

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY DR DUMISANI NGCOBO ON THE OCCASION OF THE SPRING GRADUATION CEREMONY OF THE FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES, 3 SEPTEMBER 2013, STEVE BIKO CAMPUS, DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Our Chancellor, Honourable Justice Vuka Shabalala (Retired)

Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Ahmed C Bawa

Dean, Staff and Graduandees from the Faculty of Management Sciences

Parents

Special Guests

Senior Government officials

Senior Officials from Embassies

Distinguished Guests

Comrades and Friends

Permit me Mr Chancellor to congratulate the Durban University of Technology for successfully ensuring that a substantial number of students particularly from historically disadvantaged backgrounds are today able to enter the first step into a privileged middle class group in South Africa that a degree/diploma especially awarded by a prestigious institution such as this confers, by graduating against many odds that confronted them since the first day of class in the Faculty of Management Sciences in various disciplines amongst them: Public Relations, Public Administration, Business Management, Human Resource Management, Operations Management and Quality Management.

Without a doubt these are important fields of study especially in a developmental country that seeks to banish underdevelopment, increase economic growth, spread the fruits of freedom equitable amongst all its citizens and truly empower the historically disadvantaged groups including blacks, women, children, senior citizens and the differently abled people. Also permit me, Mr Chancellor to congratulate our graduandees for staying the course and affirming the sacrifices of their parents and the contributions of their lecturers by these significant and timeless achievements in the form of these degrees/diplomas which will open the gates for them in life. This moment and this achievement also are therefore truly historic!

Kunina bazali abathandakayo ngifisa ukudlulisa lomlayezo: niyibekile induku ebandla ngokuthi noma kunzima kangakanani nikwazile ukubekezela nazifundisa izingane zenu ukuze zikwazi ukuziphilisa kusasa futhi kakhulukazi zibe namakhono afanele ukuze ziphonshe itshe ezivivanweni ekuthuthukiseni izwe lethu. Ngalokhu umdali anibusise ungunaphakade ngalisisibonelo! Futhi sengathi izingane zenu zingafunda kunina.

Having said the above, the congratulatory tune is however, not appropriate at this time for our beloved country, South Africa. I need not remind you ladies and gentlemen that the current situation in our country is very serious. I am referring to the much lamented situation of unemployment, poverty and inequality confronting the majority of our people. I am raising the triple challenges confronting our country not to apportion blame but to apportion responsibility to resolve them. As future leaders of society in your various fields of competence and general society which this education hopefully has equipped you with, must remember what the great Brazilian educator Paulo Freire said about the transformative power of education.

“Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.”

As these degrees/diplomas confer upon you upward mobility you must not leave the masses of our people behind but join with them in the necessary struggles by offering your valuable skills to change the course of the transformation of our country into an inclusive, just and egalitarian society. Don't impose your views on them but learn from each other and come to consensually agreed upon positions about the course to take. By so doing, you will not be off-the course, as again the great Brazilian educator counsels,

“Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people--they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress.”

Graduandees, your leadership is most required in finding genuine and lasting solutions to the triple challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality. You must not be confined to accepting the present solutions that are offered by the powerful in society as the only remedies for these triple challenges. Simply because if the old generation was correct in the diagnostic of the problems confronting our country, Africa and the world in general we will not be confronted with these challenges in the magnitude that we are currently confronted with them.

In order for you to occupy this important and urgent role you must imbibe the values of selflessness, sacrifice, service, transparency and public accountability which were nourished by the generation of the early twentieth century South Africa leaders such as Anton Lembede, Robert Sobukwe, Nelson Mandela, Steve Biko, Ahmad Kathrada, Joe Slovo and many more.

Look at the current crop of leadership in our country, Africa and the world and examine yourself and answer the following questions:

- 1) Are these the leaders South Africa, Africa and the World deserve?
- 2) Are these graduandees the future leaders that South Africa, Africa and the World deserve?
- 3) If yes, how does one explain the prevalence of unemployment, poverty and inequality, slow service delivery, rampant private sector and public sector corruption?
- 4) If not, what can each of us do to remedy the situation?

I want to specify the kind of leadership that is necessary if you, as our future leaders, are to transform this society for the better. It is not the leadership that is based neither on individual cult nor on worshipping one leader or few leaders but collective leadership both horizontally and vertically. In other words we must imbibe the notion that each and everyone of us is a potential leader in his or her own right.

This transformative leadership is not to be deployed for self-aggrandisement of power, position and wealth, promotion of crass materialism and populism based on empty promises. Leadership must promote the principles of

- 1) Self-development by creating the conducive environment for people to realise their full potential, develop their talents and
- 2) Self-determination so that people can be able to define, develop and defend their interests.

It is important to locate where your leadership is required at the present moment as we speak of economic freedom, the second phase of the transition and economic codesa in the context of the triple challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality. As true leaders resist the temptation to think of only your interests in the form of job security in a big firm or government when your brothers and sisters are unemployed with diminishing prospects of finding employment, when others are daily faced with job insecurity through casualization, restructuring and contract labour and others have absolutely no access to a social safety-net and are consequently leaving in abject squalor and poverty.

You must answer the question frankly in these tough economic times whose interests does the economy serves, and whose interests should it serve if we are to alter inherited power and economic relations, must it serve the haves/economically powerful or the have-nots/economically marginalised. As Paulo Freire counsels,

“Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.”

As you graduate today, which side will you take? I trust your education will enable you to make a correct choice.

We cannot remain true to our peace, democracy and social justice traditions if we do not offer a workable plan for the resolution of the current serious situations in Syria, DRC and Egypt. We must first join the growing international chorus that the use of international violence in whatever guise for whatever reason especially if not sanctioned by the only body with the authority to do so under international law, the United Nations must be condemned and duly rejected by a United Nations General Assembly vote if it is practical possible. The UN Secretary General must be petitioned within a week to present the results of the probe into the use of the chemical weapons to a Special Session of the UN General Assembly where a vote whether symbolic or not should be taken on the use of force in Syria by the only available parliament of the people of the World, the United Nations General Assembly. The second resolution that must be brought before the Special UN General Assembly Session is the holding of a UN sponsored International Conference on Peace, Democratisation and Reconstruction in Syria, DRC and Egypt. The US and Russia should co-chair the Syria section of the Conference while South Africa and Rwanda co-chair the DRC section and the two countries nominated by the Arab League co-chair the Egypt section of the International Conference. As a pre-condition for the UN sponsored Conference, all active parties in the three conflicts and their backers must commit to a cessation of hostilities. The Conference must then proceed with the discussion around the three themes: Peace, Democratisation and Reconstruction of the three countries. That is the only workable plan that can gain broad support internationally and lay the foundation for the reform of the UN instrument on Conflict, the UN Security Council.

Indeed it is apt to leave you with the advice from the great African revolutionary from Martinique, Frantz Fanon.

“It is up to us as African people to build a new future for humankind”.

I leave you with that.

Thank You.