

NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY

SRC Investiture 2021

Professor Sibongile Muthwa
Vice-Chancellor, Nelson Mandela University

President and Members of the SRC
Student leaders from societies and formations
Deputy Vice-Chancellors and executive management
The Dean of Students
Executive Deans of Faculty
Staff and students

It is my privilege and is indeed a pleasure to address this important gathering today. I am humbled as I stand here in the presence of our student leadership collective. I would like to congratulate the SRC of 2021 on your election, following a robust but fair campaigning among our student community. You are the first generation of student leaders that have been elected through the deployment of latest technologies that made our students to vote anywhere, anytime within the framework of our rules for SRC elections. To this end, I congratulate our colleagues in the Student Life and Development division for this achievement, and I hope that this will now be a practice going forward.

The investiture of the SRC is an extremely significant ceremony, as it confers upon each member of the SRC the formal responsibilities of serving in this leadership capacity. Through your election, you now have placed on your shoulders a daunting and yet exciting responsibility of selfless service to students, the university and our communities.

As the new generation of student leaders who have volunteered to be of service to the student community, you are taking office in exceptional conditions mainly occasioned by the advent of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Hence I referred to you as a new generation of student leaders. You will be leading in conditions that have fundamentally changed. Mr President, these unprecedented changes challenge us as the leadership community to rethink how we deploy learning and teaching; serve our students; respond to the changing profile and needs of our students and how we respond to precarious conditions that our communities, and indeed our society find themselves in. I am making this brief observation to challenge you to reflect on approaches you need to adopt to optimally serve our students. As you reflect on this critical question, I also challenge you to bring forward proposals on how the university can re-imagine student life at Mandela in a post-Covid higher education environment.

As the SRC, you are the custodian and champion of the university's six distinctive values. Mr President, I trust that you have ensured that each SRC member knows these values by heart. But more importantly, I am looking forward to hearing your plans and programme of action to ensure that these values come alive during your term of office, in active and vibrant ways.

I call out the values, one by one, so that we can all take a moment to reflect on these and remind ourselves of their importance as a motif, and insignia of sorts, of what this University stands for. Our values are:

- Diversity
- Excellence
- Ubuntu
- Social justice and equality
- Integrity
- Environmental stewardship

I enjoin you individually and collectively to be an embodiment of the true essence of what is espoused in these values, and in this way place yourselves through practice, and comportment at the centre of cultivating a Mandela way. **The Mandela way will be a product of the consistent adherence to the values of our university by all our students, staff and stakeholders.** Our university leadership collective inclusive, of our student leadership, has an added responsibility to not only lead by example but to champion the living of our values.

In addition **to adhering to the values of our university,** as democratically elected student representatives I urge you to carry your mandate with courage, authenticity, discipline and in ways that make Mandela moves forward – make progress. All of this is possible Mr President if we are all committed to engagement. Our university is known for its commitment to dialogue and authentic conversations with its students. Building on this success, we would want to deepen this practice into a formal social compact with our students. At the core of our social compact is our collective commitment to the cultivation of a university culture that catalyses life changing learning experiences for our students. **The social**

compact ought to commit all of us at Mandela to progress, deepen and typify our commitment to fashioning a student centric university.

Our social compact ought to enjoin us to uproot all forms of human rights violations and abuses particularly gender-based violence and harm at our institution, and advocate for same wherever the situation requires us to do. I wish to call upon the SRC to develop a clear programme to fight GBV and harm, and other social ills, the seek to indignify the members of our community. I commit the full support of management to work alongside you in this regard.

Your commanding commitment during your term of office has to be the cultivation and renewal of cutting edge leadership that is committed to the realisation of Mandela Uni's vision. One of the tasks at hand is that of enabling and supporting of women leadership. This remains pivotal in our intention to contribute towards an equal society. To this end, I wish to recommit myself to be a sounding board for women leaders in the SRC.

Finally, our leadership programme must be about the development of agents for transformative change. Developing agents of change starts at personal level – be your own agent of change first as an individual leader. This is possible if as a leadership collective we are authentic, reflective and self-reflective – self-corrective, disciplined, while we embrace lifelong learning, and remain humble.

As I conclude, leadership is not always easy. It is complex. It is multi-dimensional. It must be principled. It requires of us to think and act beyond ourselves. It serves greater good. **It must stand the test of time.** As a leader you will be called upon to make judicious and sometimes tough choices. Your leadership is your legacy, and it is how you will be known,

both now and as you move into your life beyond the university after you graduate.

As student leaders, you shoulder a great responsibility to bear the name of Nelson Mandela, who stands as the person chosen by the global community to put a human face to our collective aspirations for a more socially just world.