

## **NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY LAUNCH 20 July 2017**

Today is a momentous occasion.

We are officially rebranding our university to become the ONLY university in the world that now properly carries the name of the first all inclusive, democratically elected president of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Nelson Mandela. A global icon of the 21<sup>st</sup> century who was born in the Eastern Cape. A name that needs no explanation wherever you are in the world. And with that name also comes a huge responsibility to live up to what that name represents for anyone who has been touched and/or studied at this great university.

The repositioning of our university on a global scale has now become a reality. The timing of our rebranding cannot be more apt as it coincides with Mr Nelson Mandela's birthday week. He would have been 99 years old this past Tuesday, the 18th July 2017.

I will give you a very recent example of the global reach of the name Nelson Mandela. On a recent trip of mine to a small remote island off the coast of Croatia, I met some elderly farmers whose command of the English language was near non existing. They did not have a television set nor a radio in their humble home. The farmer asked my guide in Croatian where I was from and when he heard South Africa, the next two words uttered by the farmer, was Nelson Mandela, followed by 'great man'.

I often ask myself..How many of us could have done what Nelson Mandela did upon his release? How many of us could have sworn off vengeance and preached reconciliation? How many of us could have turned the final chapters of our own life into a new beginning for all of our nation's people?

For in bringing down the evil of apartheid, Nelson Mandela raised us up; his wisdom, patience, compassion and insistence on reconciliation inspires us to be better people and unify us as a nation. His determination to break away from the chains of the past, enabled us all to join him as the masters of our fate and the captains of our souls. He showed us that one man's courage can change the world. And he calls on us to make choices that reflect not our fears, but our hopes – in our own lives, and in the lives of our communities and our country.

So with the rebranding of this university to become the Nelson Mandela University, the question is whether Madiba would be proud of the association? And my answer to that question will undoubtedly be yes, he would be immensely proud.

Why? Quite simply because the core values that Madiba represents of integrity, ubuntu, inclusivity, proudly South African and proudly African, courageous, to name a few, are what this university has been founded upon and what it strives to live up to.

Nelson Mandela University, under the formidable leadership of outgoing VC, Prof Derrick Swartz and his team, stands proud today with 27 000 students and the highest ever number of graduates, namely 6700. This September, the only dedicated Ocean Sciences campus in South Africa will be launched here in Port Elizabeth with the approval also granted for a Medical School to be launched in the next few years. Innovation, transformation and creating thought leaders for the future prosperity of our country have always been paramount to what this university is about.

The next question will of course be whether Madiba will be proud to be associated with South Africa's current political leadership and the path that they have embarked upon and are carving out for his and our beloved country? Can the vision, integrity and skill set of the current political

leadership achieve the dream that Madiba had of a South Africa being prosperous and a globally respected country?

Personally, I very much doubt it. That is the question that political leadership should ask themselves today. The time has come to rebrand South Africa. Not in name but in values and delivery. The values of a reignited and relaunched South Africa should reflect and encompass integrity, honesty, accountability, delivery for all its people and not just a select few, eradication of all forms of corruption, underpinned by a world class primary, secondary and tertiary education system.

A drastic change in political leadership and political will is required to change our economic woes for the betterment of all South Africans. Our current hopeless 28% unemployment rate in a low growth economy is not where we as South Africans want to be. Needless to say, the current volatile and polarized political climate will remain the single biggest threat to any real economic recovery.

In my interactions with students, it has become quite clear that they are not the leaders of tomorrow, they are the leaders of today and tomorrow. They have big dreams and aspirations and it is our responsibility as leaders in all our respective spheres of influence, to enable them to make their dreams and aspirations achievable. Therefore, top quality and accessible education is a non negotiable. The debate around free, quality, decolonised education needs to be addressed by all concerned citizens to ensure that we find the best workable, long term solution for the future prosperity of South Africa. As a Nigerian colleague of mine always remind me by saying : 'It is essential for South Africa to succeed because then Africa will succeed.'

Failure is not an option.

It will be remiss of me not to thank Justice Dikgang Moseneke with whom I had the first discussion re a potential name change of the university 7 years ago and he played a critical role until the very end in making our rebranding to the Nelson Mandela University a reality.

Our number one priority is to ensure that we offer the kind of education that can change the world for the better. As Madiba so aptly said, education is the most powerful weapon that a country can have.

Siyabulela nangomso.