**Freedom, truth, democracy: citizenship and common purpose**

When I was invited to deliver the Tenth Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture, I felt daunted both by the honour of marking with you the 10th anniversary here in this historic Town Hall of Cape Town, and by the distinguished list of speakers who have gone before. Those of you who know me know that I am not easily daunted, and I feel daunted right now.

I feel a great connection to South Africa. Next only to my native country, Ireland, this is the country I have most grown to love: for its historic victory over the evil of apartheid and its promise of a "rainbow nation"; for producing two great moral giants of my lifetime, Nelson Mandela – Madiba himself – and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who chairs the group of Elders to which I belong. I also have close personal friends here, and a beloved niece is married to a South African and will soon have her first South African-Irish child in this country.

I would like to thank the board of the Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory although I must say that they have posed quite a challenge for me.

In the 1960s I studied law in Trinity College, Dublin, and was taught by Kader Asmal, who instilled in me the values of rule of law, due process, equality and non-discrimination – values so well enshrined in your admirable Constitution. Kader and I became friends, and I joined him in the anti-apartheid movement he and his wife Louise founded in Ireland; so began my particular interest in South Africa's affairs. As a young senator, I became involved in the European and African parliamentary grouping AWEPA, initially established to fight apartheid and now focused on strengthening the capacity of parliaments in Africa.

In 1994, as president of Ireland, I was honoured to represent Ireland at the inauguration of President Nelson Mandela. I will never forget the occasion. Everything about it was special: the taking of the oath by the country's beloved Madiba, the rows upon rows of South Africans of all races singing together as one, and the military fly-past and salute that caused a huge, visceral roar from the crowd below.

Since then I have had many reasons to visit regularly, and I even have an academic connection, as an extraordinary professor at the University of Pretoria, linked to its Centre for Human Rights and Centre for the Study of Aids.

I feel it necessary to set out my credentials as a friend, because my challenge today is to speak to you, South Africans, as your friend. A true friend tells you not only what you want to hear but what you need to hear.

Clearly the concepts of "freedom", "truth" and "democracy" have a particular resonance for the Republic of South Africa.

"Freedom", of course, evokes Madiba's own long walk, and the struggle and sacrifice of ordinary South African citizens, unsung heroes, who stood up against a brutal regime to win their freedom. Physical freedom, from imprisonment in Robben Island, and political freedom, from the shackles of

apartheid.

“Truth” brings to mind South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the first of its kind designed to enable the people to come to terms with the past, admit the truth about atrocities and gross human rights violations, and start the process of reconciliation. But it seems, and understandably given the circumstances, that this process only really scratched the surface, and South Africa remains, as my friend Dr Mamphela Ramphele puts it, “a nation of wounded people”.

“Democracy” puts in mind those long queues at polling booths in 1994 all over the country, the tangible excitement as the majority of people voted for the first time. It puts in mind South Africa’s Constitution, admired around the world for the way it values human dignity and frames human rights at its heart. It puts in mind the promise of a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world, symbol of the possibilities for transformation, reconciliation and national unity. But we need to ask ourselves: is this young democracy living up to all those high expectations and ideals?

As a human rights person, the term “freedom” also calls to mind the “Four Freedoms” identified by US President Franklin D Roosevelt in his state of the union address given in 1941, a time of world crisis:

*“The first is freedom of speech and expression – everywhere in the world.*

*“The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way – everywhere in the world.*

*“The third is freedom from want, which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants – everywhere in the world.*

*"The fourth is freedom from fear, which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbour – anywhere in the world.”*

I have always emphasised that freedom from want is a core part of human rights, as affirmed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including rights to food, safe water, health, education and shelter. In spite of the innovative provisions of the South African Constitution, can it be truly said that freedom from want has been adequately secured for all in the past 18 years?

In the context of ideas of freedom and democracy, of citizenship and common purpose, inherent in the concept of truth is the need for transparency and accountability in government action. In order for citizens to remain the stewards of democracy, issues of accountability and transparency in governance are key. It is therefore with great concern that I have followed the progress of South Africa’s “Protection of State Information” legislation – knowingly styled by its detractors as the “Secrecy Act”. Perhaps it is not my place to pronounce on the levels of corruption at play in today’s South Africa. But, from my experience as a human rights lawyer, I can give you a certainty: if you enact a law that cloaks the workings of state actors, that interferes with

press freedom to investigate corruption, that stifles efforts by whistleblowers to expose corruption, you are sure to increase those levels of corruption tomorrow. The public interest demands that basic truth, of having both transparency and accountability in government. Secrecy is the enemy of truth in this regard.

Another aspect of truth is admitting mistakes. My own country, Ireland, is going through a very difficult time, struggling to recover from financial collapse and the humiliation – for a proud nation that experienced its own fight for freedom and democracy in the early 20th century – of having to be bailed out by the IMF, European Union and European Central Bank, thereby ceding a part of its hard-fought sovereignty. The downward spiral of the economy happened quickly. People are angry and they are hurting: many households find themselves in negative equity, unable to meet mortgage payments and household bills. Small businesses have closed and many are still closing in cities and towns. The cutbacks required to meet the financial targets imposed on Ireland as part of the bailout package are hurting the poorest and most vulnerable in particular. Where a decade ago we had almost full employment, unemployment is once again a scourge, and emigration is back as a reality for a new generation of Irish people.

Mistakes were made during the boom years. We somehow lost our way, became obsessed with personal wealth and material possessions. Now, as part of the national conversation, we have to acknowledge these mistakes as we try to regain a sense of ourselves. The Irish are, I am glad to be able to say, a resilient people and, I believe, we will come out of this difficult time feeling stronger, and I hope more compassionate. To do that we are in some sense re-inventing ourselves, lifting ourselves up again by playing to our strengths.

Every country has the capacity – and sometimes the need – to reinvent itself.

Today, the 5th of August 2012, is the 50th anniversary, to the day, of the capture of Nelson Mandela, lawyer, activist, leader, vocal opponent of the apartheid regime. As we commemorate that anniversary, I would like to dwell, for a moment, on the nature of anniversaries. Anniversaries are a good time to take stock. They can also be a good time to look at ways to re-invent, to re-invigorate, to renew an earlier spirit.

In December 1997, very near the beginning of my term as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, I chose to launch the year-long celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights here in South Africa, alongside President Nelson Mandela, who was then launching South Africa's "National Plan of Action for Human Rights". In that plan of action was stated, among other things, the following:

*"Democracy is irreconcilable with racial inequality and social injustice. Democracy is incompatible with poverty, crime, violence and the wanton disregard for human life. Democracy is strengthened and entrenched when society is fully aware of its fundamental human rights and freedoms and lays claim to these."*

As you know, this year marks the 100th anniversary of the African National Congress, the ANC, founded in 1912 to defend and advance the rights of African people. Leader in the struggle to destroy the apartheid state, with a vision to replace it with a united, non-racist, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous South Africa in which the people as a whole shall govern and all shall enjoy equal rights. What the ANC has achieved in those hundred years is remarkable: from the defiance campaign, the resistance movement, armed struggle, banishment, to becoming the governing political party since 1994, leading the way in transforming the country according to that vision. Sadly, though, in recent years my South African friends tell me the ANC's moral authority has been eroded, tainted by allegations of corruption; a temporary betrayal of its history.

And meanwhile, there remains, in the transformation process, much unfinished business. We cannot deny that South Africa faces serious problems: I read about them in the newspapers, I hear about them from my South African friends, and I see evidence of them with my own eyes. The scourge of poverty, with which, as that national plan of action stated, democracy is irreconcilable, has been a central theme of my human rights work, so undermining is poverty of human rights. Where you witness extremes of wealth side by side with dire poverty within the same country, it is more divisive than an overall condition of poverty. Last year I came here to South Africa to attend my beloved niece's wedding. Before joining the party I was invited by  Mamphela Ramphele to visit part of Eastern Cape, where I sat with her listening in on the Letsema Circle Pathfinder initiative. I was taken aback by the poverty of the surroundings and deeply impressed with this initiative. From there I travelled to the town of Paarl for the family wedding, and was even more taken aback by the shocking disparity I witnessed: from abject poverty to luxurious, gated wealth.

My friends tell me that the levels of crime and violence in some areas, Lavender Hill, say, or Khayelitsha (where my son Aubrey worked for a number of years with a local organisation), mean that people are living in unmanageably traumatic situations – school learners sitting on the floor so that they don't get caught in the cross fire, local community members resorting to vigilante justice, the dreaded necklace – situations that need to be addressed before those people can feel free and participate as active citizens in South Africa's democracy.

But I need to bear in mind what we all should remember: that the Republic of South Africa is a young democracy – just 18 years old. It is also a democracy the majority of whose rapidly increasing population consists of young people. It is hard to address all the structural problems and inequalities in such a short time. Still, you need to ask yourselves some uncomfortable questions: Why is South Africa's education system underperforming? Why are the rates of illiteracy so high? What has caused the culture of non-attendance and resistance to learning? How has such disparity in the allocation of resources been allowed to occur? How can the inequities in the system be resolved so that every South African child has equal access to quality education? How can the teachers' union be motivated to drive efforts towards positive change?

Those questions need to be addressed if South Africa's hard-fought democracy is to be sustained for generations to come.

You have both the positive resource and the acute problem of a young population with high unemployment and a deficit of skills. There are no simple solutions and I don't begin to have the local knowledge to construct the multi-layered approach needed. Those young people who feel discouraged need to be given a positive sense of self, and the support and resources needed to complete their education, to learn the necessary skills and then access a job market, and one where there are jobs to be found. As young citizens they should enjoy positive relationships and a sense of engagement as part of being citizens or residents in a modern South African state.

But I don't stand here to preach, even though I may sound at times as though I am preaching. I prefer to encourage. South Africa has shown itself to be a resilient nation. It has also shown itself to be an exceptional organiser of world events – and I'm not just talking about the football World Cup! Two world conferences, steered by South Africa, in Durban, have led the way to achieving significant improvements in the global conversation on the issues of racism and of climate. I recall vividly serving as secretary general of the World Conference against Racism in Durban in September 2001, ably chaired by Dr [Nkosazana] Dlamini-Zuma, who is now breaking new ground as the first woman president of the Commission of the African Union. It was a difficult conference, and when the United States and Israel withdrew, it would have collapsed without the skillful and committed leadership of South Africa, a country which understood profoundly how vital it was to secure the Durban Declaration and Plan of Action to counter racism in all its forms.

I was happy to return to Durban last November for COP17 on climate change, again ably chaired by a South African woman, Maite [Nkoana-]Mashabane, which was able to forge with difficulty the Durban Enhanced Platform for Action, under which all countries committed themselves to a new climate agreement by 2015, to come into effect by 2020. It is not strong enough, or urgent enough, to deal with the looming disaster of climate change but few, going into Durban last November, had predicted this agreed outcome. Which proves that you should never underestimate South Africa's – and particularly South Africa's women's – capacity to bring about remarkable results!

Therefore I have every faith that South Africa, endowed as it is with such a wealth of resources, and a resourceful population, can acknowledge its mistakes, face up to its problems, engage in a national conversation and continue the process of transformation that has so inspired the watching world.

Which brings me to citizenship and common purpose – put into practice – which are the essential bedrock to realising these basic concepts of freedom, truth and democracy.

To quote another Roosevelt, this time Eleanor as she spoke about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the United Nations in New York in 1958:

*“Where, after all, do universal rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person" Now it's here in the quote where I have to stop and say it's not gender-sensitive, but it was in 1958 ... "the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.”*

The “concerted citizen action” called for requires engagement by the people with the process of government in all its forms, starting with the very local. But with such contrasts of extremes as I alluded to earlier, it is not difficult to understand the disengagement and apathy of many citizens living in those unmanageably traumatic situations.

To me, an outsider, but a genuine friend, South Africa is a nation of paradoxes. When I hear about the tireless work of the many non-governmental organisations, youth groups, women’s groups – working with local communities or working at a national level, I think civil society in South Africa is thriving! But then, my South African friends tell me, wider civil society is often disengaged. What are religious leaders saying and doing about South Africa’s problems? What are the professions saying? What are the unions saying? Are they doing enough? Are they truly working to hold government to account for the inequities, the imbalances, the injustices they witness close to home? Or are they more concerned with their own survival, their own advancement, to the detriment of that wider common purpose of achieving a constitutional democracy: that vision of a united, non-racist, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous South Africa?

Article 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that: “Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.”

This is echoed in South Africa’s Constitution where it provides that: “All citizens are (a) equally entitled to the rights, privileges and benefits of citizenship; and (b) equally subject to the duties and responsibilities of citizenship.”

*Meitheal* is an Irish word that describes a traditional, rural practice of people coming together to work, farmers lending support to their neighbours as the need arises. It expresses the idea of community spirit and self-reliance. I can remember as a child going out with my father, a doctor, on his calls to rural areas at harvest time: practically everyone would be working in a particular field to save the hay, the women bringing sweet tea and bread and jam. If a farmer was sick, his field would be done willingly by neighbours. I find *meitheal* similar to the African ethic of *Ubuntu*, that idea of human

interconnectedness and solidarity, described in the phrase which Archbishop Tutu often uses with us, the phrase “I am because you are”.

*Meitheal* and *Ubuntu* are deep-rooted, traditional approaches that can be harnessed towards a vision of citizenship that involves active participation in a society in which citizens enjoy personal rights and freedoms, and they discharge the correlating duties and responsibilities towards a common purpose of a sustainable future.

Here in South Africa, as in many countries around the world, there is a distinct lack of trust in traditional institutions of democracy, such as in the ability of parliament and local authorities to tackle corruption and inequality. But the good news is – the good news is – that technological innovations can empower ordinary people as never before, and can introduce new ways of holding government and local authorities accountable. Social media now provides the ability to connect individuals to the knowledge and resources they need electronically. Cell phones allow people to communicate with one another, and to connect to the internet, by friending, tweeting, collaborating – in ways that are quite beyond me as a mere Elder, but many of you, particularly the younger ones, will know what I mean.

Now we are witnessing new platforms being created, which enable people to become data providers and fact checkers. One of the most impressive is Ushahidi which came about in response to calls from Kenyan bloggers to repurpose Google Maps for Kenya to identify where violence was occurring, and the extent of it. Today Ushahidi software has been repurposed for everything from disease mapping to many types of crisis mapping around the world. I was intrigued to learn recently that a local authority in Ireland is using Ushahidi to map potholes on roads in their area - they can be quite a problem in my country. The potential of this technology to map, and provide data, on incidents of corruption, on non-attendance of teachers at schools, and so on, could make these problems much more visible and increase the possibility of accountability. Of course, those with access to these innovative technologies tend to be the middle class, but we know from history that it is often a frustrated middle class which rises up to demand better quality of services and necessary structural change.

When we think of citizenship, we think of a definition based on nationality of a particular country. But my view is that in the 21st century, we need a new concept of citizenship that embraces all of those people who find themselves in the country – nationals and migrants alike. This is particularly relevant to countries like South Africa, a “go to” country with a strong economy that attracts and will continue to attract a large migrant population.

In the 2001 Durban World Conference Against Racism, steered by South Africa, the strongest international statement yet was applied to the rights of migrants. Yet in the decade since then, in real terms, there has been a marked deterioration in migrant status: whether by Europe erecting further barriers to entry, whether by the United States enacting harsher laws against what it terms “illegal aliens” from Mexico and other parts of Latin America or whether by rising xenophobia in African countries, including South Africa.

Roughly half of any country's citizenship is made up of its women. I'm glad to say that South Africa celebrates August as "women's month", and it has much to celebrate. I have already mentioned several notable South African women and I could list many more - both in the past struggle and today. It's not just true of South Africa but of African countries generally that women's leadership is coming into its own. I fully agree with my Elder sister Graça Machel, when in an interview in October 2011, she stated:

*"I think that in ten years' time Africa will be a completely different landscape. It's already happening with regard to women: skillful and ambitious women will be at the highest levels of decision-making in politics, business, science and technology. There's a new generation of female leaders coming."* That's right!

A UN Panel report in February 2012, "Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing" highlighted the importance of women's economic empowerment globally in this way:

*"Any serious shift towards sustainable development requires gender equality. Half of humankind's collective intelligence and capacity is a resource we must nurture and develop for the sake of multiple generations to come. The next increment of global growth could well come from the economic empowerment of women."*

Yet, to come back to my observation that South Africa is a nation of paradoxes, I ask you how can this be the same country where an article entitled "The Big Read: A lousy land for women" can be published? The article notes a further paradox. Women are doing well in representative positions: 41% of the cabinet are women, five of the nine provincial premiers are women and 42.3% of the seats in the lower house of the South African Parliament are occupied by women. And yet, as you well know, there is a darker picture.

Twice as many women as men have HIV, and 66 196 cases of sexual offences were reported in 2010-2011, some involving rape of very young children. The article refers to a 2009 gender study of South Africa by the African Development Bank, and quotes it as stating "the focus on representative equality has dominated the discourse [whereas] less energy seems to have been turned towards implementation of policies that would effectively change the lives of the majority of women."

This is clearly a challenge which women leaders in South Africa must take up – not just political leaders, but women in business, in law, in the unions, and in leadership at local level. And not just women – men, too, must see this as a priority. Sustainable development can only be achieved when there is zero tolerance of gender-based violence and a full commitment to gender equality. It is possible now - and I talked about this a few months ago - to map incidents of violence and to track them through social media. This is women's month, and I am confident my South African sisters will again surprise us!

Your admirable constitution opens with stirring words: "We, the people of South Africa … believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity." As you approach your early twenties – and you are a yong democratic country in that sense – you have a great opportunity to draw on your strengths, renew that inspirational vision that the world stood in

admiration of in 1994, and continue to build your rainbow nation, block by block.

Some time ago I read the memoir of another extraordinary South African friend, Pregs Govender “Love and Courage: Story of Insubordination”. I'd like to finish with a passage she used in relation to her own personal journey, which I believe can be transposed to the journey that many South Africans may also have taken:

*“The worst experience had sent me spiralling. Yet it had also deepened the journey within and awakened love from which courage flowed. Memory had surfaced and, beyond it, a glimpse of the truth that none of us are fixed in heroic or despotic moments of history. Life, as it waxes and wanes, always provides opportunities for our humanity to emerge.”*

I have every confidence in South Africa realising the opportunities for its humanity to fully emerge.

Thank you very much.