



# RHODES UNIVERSITY

*Where leaders learn*

## VICE-CHANCELLOR'S WELCOME ADDRESS TO 2015 GRADUATION CEREMONIES

### Thursday 09 April 2015

10:00: Faculty of Science

17:00: Faculties of Education and Humanities  
Mr Hugh Masekela, D Mus (*hc*)

### Friday 10 April 2015

10:00: Faculty of Commerce

Dr Saleem Badat, LLD (*hc*)

14:30: Faculties of Law, Commerce, Science and Pharmacy  
Adv. Thulisile Madonsela, LLD (*hc*)

18:00: Faculties of Humanities, Commerce and Science  
Dr David Koloane, DFA (*hc*)

### Saturday 11 April 2015

10:00: Faculties of Science and Humanities

Prof Frances Lund, LLD (*hc*)

OFFICE OF THE VICE-CHANCELLOR

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## **No greater honour!**

The Chancellor, the Honourable Justice Lex Mpati

The Chairperson of the Rhodes University Council, Mr Vuyo Kahla, and other members of our Council

The Chairperson of the Rhodes University Convocation, Reverend Dr Simon Gqubule

Our Honorary Doctoral Graduand

The Public Orator, Distinguished Prof Paul Maylam

Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Deans, Registrar, Heads of Academic Departments and Administrative Divisions

Academic and support staff colleagues

President and other members of the Student Representative Council

Our new graduands,

Families, guardians, siblings and friends of our graduands

Honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen

Molweni, dumelang, good morning, gotsong, goeie-more, sanibonani.

It gives me immense pleasure to welcome you all to the first of our six graduation ceremonies of 2015 at which we acknowledge, honour and celebrate the outstanding achievements and successes of our students.

First and foremost, let me, on behalf of our academic, administrative and support staff offer our deep and warm congratulations to you, our graduands.

Your graduation this morning is a culmination of many hours of hard work, sacrifice, perseverance, determination and drive to succeed. You have spent many hours preparing for your lectures, writing term papers and sitting for examinations. I am certain that there were moments of frustration, despair and doubt when you wondered if this special day would ever arrive. I hope that the fruits of your well-earned success that we celebrate this morning have made frustration, despair and doubt a distant memory.

Your stellar achievements are all the more special given that our education system has a dismal record in realising the full potential of many young people in this country.

Your graduation this morning fills one with a deep sense of hope and optimism that the future of our country is very bright with promise.

I hope you will not begrudge your parents, guardians, loved ones and friends when they bask in the reflected glory of your fine achievements. They too made huge sacrifices for you to reach this stage of your personal growth, development and educational achievement. Without their boundless love, constant encouragement, unfailing moral, spiritual and material support, the academic success we celebrate with you this morning may have remained in the realm of hope and wishful imagination.

If I may be so bold, let me, on your behalf, express profound gratitude and sincere appreciation to your lecturers, tutors, laboratory technicians, computer assistants, support and administrative staff for their guidance, mentoring, support and encouragement during the trying times of your studies. Your success is their just reward!

I hope you will also be the first to acknowledge the important role played by the cleaners, cooks, gardeners, janitorial staff, wardening staff, student leadership and sport societies and clubs in creating a rich and supportive intellectual, social and physical environment for you to develop, grow and succeed in your academic endeavours.

Our University is very fortunate to have outstanding, loyal, dedicated and committed academic and support staff who take a deep and keen interest in the growth, development and academic success of each and every one of our students. As a Vice-Chancellor, I could not ask for more!

In five of the six graduation ceremonies, we will also recognise, honour and celebrate five outstanding honorary graduands whose unique and special contributions to our nation and humankind are worthy of our recognition. These are women and men whose significant achievements and distinction in some field or activity of human endeavour set them apart from others, and are consonant with our institutional mission, purposes and values.

We are deeply grateful that they have honoured us with their acceptance of our offer of recognition and have graced us with their presence in our graduation ceremonies.

### *Tragic events in Kenya...*

As we gather this morning to celebrate exceptional achievements and the future promise of our students, our thoughts and prayers go out to the students and staff of Garissa University in Kenya, who are struggling with grief and shock as they try to make sense of the cold-blooded, senseless and violent killing of 148 students on their campus. Our hearts go out to the parents,

friends and relatives who lost their loved ones in that barbaric act of brutality. May I request that we all stand and observe a moment of silence in memory of the lives lost at Garissa University.

### *Are we still on course?*

On 27 April 1994, we embarked on an ambitious and yet eminently achievable course of building a new nation; a transformed, non-racial, non-sexist society; a society that is united in its diversity; a prosperous South Africa which upholds human dignity, social justice and human rights. It was on that memorable day, when we stood patiently in long and winding queues, that the ‘winter of despair’ of colonialism and despair gave way to the ‘spring of hope’ of a constitutional democracy.

The early years of our young democracy were characterised by unbounded enthusiasm for national reconciliation, nation-building and human solidarity. It was indeed that spirit of optimism that moved former President Mbeki to proclaim proudly that

“I believe I know this as a matter of fact, that the great masses of our country everyday pray that the new South Africa that is being born will be a good, a moral, a humane and a caring South Africa, which, as it matures, will progressively guarantee the happiness of all its citizens.”<sup>1</sup>

Nations of the world looked at us with envy as our peaceful transition from an oppressive and pernicious system of colonialism and apartheid to a constitutional order was celebrated and hailed as a ‘miracle’.

Why, you might ask, am I taking you back to the momentous events of April 1994?

I do so to make two simple points:

First, in my view, we have lost our direction, we have lost our way, and, above all, we have lost our moral compass. We have elevated to positions of leadership and responsibility some people of questionable moral and ethical character. People who have no sense of the difference between right and wrong, just and unjust, fair and unfair, ethical and unethical occupy positions of significance, power and influence.

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<sup>1</sup> T Mbeki, 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture.

The noble qualities and values of personal integrity, honesty, humility, compassion, respect for each other, fairness, forgiveness, empathy, selfless dedication and willingness to put others first, that were so beautifully exemplified by President Nelson Mandela, have given way to venality, a complete lack of integrity, moral decadence, profligacy, rampant corruption, deceit, and duplicity.

We have become a society in which obscene and unbridled opulence exists alongside debilitating poverty and deprivation; a society that relentlessly promotes a culture of untrammelled greed and conspicuous consumption above the public and common good; a culture that judges one's worth by the amount of personal wealth amassed; a culture which, in the words of former president Thabo Mbeki, is possessed of demons which,

“advise with rhythmic and hypnotic regularity – get rich! get rich! get rich!”<sup>2</sup>

We have become a society in which many, far too many, of our fellow compatriots are mired in desperate daily routines of survival, while at the same time, crass materialism and vulgar and ostentatious displays of personal wealth have become fashion statements for the political elite.

Is it any wonder that key institutions such as the criminal justice system are in such a state of disarray? The National Prosecution Authority has not had proper leadership since the departure of Advocate Vusi Pikoli; the head of the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID), Mr Robert McBride, is on suspension, the head of the Hawks, Mr Anwar Dramat, is on suspension, the head of the Special Investigating Unit, Advocate Vas Soni, resigned earlier this year.

In a society characterised by incertitude, cynicism and despair, we look to you, graduates of this distinct and distinctive institution of higher learning, for leadership to tackle the challenges that face our society and the world.

The choices that you make will determine and shape who you will become, and the legacy that you will bequeath our society and humanity. Whatever choices you make, never elevate personal ambition and single-minded pursuit of material and financial gain above everything else. Whatever the future holds for you, always strive to be the best that you can possibly be.

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<sup>2</sup> T Mbeki, 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture.

Always strive to live a life of consequence, guided by Mahatma Ghandi's injunction that we should "live simply so others may simply live".

My appeal to you is that you become an active, engaged and concerned citizen who takes a special interest in and concern for those who are living in the social and economic margins of our society. We cannot fail them; we dare not fail them!

My appeal to you is that you use your knowledge, creativity, skills, energy and expertise to ensure that the society and the world you will bequeath the next generation is better than the one you inherited from our generation.

Second, the recent momentous events that were sparked off by a call by some students at the University of Cape Town for the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes have reverberated across the length and breadth of our land and beyond and have drawn our attention to the unfinished project of fashioning, out of a society kept apart by centuries of colonialism and decades of apartheid, a new and virtuous society animated by the values of our Constitution; a more humane, a more just, a more caring, a more equitable, a fairer, and an inclusive society.

The recent events also point to the sad reality that the political transition of 1994 has not been accompanied, in any tangible and meaningful way, by economic and social upliftment of the poor and marginalised majority of our country. There is a growing and palpable disenchantment with the slow pace of economic and social advancement of the poor and the marginalised in our country. Poverty, unemployment and inequality still reflect the contours of our apartheid past. More fundamentally, these events point to the lack of transformation in our society, in general, and in our institutions of higher learning, in particular. In the context of higher education, central to the issue of transformation are the key questions of: what we teach, who teaches, how we teach, how we assess, recognition and appreciation of different lived experiences that students bring with them in class, taking cognisance of different learning styles of our students, what we value as knowledge, which scholarly voices are heard and which ones are silenced, recognition and celebration of diversity and difference and leveraging on them to create a rich learning experience for our students, social and demographic composition of our academic and support staff, daily discourses and the assumptions we make about each other, experiences of exclusion, and so on. These are some

of the important questions we must critically reflect on and address if we are to become a genuinely African university and not just a university in Africa.

Questions have been raised about the future of the name of our University, in light of the excesses of the person, Cecil John Rhodes, after whom it is named. We welcome the opening that has been created by our students to engage, debate and discuss our complex and uncomfortable past in earnest in order to forge a new and shared future. However, in order for us to advance the creation of the kind of a society envisioned in our Constitution, we must refrain from making sweeping, unhelpful and hurtful generalisations. We must respect each other's views. We should never try to delegitimise, trivialise or be dismissive of each other's views and experiences. We shouldn't call each other names nor should we launch gratuitous *ad hominem* attacks on each other. We should use the power of rational and reasoned argument, logic and debate to forge common ground on the issues about which we hold different views. We must also be open-minded, and be willing to be persuaded to change our position on the matter based on the quality of the argument advanced.

Ours is a nation in the making. We are a society that is struggling to find a common set of values. We are as yet to forge a shared sense of national identity. The maturity of our 21 year old democracy will be tested as we engage, debate and discuss our painful, complex and uncomfortable past. This will require of us to embrace, internalise and live out the values of our Constitution. It will also require mature and visionary leadership, values-based leadership, caring leadership, compassionate leadership, bold and courageous leadership, moral and ethical leadership, responsible and accountable leadership, leadership that is guided by principles and one that eschews populism.

My appeal to you, our graduands, is that you embrace the leadership responsibility that you will be expected to discharge as a graduate of this great institution and that you do so with humility. Choose to serve our society and humanity. For there is no greater honour than to serve humanity with honour, integrity and humility!

### *Graduation statistics.....*

In the 6 graduation ceremonies of 2015, a total of 2 298 students will receive their degrees and diplomas. Of these, 1 244 (or 54%) are undergraduate Bachelor's degrees and 1054 (or 46%) are postgraduate degrees and diplomas.

Of the 1 054 postgraduate students, 281 will be receiving their Master's degrees.

We celebrate a new University record of 75 PhD degrees, beating the previous record of 71 of last year! We also celebrate a new record of 16 PhD degrees for the Faculty of Humanities, up from the previous record of 12 achieved last year.

Of the 2 298 graduates, 61% are women – this is up from 60% last year, and 23% are international students – also up from 21% last year.

The Faculty of Science, which is the third largest Faculty in the University, has produced more PhDs than all the other five Faculties combined! Congratulations to the Dean and staff of the Faculty of Science.

### *Our graduates...*

With your graduation this morning, you join thousands of other exceptionally talented and influential graduates of our University who are making significant contributions in many and diverse fields of human endeavour across the globe.

I welcome you to this ever-growing and diverse community, and I invite you to visit the alumni table in the Monument foyer to receive your special graduation gift.

With a degree or diploma from Rhodes University, you have been prepared to negotiate successfully and overcome whatever challenges that may lie ahead. You have been educated at one of the finest universities in the world. Your future could not be brighter! In the years to come, we will follow your growth and development as a professional with keen interest and we will applaud you for the honour and credit you bring to your alma mater.

At my installation as the Vice-Chancellor of this fine institution, I made two commitments.

- (1) First, that Rhodes University would be accessible to students from poor, rural and working class backgrounds so that they can benefit from the outstanding educational experiences it offers.
- (2) Second, that I would make it my personal mission to strive to ensure that no academically talented, but financially needy, student is turned away from Rhodes University.

In that regard, my final appeal to you is that you help us live up to these important commitments by contributing generously to our Alumni Annual Fund and other fundraising efforts. Your support is vital if we are to continue to make the learning experiences we value so greatly here at Rhodes University more available to all.

Today is your special day, a moment to pause, to reflect, and to celebrate all you have achieved. Enjoy this special moment. You have earned it! May you look back on this glorious day with great pride and warm memories and may it serve as an inspiration and a springboard towards better and exciting things in life for you.

### *Special acknowledgement....*

In conclusion, let me pay a special tribute to the wonderful men and women who have worked tirelessly to make our graduation ceremonies possible. They normally work behind the scene to ensure that our graduation ceremonies run without a glitch. These are the people who have worked extra hard to ensure that the names of our graduands appeared on the graduation programme, in the right place, in the right order and for the right qualification. They wanted to be sure that the moment of glory of each one of our graduands was a truly memorable experience.

They are too many to mention, but permit me to single out a few:

- The army of student volunteers who are serving as ushers;
- Ms Desiree Wicks;
- Ms Suzette Flanagan;
- Ms Robyn Cock;
- Charmaine Avery
- Mr Cromwell Dyala
- The Faculty Deans;
- Master's dissertation and doctoral thesis supervisors; and
- Our Registrar, Dr Steve Fourie.

When you see them around, please give them a warm hug, a smile and a quiet 'thank you'.

They are truly special!

Asante sana. Enkosi. Ke a leboga. Ngiyabonga. Ke a leboha. Ndo livhuwa. Ngiyathokoza.  
Inkomu. Baie dankie. Thank you very much.