

NELSON MANDELA

UNIVERSITY

100 YEARS OF MANDELA

NELSON MANDELA YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CONVENTION

Welcoming Address: Professor Sibongile Muthwa
Vice-Chancellor, Nelson Mandela University
30 July 2018

Introduction

Programme Director,

I wish to disrupt protocol a bit and start by greeting all the youth leaders and students who are gathered here today to participate in this inaugural Nelson Mandela Youth Development Convention. This is your domain.

It is then my privilege to further welcome:

Mayor Trollip

Deputy Vice-Chancellors

Executive Deans of Faculties

Dean of Students

Members of university senior management

Members of the Professoriate and academics

Our partners in this endeavour:

- The United Nations Agency for Population Activities
- The National Youth Development Agency
- Government departments
- The Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council
- The National Youth Development Agency
- Harambee

Our speakers and panellists

Ladies and gentlemen

It is indeed an honour and a privilege to address you at this opening of the inaugural Nelson Mandela Youth Convention, which is the first of its kind. I have the sense that we are making history today as we embark upon this pioneering initiative.

It is particularly pertinent that this Convention is taking place during the birth month of the world-renowned icon after whom the university is named. The Convention forms an important part of our University's commemoration of the centenary of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela.

Locating our Mandela Centenary programme in the academic enterprise resonates with the importance Mandela placed on education and on young people being instruments and agents of their own development. Throughout the next 12 months our University will be proudly hosting a range of other activities as part of this centenary programme. I hope that

all of you will find space to participate in some of these.

Youth-Centric Higher Education Transformation

Higher education, both locally and globally, is in transition. In South Africa, student movements, intellectual analyses, and government reports over the past five years have highlighted that the move towards more decolonized, equitable and inclusive institutions of higher learning has been slow. This is due partially to the contextual complexities relating to high levels of inequality still prevalent in society, and persistent divisions based largely on race, class and patriarchy which manifest in the fabric of the university and its functionalities.

In beginning to fundamentally change this, there is a need to place a sharper focus on praxes that tackle issues of social justice and poverty alleviation locally, continentally and globally. In doing this we must look not only at matters of redress, democratisation, development and the quality of the university, but also zoom in on curriculum and research, diversity, social cohesion and social inclusion, as well as community engagement. At the core of this must be students. It is imperative to transfigure the way the university functions so that it is deliberately student-centric in its organising philosophy.

The life-blood of a student-centric university is its willingness to locate student voice in strategic platforms where engagements about student life take place. This should be complemented by an active approach and programme to develop the full human potential of each student as a young person. Whilst it is our belief that higher education plays a major role in

the development of a vibrant society and is key to delivering the knowledge requirements for development that will enhance the quality of life for all citizens, education on its own is not the only ingredient that enables young people to graduate out of the university and become productive and capable members of society. We need to have a strategy that deliberately nurtures and develops all aspects of a student as a young person. This Youth Development Convention is the starting point of this, with the deliberate intent of igniting active student and youth engagement in conversations about the real-world situations that face students after graduation and the youth in general in society.

Prevailing Conditions

What kind of world are we living in today, and what realities face the youth, students and new graduates? I would wish to suggest four defining characteristics:

- Firstly, we are in an era of high volatility and fast moving change - an uncertain world that is less predictable, a complex world with many, often contradictory, variables at play, and challenges that are often ambiguous with no clear cut solutions;
- Secondly, it is an era of rapid pace of technological adoption, the internet of things, artificial intelligence and robotics presently manifesting itself in the form of what is popularly known as the Fourth Industrial Revolution or Industry 4.0 – I am glad there is a specific presentation that is going to look at the implications of this for young people;

- Thirdly the new normal of our time is evinced by high levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality, all in the midst of islands of opulence that have never been seen before; and
- And finally, it is a period that is characterised by a disconnect between public institutions and the broader development imperatives of society. This has been popularly referred to as the social distance. A social distance that chiefly manifests itself between those who are in position of power and influence and those who are supposed to be recipients of service.

Whilst this may all seem daunting, at the same time it is an opportunity for innovation, calling for an adaptive transition into new social, economic and institutional configurations. Encouragingly, the signs are there that the world, the continent and our nation are already in transition. This Youth Development Convention aims to trigger deeper discussion and debate about this and the role of youth in transforming and shaping the future world. This is particularly necessary when considering the demographics both continentally and nationally, which portray a move towards a more youthful population. For example, Statistics South Africa 2017 data shows that almost two thirds of our population is under the age of 35, of whom 36% are youth between the ages of 15 – 34. It therefore is critical to activate the youth voice and to tap into their animated creative potential in developing new solutions to the socio-economic challenges of poverty, exclusion, inequality and unemployment so that young people's agency shapes a more sustainable future.

Policy Context

Significant work has been done to develop policy frameworks aimed at unlocking the demographic dividend of Africa's youthful population. Some of the major policy prescripts that make a bold attempt at defining a youth development trajectory are:

- a. The African Youth Charter as adopted by the African Union
- b. Africa Agenda 2063: *The Africa We Want* – Africa's integrated development programme.
- c. South Africa's National Youth Policy – *We are generation 2020! We do not want a hand-out we want a hand up!*

These policies are the blue prints that embody the development aspirations of Africa's young people and serve as the cornerstone for the Convention. There is an urgent need to translate these policy intentions into concrete integrated programmes of action to proffer alternative and creative evidence-based solutions to the challenge of youth inclusion in the global and national development agenda. The carefully selected themes of the Convention are positioned to provide the scaffolding for advancing and achieving this. A pivotal outcome of this Convention, I hope, is putting the basics in place towards the development of a Youth Development Index for South Africa. This will be a critical tool for ensuring and enhancing policy implementation through integrated monitoring and accountability.

I wish to thank all our partners, including particularly government agencies such as the Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Consultative Council (ECSECC) and the United Nations agencies in providing technical expertise for this endeavour. This brings to life the university's public

commitment to forge close partnerships with government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and civil society in order to deliver on the development aspirations of young people.

Embedding the Convention

In my inaugural address in April, I put forward the idea of establishing Hubs of Convergence, between the University and community. As we announced, these Hubs will be spaces where the University meets community to engage on common platforms to find solutions to practical problems that affect our immediate communities. The Hubs will provide an outward focus, and will benefit from the intellectual and other assets of the University, and the conscious wisdom of the communities that surround us.

This Youth Development Convention is designed as an expression of the conceptual notion and purpose of a Hub of Convergence, set up to enable a sustained focus and discourse on the needs, challenges, aspirations and visions of young people. Through this, the youth and students will remain positioned as the key participants and contributors to the transformation of both society and the university, working towards more youth-centred solutions whilst fostering innovation and on-going development.

To be held annually, each year, the Convention will provide a space for young people to come together to reflect on their centrality in their own development, and to track progress against the milestones delineated in the Youth Development Index.

Leadership Renewal

The Arab spring and the Fallist Movement in our country chiefly manifesting in the #feesmust fall movement have clearly dislodged the long held notion about youth apathy. The young people of the continent are active and consciously awake to the realities of their human condition. The lessons from these examples of youth activism are instructive. They redefine leadership as we know it. We need to therefore view leadership *“as the capacity of a community to co-sense and co-create its emerging future”*. We need to therefore shift *“our framing of leadership development from building individual skills to igniting fields of inspired connection and action”* (Otto Sharmer; 2009).

It is therefore imperative to cultivate a new kind of leaders who are capable of remaking and redesigning the new world and continent into a thread of humanity that connects us all. Amongst others, this Convention must contribute to the sculpting of a new young African intelligentsia that understands and believes that the real purpose in life is to serve humanity.

If we succeed in this endeavour of renewing leadership, we would have built a solid cornerstone towards the sustainable renewal of the country and continent.

Conclusion

In concluding Programme Director, this inaugural Convention is a manifestation of the university's posture on engagement, placing the resources of the university as a community asset, seeking to contribute to the creation and expansion of a knowledge base on youth development. I wish to thank all of the entities who are partnering with us and participating in this ground-breaking initiative. I also wish to acknowledge and thank all the speakers who will share their insights over the next three days.

Finally I call on the youth who have opted to give their time to attend this Convention, to participate actively, to contribute your voice, energy and ideas, to change the world.

Enkosi, I thank you.