

Speech at the occasion of reconciliation at the University of Free State, 25 February 2011

The Honourable Mayor ntate Playfair Morule; the leadership of the South African Human Rights Commission and other Chapter 9 institutions here-present, the University of the Free State and Mangaung municipality; most importantly, the workers and former students who are parties to the settlement we are marking tonight. There are so many people gathered here tonight that deserve to be acknowledged, that we could be doing just that all evening. So allow me to hide behind a wonderful saying by the diplomatic corps and say – all protocol observed.

The Nelson Mandela Foundation's Centre of Memory would like to congratulate all parties involved in this matter for reaching the settlement that they did. We would, however, like to remind us all that reconciliation is not an event but a process which requires a lot of work. Vanaand is belangrik maar meer belangrik is wat ons na-vanaand doen. It is what follows tonight's events that matters most and we stand ready to help. Ons moet almal hard werk om versoening en werklikheid te maak.

Re a le leboha hore le be le nkile keletso ya ntate Mandela ha a

re:

“Pheletsong, poelano ke tsela ya semoya, mme ha e hloke feela tsamaiso ya molao. E lokela ho etsahala ka dipelong le mehopolong ya batho”.

Let me repeat: We thank you for taking Madiba’s advice when he said:

“in the end, reconciliation is a spiritual process, which requires more than just a legal framework. It has to happen in the hearts and minds of people.”

We would also like to congratulate you for recognizing that effective reconciliation can only happen if nobody is humiliated into submission. That everybody is given an opportunity to sincerely recognize their mistakes and ask for forgiveness with their dignity intact. Thereby restoring the dignity of the victims. Benjamin Pogrund in his book titled *How Can Man Die Better: The Life and Times of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe*, writes “a man will forgive you, after some time, for defrauding him or even taking his wife away from him but no man will forget or forgive a humiliation.”

This event is convened at the time that we are celebrating the 21st anniversary of the release of Mr Nelson Mandela. For some, this marks the coming of age of our democracy and the values that Madiba and his comrades aspired to. A society which embraced non-racialism as a pillar in its constitution, reconciled with itself and its pasts.

We need to celebrate this important milestone. And we must as a country, as you have chosen to do in this matter, continue to build on those achievements, promoting and furthering the cause of national reconciliation and entrenching a culture of human rights. It is about time that we call on all South Africans witnessing this event tonight, to find within their communities, farms, ko magaeng le dipolaseng, localities, klein dorpie or towns a concrete opportunity to reach out and make national reconciliation real. Make national reconciliation work now.

Forgiveness, of course, is a matter fraught with complexity, some argue it is impossible. You have to believe in the impossible to even start the process. It is not an event; it is not an act of mercy from one party to another. It is a rendezvous. Something which requires immense patience. We congratulate the workers and former students for the patience and endurance they have shown. We wish them well in making that rendezvous endure. Perhaps you will achieve the impossible.

As Madiba said: “Reconciliation means working together to correct the legacy of past injustice and fighting for a society where people will cease thinking in terms of colour.” We would like to commit the Nelson Mandela Foundation’s Centre of Memory to working with all parties to ensure that we walk this long walk to victory over all the obstacles created by our pasts.

Let me conclude by yet again quoting Madiba when he said “the time for healing of the wounds has come. The moment to bridge the chasm that divides us has come. The time to build is upon us.” He went further by saying “If we don’t forgive them then that feeling of bitterness and revenge will be there and we are saying, ‘let us forget the past, let’s concern ourselves with the present and the future’ but to say the atrocities of the past will never be allowed to happen again”.

Re a leboha! Baie Dankie! Thank you!