

Graduation 2019

George Campus

Speech by the Chancellor, Geraldine-Fraser Moleketi

Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sibongile Muthwa;
Deputy Vice-Chancellors;
Executive Deans of Faculty;
Dean of Students;
The Professoriate and members of the Academy;
The Acting Campus Principal and university staff members;
Members of the Student Representative Council;
Members of the media, university partners and stakeholders from government, the faith sector, civil society, communities, business, and particularly the Chairperson of the George Business Chamber;
Graduands, family and friends;
Manene nani manenekazi; ladies and gentlemen –

Molweni.

Good morning / afternoon.

Goeie more / middag.

On behalf of Nelson Mandela University, it is my great pleasure to welcome you all to this 2019 Autumn Graduation Ceremony.

It is a time to celebrate the giant step of graduation; the culmination of much hard work and many sacrifices by yourselves and your families.

It is a time to congratulate you, the students of Nelson Mandela University who are graduating today. Many of you have achieved and triumphed despite significant obstacles and difficulties. The university community applauds each and every one of our graduates and we share in your joy – we are a community that celebrates together.

Today, here on our George Campus, Nelson Mandela University is conferring over 450 under-graduate qualifications across higher certificates, diplomas and degrees, and, I'm very pleased to say, an increasing number of postgraduate qualifications this year, specifically master's degrees. You have completed your studies at arguably the most beautiful of our seven campuses that *nestles at the foot of the Outeniqua mountains "meaning they who bear honey!"*

During the full series of Autumn graduations being held during April this year, we will award just on 5000 qualifications, of which 68 are doctoral degrees.

One of our strategic priorities is to create environments that foster a thriving living and learning environment for staff and students. And so I am pleased to share that our Campus here in George will soon experience the benefit of sizeable investments made by the university. This is thanks to the imminent completion of a number of on-

campus build projects within the next 12 to 18 months. Construction work on most of these projects is already underway, including

- A 198-bed student accommodation facility at a cost of R50 million;
 - Refurbishment and conversion of existing infrastructure into large lecturing spaces which would also double-up as multipurpose venues at an estimated cost of R8 million;
 - The construction of an additional fresh water reservoir at a cost of R6 million to supplement the current reservoir's capacity for the George Campus community.
- In addition to the above, other smaller but equally significant projects underway include:
- A borehole sunk using the expertise of one of our own entities AEON (the Africa Earth Observatory Network) bringing an additional water capacity of 2 400 litres per hour;
 - Renovation and modernisation of the central control room of Protection Services Control; and
 - Upgrading of facilities of Horticulture Services.

We believe this investment will shape to the future attractiveness of the George campus as a place of learning and research and will contribute to the regional economy of this area.

Whether you are continuing on to further studies, entering the world of work, or you have studied while working, graduation is a life-changing occasion and you have no doubt been asking yourselves many times over, *where to next? How are you going to use this qualification you have achieved? What would you like do with your life? What would you like to do differently?*

Since the academic endeavour of addressing challenges and finding solutions starts with asking questions, you are all no doubt skilled in this art, and so, in my address today I hope to contribute some thoughts that pose a few questions.

I begin with a beautiful line spoken by Nelson Mandela. *"Somewhere in the mystery of your essence, you heard the call that you must devote your life to the creation of a new South African nation...."* This is what Mandela said at Oliver Tambo's funeral on 2 May 1993.

It is a call for all of us to hear and act upon, particularly at this time in our country when the creation of a united and proudly South African nation is still a work in progress.

As you know, Mandela and Tambo both grew up in rural communities, as did Albertina Sisulu, Walter Sisulu, Steve Bantu Biko, Sophie Williams, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, Sarah Baardman and many other outstanding people from their generation who made 1994 possible; and who made it possible for the existence of a Nelson Mandela University, where every South African of academic ability is able to enrol for a qualification that will change your life.

These were among the people who inspired me as a young woman born on the Cape Flats to a working class family. **They inspired me to dream audacious**

dreams, to join the struggle for social, political, economic justice and to believe in the vision of an equal, non-racial, non-sexist society.

Standing here and seeing this wonderful group of graduates, I think back to my twenties. I was absolutely bold and a bit of an idealist but it was not misplaced idealism. I was determined to do difficult things, to contribute to freedom, justice and the birth of a better society. To be an activist.

On Friday this week at our Port Elizabeth Campus graduation ceremonies, four lifelong activists who epitomise what it means to be an agent of change, will be receiving honorary doctorates. They are Dr Vuyokazi Mahlati, Ms Sibongile Mkhabela, Reverend Frank Chikane and Professor Mohambry Morgan Chetty.

As a student in the early 1970s, Reverend Chikane became politically aware and involved in the activities of the South African Student Organisation (SASO). His political activism, influenced by Black Consciousness, his involvement in the Congress Movement and his leadership role in the South African Council of Churches, led to his repeated detention which was disruptive to his education but he ultimately obtained an MA from Harvard University and a Master of Theology from the University of Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal). Throughout his life he has epitomised bold, fearless, ethical leadership, and has been committed to justice and equality for all.

Professor Chetty is one of South Africa's foremost medical and healthcare activists who has devoted his life to quality healthcare for all South Africans. A specialist family physician and researcher, he is the Chairperson of the Independent Practitioners Association Foundation, which unites family practitioners and surgeons towards providing South Africans with better care. "We need more pragmatism and less ideology" is his standpoint.

Dr Mahlati started her education at a farm school in the Eastern Cape and ultimately graduated with a PhD. She says that her education enabled her to make a difference in the lives of women and children in South Africa, and in the lives of the disabled, as well as to succeed in business, empower women in business and serve on South Africa's National Planning Commission.

Ms Mkhabela was a student activist in Soweto during the June 16, 1976 uprisings. Bold and fearless, she was arrested for her role in the uprisings, charged and imprisoned in Kroonstad in solitary confinement. Mind you, Bongi was a mere teenager when her mother Maggie/MaMasango met her untimely death and she became a pillar and anchor of her family. She rose to become the CEO of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund and through this has had a profound impact on the lives of millions of South African children. She says "always ask yourself, what are you doing for your society?"

Decades later, it is up to you to ask yourself this same question, to commit to expanding on freedom, equality and justice in whichever life path you pursue. You need to continue making difficult things happen, including very importantly, to make sure that you play your part in making society a safe space for women and men in

this era of intolerable gender violence that we are seeing on our campuses and in our society - and in so doing, to play your part in *changing the world*.

We are all aware of the rising cynicism about democracy and equality, but the achievement of a more equal society is not lost. You are the new leaders and shapers of our society and it is in your hands to respond to this challenge and rethink how each of you, with your fine qualifications, can play your part in reshaping society for the better, changing negative mindsets, confronting fear, boldly embracing life beyond university, dreaming audacious dreams. As Madiba said ... *from the mystery of your essence, hear the call...*

And so, the first question I put to you, is how will you contribute to improving life for yourself, your family, your community, your South Africa, your world?

Career-wise, you are entering one of the most exciting and challenging times in the history of the world.

- *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: 'We recognise that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan. We are resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet. We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind'.*

The future, with the Fourth Industrial Revolution upon us, is a new landscape of artificial intelligence, automation, robotics, big data, clean technologies, green economies... It is an unknown future from which will emerge a world, society, jobs, careers and professions that do not yet exist. In the same vein, jobs, careers and professions that currently exist will fall away or change.

This is not something to fear - this is something to which you need to apply your fine minds; to help create the future, help create a meaningful life and career for yourself and see how you can help to contribute to a more just society and greater opportunities for people who don't have the advantage of your qualifications, thinking ability and skills-set.

You will be faced with many times of uncertainty. Life is a journey of uncertainty. But if you befriend uncertainty you will recognise the many opportunities it can offer. We learn the most when we are thrust beyond our comfort zones.

Find ways to add innovative and global perspectives to your knowledge – through reading, connecting on-line or, where possible, travel. Find ways to create a bridge between university and life. See the transition itself as a journey that you will look back on in wonder in the years to come.

Dream big dreams for yourself, your family and your community. Be idealistic. This is the gift of youth and energy. Remember that with idealism and big dreams, come sacrifices of short-term satisfaction. You might not get the perfect job or opportunity at first - You might have to work towards what you want and be frustrated for a while.

Your degree is not an automatic entry to the ideal career. It is up to you to creatively and innovatively apply your knowledge and skills to whatever you do, and to draw on the academic and non-academic skills you have learnt at this university, including leadership, caring and character, to demonstrate who you are.

You will certainly have to work hard if you want to get ahead in life. Hard work will remain a constant throughout your life if you want to achieve, and it can bring great satisfaction. Material rewards often come with it too, and material comfort for you and your family is important, but I urge you to embrace the age old wisdom that *“enough is as good as a feast”*.

Which brings me to my second question:

How are you going to approach or your life now that you have graduated?

The growing trend is that you will have multiple careers, rather than a job for life. This does not necessarily mean constantly changing jobs. Having multiple careers means that throughout your life you need to keep innovating and reinventing yourself to adapt to the times, rising to the challenges of the times.

Change now is so rapid that what was a radical way of working five years ago is now “normal”. Transdisciplinarity; new knowledge; global context; sustainability; climate change; social entrepreneurship, circular economy, responsible citizenship, the internet of things, algorithmic consumers ... these are part of our lives and they are revolutionising ways of working and living and how we interact and transact in the world. These changes are birthing a new generation of entrepreneurs. Nurture and explore your entrepreneurial thinking and ability – even if you are not starting your own business just yet – entrepreneurial thinking, agility, curiosity and innovative ability are invaluable assets in the workplace.

This sets you apart and it brings me to another set of questions: *What does it mean to be a graduate of Nelson Mandela University? How will you distinguish yourself amongst the many graduates entering the world of work or the next level of study? How will you take forward into the world the values we seek to nurture at Nelson Mandela University?*

Our values are:

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

I urge you to inculcate these values and to think deeply and reflect on these questions, and the many others I am sure you have in your minds.

I wish to thank the families and communities who have stood by and supported our graduates. Your contributions are a fundamental component of the success of each and every graduate here today. It does indeed take a village to raise a child. We share in your pride and congratulate you on the success of your loved ones.

And so to the graduates, as you prepare to walk across this stage and into the next chapter of your journey, my final questions to you are: *What will you do with your education from Nelson Mandela University to change the world – for your family, your community, your profession, your country? What contribution will you make towards Africa's growth and development that leads to a better life for all?*

With confidence we believe that each of you will heed Madiba's call and make a valuable contribution. We look forward to seeing where your lives lead and encourage you to be active alumni of Mandela University.

Congratulations once again. I thank you.