

**Mandela University Press Launch Address**

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Programme Facilitator, Professor Andre Keet, good evening

Let me start by recognising our Chancellor, Dr Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi; our Chair of Council, Ambassador January-Bardill; Exco of Council and Members of Council; members of the MUP Editorial Board; CEO of African Sun Media, Mr Nirode Bramdaw; all colleagues from Mandela University in our different categories; our students; the authors of the book that we are launching this evening; and all of you honoured guests.

1. Thank you, Chairperson of Council, Ambassador Nozipho January-Bardill, for your warm words of welcome and encouragement. I would also like to greet you all - those who are joining us online this evening and those of you able to attend in person. We have people joining us from different time zones across the world, and so for some, it is very early in the morning and for others it is very late at night. Thank you for taking time to participate in this important event.
2. This evening we are holding a double celebration: we are officially launching the Mandela University Press; and we are launching the book *Achieving Nelson Mandela University?* You will hear more about the book later, but one of the key themes of the book is that Mandela University is on a journey to become a socially embedded university in the service of society.

## **Mandela University Press**

3. The launch of the Mandela University Press is a historic milestone along the road to achieving Mandela University. It is always a very special moment when a dream becomes a reality.

4. Why a university press when we live in a country that is already reasonably well endowed with university presses? A good friend of Mandela University, and a wise and experienced scholar and higher education specialist, Prof. Ahmed Bawa, set this out very succinctly in 2019:

**“Scholarly publishing is at the very heart of the academic enterprise. It is the mechanism by which research findings are subjected to peer review, which brings them to the attention of scholars and the public and ultimately embeds them in the global enterprise of knowledge production.”<sup>1</sup>**

5. To this I could add that university presses in South Africa are concentrated at historically advantaged, research-intensive universities, and, until now, none are located in the Eastern Cape. This is unfortunate if you consider that the Eastern Cape was home to the iconic Lovedale Press, the premier publishing house in South Africa in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; one that did so much to advance works in African literature, history, languages and culture.

6. Advancing the rationale for university presses at a global level, the Association of University Presses describes the value of a university press as follows:

**“University Presses are at the center of the global knowledge ecosystem. We publish works and perform services that are of vast benefit to the diverse scholarly network - researchers, teachers, students, librarians, and the rest of the university community... Each University Press brings a distinctive vision and mission to its work. Yet we are all guided by, and united in, core values -**

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<sup>1</sup> Bawa, A. 2019. South Africa’s Scholarly Presses: Essential to the knowledge enterprise. USAf website: <https://www.usaf.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/South-Africas-Scholarly-Presses.pdf.pdf> (accessed 25 July 2024). I am indebted to African Sun Media’s foundation document for establishment of MUP for bringing this reference to my attention.

**integrity, diversity, stewardship, and intellectual freedom - that define who we are, the work we do, and the goals to which we aspire.”**<sup>2</sup> (my emphasis)

7. Distinguished guests, Nelson Mandela placed huge importance on education as a force for good; as a weapon to change the world. Our intention with the establishment of the MUP is to create a bespoke press that initially aims to publish no more than 5-10 books annually. The number of books that it publishes speaks to its purposeful differentiation. The MUP does not seek to compete with the other university presses that publish around 20 books per annum, and that have several accredited and unaccredited journals or textbooks in their stables.
8. We are confident that Mandela University Press will become a sought-after publisher for works that extend the frontiers of knowledge. The press has already published and launched four titles over the past two years. We are encouraged that we have already received unsolicited manuscripts from scholars who wish to publish with us. After today’s launch of *Achieving Nelson Mandela University?* four more books will be published in 2024 (three are academic volumes and one is a community-oriented publication). The next book will be out in August 2024. This book, *Inyathi ibuzwa kwaba’phambili: African Women’s Intellectual Histories in Southern Africa* is edited by Babalwa Magoqwana, Siphokazi Magadla and Athambile Masola.
9. Establishing a university press is, of course, a costly enterprise but we have adopted a model which will make the MUP both viable and sustainable.
10. Firstly, the press will operate from within the university and not as an independent entity with its own legal persona. The niche areas of the press will be closely linked with the identity and values of the university as well the strategic focus areas and research themes.
11. Secondly, the MUP will not, at the outset, set up the whole infrastructure of an independent publishing house. We have instead entered into a partnership with African Sun Media (ASM). This will enable us to operate from a low-cost basis with controlled fixed costs and overheads. In this regard, I must extend a special word of appreciation to the CEO of

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<sup>2</sup> The Value of University Presses. 2019. The Association of University Presses. AUP website: <https://aupresses.org/the-value-of-university-presses/> (accessed 25 July 2024).

African Sun Media, Nirode Bramdaw. Nirode, thank you for joining hands with Mandela University as a strategic partner in this very important enterprise. We value the expertise and experience that you and your team bring to MUP.

12. The establishment of the MUP directly advances our Vision 2030 strategy, of which one of our focus areas (Strategic Focus Area 2) talks to pursuing impactful, pioneering research, innovation, and internationalisation to address grand societal challenges and promote sustainable futures.
13. I also would like to stress that in line with the vision and mission of Nelson Mandela University to contribute to social justice and a more equal society, the Mandela University Press is committed to working with partners beyond the confines of the institution, and to generating books, materials and works that will advance and further the goals of knowledge creation, affirmation, and resurfacing of genres that engage with the diversity of human experience and creativity; especially those that history has pushed to the margins.
14. To this end, while the Press is intended to provide deliberate pathways for emerging and established scholars and in so doing, advance the University's intellectual reputation and standing, it will have more than a purely academic imprint. It will also make provision for diverse outputs and forms of expression. As it grows, these may include platforms for oral traditions, community-centred work, artistic creations, gendered imaginations, and so on. In this way, the press will aim to be inclusive in its outlook and to respond to our ideal of being a socially embedded university in service of society.
15. This orientation of the press stretches across knowledge fields: from the hard sciences, engineering and health sciences, to the arts, humanities and the social sciences.
16. Most importantly, the establishment of the Mandela University Press is a tangible step in our Africanisation and reclamation aspirations. It will pursue an African epistemic project. This means, and here I am paraphrasing Paul Zeleza, it will encourage work that does not simply "write Africa by analogy."<sup>3</sup> Rather, it will facilitate writing beyond the Eurocentric coding of our Continent. In this way we may be in a better position to do what Kopano

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<sup>3</sup> Zeleza, Paul. 2009. African Studies and Universities since Independence: the Challenges of Epistemic and Institutional Decolonization. *Transition*. 101, p. 113.

Ratele (2019) asks us to do ... that is, to “better locate Africa and Africans in knowledge” and to “produce ideas that are disalienating for a meaningful life in Africa.”<sup>4</sup>

17. Earlier I mentioned the Lovedale Press. Our University has a formal partnership agreement with the Thabo Mbeki Foundation. One of the key areas of cooperation is to explore the revitalisation of the Lovedale Press. Our Executive Dean of Humanities, Prof. Pamela Maseko, has been engaging with the Thabo Mbeki Foundation and our sister universities in the Eastern Cape on this. But I would like to throw out a challenge this evening: Lovedale Press played a vitally important role in publishing works by Africans, much of it in African languages. Is there not an opportunity to work with partners to identify works of great significance for the decolonisation and Africanisation project and make them available to a wider audience by publishing facsimile reprints under the imprint of MUP?
18. Of course, distinguished guests, it is very important that we put in place systems and processes to jealously guard the integrity of the Press in terms of management, governance, and editorial processes.
19. No university Press would be able to operate appropriately without the oversight of an Editorial Board. To this end, we are grateful to have assembled an editorial board of high repute and integrity. It is my pleasure to announce the ten members of Nelson Mandela University Press Editorial Board. They are:
  - i. **Prof. Crain Soudien** (Chairperson)
  - ii. **Mr Nirode Bramdaw** (CEO of African Sun Media)
  - iii. **Prof. Andre Keet** (DVC: Engagement and Transformation)
  - iv. **Prof. Takyiwaa Manuh** (Emeritus Professor of African Studies, University of Ghana)
  - v. **Prof Nomalanga Mkhize** (Nelson Mandela University)
  - vi. **Prof. Azwinndini Muronga** (Executive Dean, Nelson Mandela University)
  - vii. **Dr Kwezi Mzilikazi** (Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Innovation and Strategic Partnerships, Rhodes University)

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<sup>4</sup> Ratele, Kopano. 2019. *The World Looks Like This From Here: Thoughts on African Psychology*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, p. 53.

- viii. **Prof. SN Neyck** (Associate Professor of African Studies, Political Economy, Gender, and Queer Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder, USA, and Adjunct Professor at *CriSHET* Nelson Mandela University, South Africa)
- ix. **Prof. Shirley Ann Tate** (Professor and Canada Research Chair in Feminism and Intersectionality, Dept of Sociology, University of Alberta) and
- x. **Prof. Felisa Tibbitts** (from the USA and the Department of Law, Economics and Governance at University of Utrecht, visiting Professor, *CrisHET*).

20. Our warm congratulations go to you all. We thank you for your willingness to lend your time and expertise to this important initiative.

21. I would like to sincerely thank all those who have played a role in bringing the Mandela University Press to life: Prof. Andre Keet, Mr Allan Zinn, Mr Nirode Bramdaw, the interim editorial board (without whom we would not have got to this point) and the many other people who have lent a shoulder to the wheel behind the scenes.

### **Book Launch**

22. Now let me briefly turn to the book we are also launching this evening, *Achieving Nelson Mandela University?* As you all know, South Africa's higher education sector is rooted in the country's divided past. From around 1997, a State-driven restructuring significantly changed the higher education landscape and resulted in what is largely the current configuration of public universities.

23. Nelson Mandela University is one of the public universities that emerged from that restructuring process. It emerged as Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in 2005 out of the amalgamation of the University of Port Elizabeth, Port Elizabeth Technikon and incorporation of the Port Elizabeth campus of Vista. In 2017, it was renamed Nelson Mandela University.

24. This renaming was conceptualised as more than a marketing and rebranding exercise. We also saw it as an opportunity to reorientate the university, to reposition Nelson Mandela University as an engaged and embedded university in the service of society, striving to be the academic expression of the values and ethos of its iconic namesake. This sense of

endeavouring to be something greater imbues its strategy documents and public statements. This determination to ‘achieve Mandela University’ serves, or is intended to serve, both an organising principle and a lodestar.

25. It is important in this regard to recognise the role played by the founding vice-chancellors of the merged institution now known as Nelson Mandela. We thank Dr Roelf Stumpf and Professor Derrick Swartz for pioneering leadership which stewarded the formation of the university that we have. Hopefully, we have been able to project this through this publication.

26. The purpose of the book we are launching today is to situate Nelson Mandela University within the contemporary historical moment from which it emerged and examine its subsequent evolution. *Achieving Nelson Mandela University?* is an intellectual and scholarly reflection on where the university has come from and where it is seeking to go.

27. My co-editor, Dr Denver Webb, will shortly outline the themes and provide more information on the authors of the book. I am exceedingly grateful to Denver for his diligence and humanising of the project. It was both a privilege and an honour to edit the book and to contribute to it. I also sincerely thank all the contributors to the book.

## **Conclusion**

28. In conclusion, it is our sincere wish that the Mandela University Press becomes an enduring symbol and manifestation of our commitment to being the academic expression of the ideals of our namesake and that the book that forms part of this launch will serve as a record of our journey so far as Nelson Mandela University. It is therefore my very great pleasure to formally launch the Mandela University Press and the accompanying book, *Achieving Nelson Mandela University?*

I thank you.

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