

***Opening Address and Official Launch of Centenary
Celebrations: The meaning and significance
of the Nelson Mandela Centenary in today's
context: a call to action and agency***

Opening Address by Prof. Sibongile Muthwa

Vice-Chancellor, Nelson Mandela University

Repositioning our understanding of the 'weapon' Education Colloquium

19 July 2018

Introduction

Programme Director

Chancellor of Nelson Mandela University, Dr Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi

Deputy Vice-Chancellors

Executive Dean of the Faculty of Education, and other Deans herein present

Members of Senior Management

Professors, and the members of the Academy Ngokubanzi

Honoured Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen, Manene Namanenekazi

I have the pleasant opportunity of fulfilling two roles this morning: making opening remarks at this important colloquium and formally launching the Centenary Programme of Nelson Mandela University.

Yesterday, on the 18th July, Nelson Mandela's birthday was memorably honoured by people across the world who took part in various acts of kindness, under the "67 minutes" banner. The "67 minutes" is an annual tribute to the dedication and generosity of a man who gave 67 years of his life to the liberation and emancipation of the people of South Africa, and who embarked on the toilsome task of rebuilding our country. Mandela Day originates as an initiative of the United Nations, which, in November 2009, declared July 18 as Nelson Mandela International Day. The first UN Mandela Day was held on 18 July 2010. But this year – the year of the centenary of his birth – it has special significance.

Exactly one hundred years ago yesterday, Nelson Mandela was born at Mvezo in the Eastern Cape. How a child, born in humble circumstances in this deeply rural area, in this corner of South Africa, became one of the most famous statesmen of the 20th century is an amazing story and an inspiration to all of us.

The Mandela Centenary Year, as it has come to be known, will see heightened efforts to mark the life, times and legacy of a man who dedicated his life in service to his people and country. As Nelson Mandela University, the only University in the world to bear his iconic name, we are embarking on a 12-month commemorative programme. We are honouring him with a year-long University Centenary Celebration Programme, which we are formally launching today with this colloquium.

The Mandela University's approach to the centenary is rooted firmly in our academic, scholarly and engagement enterprise as we believe this is the best contribution we as a University can make in preserving and nurturing Nelson Mandela's legacy. Locating our Mandela Centenary programme in the academic enterprise resonates with the importance Mandela placed on education, illustrated so emphatically with his famous declaration in July 2003 that "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world".

This insightful declaration reflected Mandela's profound belief, arising from his personal and communal experiences, that education could be a tool for people to transform their lives and those of their children. Nelson Mandela, and the generation of South African and African leaders he was part of, moved from peasant and rural lives, to become leaders of organisations, of society, and of nations.

Here we would remember not only Mandela, but also his contemporaries, courageous men and women who inspire us, who give us hope, and who (against all odds) made it possible for us to be where we are today. These men and women include Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Ahmed Kathrada, Raymond Mhlaba, Andrew Mlangeni, Albertina Sisulu, Helen Joseph, Lillian Ngoyi, Sophia de Bruyn, Rahima Moosa, Charlotte Maxeke, Ruth First, Toivo Ya Toivo, Seretse Khama, Kenneth Kaunda, Yusuf Lule and Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, to name a few.

Through the lives of these historical figures we can see why Mandela believed education is "the great engine of personal (and national) development"; and why he said: "It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation."

The Mandela Centenary Year has another significance for us. It also is the year in which we proudly observe and celebrate the first anniversary of our new name of “Nelson Mandela University”, which we launched officially on 20 July 2017. In this sense, the centenary year enables us to recommit and rededicate ourselves, as the Nelson Mandela University community:

- Firstly, by honouring and nurturing the ethos and legacy of Mandela, particularly as this relates to his leadership, his notion of social justice and the value of education in changing the trajectory of the marginalised and the vulnerable in society.
- Secondly, by ensuring our foundational scholarly missions of the University – (namely, teaching and learning, research, as well as engagement) – are aligned to the distinct iconic identity and brand of Madiba, and more broadly, the vision and values of a free, equal and democratic world that he stood and fought for. **This will enable us to advance new directions of scholarship that are synchronised with our larger purpose as Nelson Mandela University.**
- Thirdly, by entrenching an institutional culture, practices and symbols that define our institution to help break with the negative legacy of the past.

Mandela University’s centenary commemoration programme will see a series of institution-wide activities planned and championed by its seven Faculties, along with other University entities, that essentially speak to various aspects of Nelson Mandela’s legacy. These will predominantly take on the form of academic conferences and colloquia, public lectures and book launches. This includes the following.

Conferences and Colloquia

The official Centenary Programme kicks off today with this two-day colloquium, hosted by the Faculty of Education, which seeks to interrogate the famous Mandela quote with the theme of, *“Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world”: Understanding the contextual relevance of Mandela’s statement to meet the 21st-century realities of growing inequalities*

and hegemonies of knowledge, within the drive for a decolonised education system.”

On 6 and 7 August the Law Faculty will be holding a conference with the theme, “Rethinking Private Law and Social Justice Post-Mandela”, which will, inter alia, celebrate the South African Constitution and Mandela’s leadership and contribution to its making whilst exploring issues around social justice.

This will be followed by a Faculty of Arts conference on “Being Human(e) in the 21st Century” from 21 to 24 August. Next year the Chair on Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation will be hosting a colloquium on Scholarship on Mandela.

The Faculty programmes are complemented by a range of public lectures by notable South Africans. Tonight, Advocate Thuli Madonsela, in a lecture arranged in collaboration with the Moral Regeneration Movement and the Centre for the Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy, will deliver a public lecture on the "Social Justice Gap: Is the Constitution Responsible?".

This will be followed by the South African Reserve Bank Governor, Mr Lesetja Kganyago, on the role of the Central Bank in building democracy on 1 August. Then, as I have mentioned on 6 August, former Deputy Chief Justice Dr Dikgang Moseneke will address us on “Rethinking Private Law and Social Justice post-Mandela”.

Other Faculty Activities

On 24 July we will formally launch the Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation (CrisHET) at our Bird Street Campus.

Our Science Faculty has combined forces with various partners to make a contribution to improving science and maths education in the Eastern Cape. In this regard, the Faculty is working closely with the Faculty of Education, the Department of Science and Technology, the South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement, the Provincial Department of Education, as well as Rhodes, Fort Hare and Walter Sisulu universities. The focal point for this initiative are communities of Mvezo Komkhulu, Cala and surrounding areas.

In addition, the Faculty is running a series of lectures and engagement activities on matters such as restless curiosity, wild brilliance, particle physics, ancient African interpretations of the night skies, coding and computation in anticipation of the fourth industrial revolution and big data science. These activities will culminate on a week of science taking place at the Nelson Mandela School of Science in Mvezo, (and they are indeed part of the National Science Week which takes place from the 28 July to 4 August).

The Mandela Centenary year will see our Health Science Faculty consolidating plans for the launch in 2020 of the country's 10th Medical School. The Medical School, based on this campus, will form what will become the Missionvale Campus-Dora Ngiza Hospital health complex.

In October the Centre for Community Technologies will launch a digital "story telling" laboratory in partnership with Scotland's Glasgow Caledonian University.

Students Activities

Our students are active in contributing to the centenary commemorations in various innovative ways. At the end of this month we will be hosting an Nelson Mandela Youth Convention, a national student leadership conference that will deliberate on the role and contribution of student activism to reshaping higher education.

This will be coupled with the launch of the MyMandela SRC Legacy Building Programme a campaign to build the Mandela University identity from the perspective of students, as well as the launch of a MyMandela (SRC) Legacy Fund to render support to deserving students in need of funding top up, books, and other basic essentials.

Conclusion

Programme Director, these are exciting times for us and for our University. What I have shared this morning are just some of the events forming the year-long centenary programme, which we hope will have lasting outcomes for University.

They will illuminate the vision and strategic trajectory we have chosen for ourselves, embedding an institutional culture, that underscores our commitment to social justice, and fortify the firm foundations on which we can contribute in fundamental ways to enhancing and nurturing the legacy of Madiba.

It is therefore my singular honour and privilege to declare the *“Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world”* colloquium officially open, and through it, officially launch the University’s Nelson Mandela Centenary programme.

I wish you fruitful deliberations. Enkosi