Youth?

Precisely, because of these questions, we would foremost as the Mandela Rhodes Scholars love to join the multitudes of young people in standing in attention, to salute and pay homage to a son who entered this bumpy crease of life from the humble and relatively unassuming village on the banks of the Mbashe river, eMvezo; A young man who defied the comfort afforded by his birth-right to pursue hunger for freedom; An eager student who was expelled from the Centre of Higher Learning from drinking from the well of solidarity and befriending understanding to pave way for clarity of thought in adversity. I’m referring to that inconspicuous black pimperl who was a foot soldier for justice. Yes, the towering revolutionary who was a front-line combatant in the battle for restoration of dignity, for both oppressed and oppressor, in service to humanity. In short I am referring to the captain who was charged by history to simultaneously carry the burdens of our aspirations when the formal nightmare of apartheid seized to exist and the hope of our new democracy engulfed its dawn.

Indeed we are in attention for the Commander-in-Chief of Umkhonto we Sizwe, Isithwalandwe, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Esteemed Member of the Order of Mapungubwe, President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela.

Ladies and gentle, President Mandela's life compels us to appreciate the enormity of the task to unpack the roadmap to achieve our generations mission. Preceding this, must be a clear sense of purpose to address the important task of how to ensure we achieve a shared acceptance of this mission. Therefore, in order to do this, we must certainly, collectively define this mission in order TO OWN IT. Due to the objective reality that we are a Work-in-Progress with respect to collectively defining our mission. Perhaps we can agree that the central objectives of our mission should achieve:

1. Living the humanity principle – That I am my brother or sisters' keeper
2. Quality education for all irrespective of the socio-economic background
3. Equitable distribution of wealth is an imperative that must occur for the sustainable development of South Africa

With this in mind, we find solace and counsel on the values bequeathed to us by your generation Madiba, inspired by the heroic generations preceding it. These values broadly encompass acknowledging where we come from, building a caring society, never forsaking principle at the altar of expediency.

To understand where we come from, fortunately for us, former President Thabo Mbeki poignantly summarised this complex question during the adoption of the Republic's constitution in 1996.

"I owe my being to the Khoi and the San whose desolate souls haunt the great expanses of the beautiful Cape - they who fell victim to the most merciless genocide our native land has ever seen"

"I am formed of the migrants who left Europe to find a new home on our native land. Whatever their own actions, they remain still, part of me."

"In my veins courses the blood of the Malay slaves who came from the East....The stripes they bore on their bodies from the lash of the slave master are a reminder embossed on my consciousness of what should not be done."

"I am the grandchild of the warrior men and women that Hintsa and Sekhukhune led, the patriots that Cetshwayo and Mphephu took to battle, the soldiers Moshoeshe and Ngungunyane taught never to dishonour the cause of freedom"

"My mind and my knowledge of myself is formed by the victories...we earned from Isandhlwana to Khartoum, as Ethiopians and as the Ashanti of Ghana, as the Berbers of the desert."

"I am the grandchild who lays fresh flowers on the Boer graves at St Helena and the Bahamas"

“I am the child of Nongqause”

“I come of those who were transported from India and China, whose being resided in the fact, solely, that they were able to provide physical labour,”

“Being part of all these people, and in the knowledge that none dare contest that assertion, I shall claim that - I am an African.”

Simply put Madiba, we acknowledge that the **political freedom** and **democracy** we enjoy today was not free, and that our **diversity** is the jewel in our nation’s crown – Thus we vow, re-ekana, siyafunga singa’jiki to never squander it!

Similarly, I urge us to cast our eyes towards the values of **reconciliation** and **ethical leadership** as important elements of building a caring society. There are many examples we could cite, however, there are very few more contested than the enjoining of the names of Mandela and Rhodes. Madiba your counsel delivered at Westminster Hall, London, 2nd July 2002, during the occasion of the establishment of the Mandela Rhodes Foundation following the celebration of a century of existence of the Rhodes Trust – humbles, you said:

“Bringing together those two names represents a symbolic moment in the closing of the historic circle.”

In illustrating this point you further clarify that:

“It was in South Africa that Cecil John Rhodes made most of the money which he left in legacy for scholars from across the world to benefit from for the past 100 years....and therefore, It speaks of growing sense of a global responsibility that in this second century of its operation The Rhodes Trust find it appropriate to redirect attention and resources back to the origin of it wealth”

And now to drive this point home for those skeptics, you state:

“Ours is the name for the labourer who toils on the African Farm, fighting for a life of dignity; The girl child battling against great odds for an opportunity to realize her potential; The poor AIDS orphan bereft of family or care; The rural poor eking out a subsistence, deprived of the most basic services and facilities. It is in their names and those like them, and in the name of all South Africans (& Africans), that we lend ours to this initiative, seeking that a better future be build for all of them”

From this we learn that compassion and leadership must be aligned in word and deed!

Madiba and to your generation, we know that expediency was never a word or trait that would ever see the light of day in your midst. To this effect, we too shall look to the compass of principle as our only guiding tool!

Madiba, your legacy, as I said on a social network site during the occasion of your birthday - “shows us how you unleashed unforgettable strokes such as the commanding straight drive

towards freedom, elegant pull towards reconciliation, clear drive towards equality, determined square cut towards justice and clean hook towards humility”

Gallant son of this majestic African soil, we will honour this treasured gift with the vigour of our youth and will to succeed. THANK YOU, for your generation has taught us that our destiny can now never be a mirage when in service of humanity.

Yes, indeed we will live up to the legacy!

Aah Dalibhunga!!!

I thank you.