

Address by Naledi Pandor MP, Minister of Science and Technology, at the launch of the Mandela Digital Archive Project, 27 March 2012

Minister, CEO of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, Deputy Chief Justice, Leaders of the ICT industry, Members of the Human Rights Law Fraternity, Members of the media, Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen:

It's a great pleasure to participate in the launch of the Nelson Mandela Digital Archive Project and to be in the presence of such an interesting group of heritage and information technology experts, academics, and human-rights lawyers.

Sixty years ago, in 1952, Nelson Mandela was admitted as an attorney and opened South Africa's first black law office.

Today we appreciate his huge contribution to bringing peace and reconciliation to South Africa.

The first President of a democratic South Africa was one of the world's longest-detained political prisoners. He is the most famous ex-political prisoner of all time. During his imprisonment he remained steadfast in his belief in social justice and non-racialism. He remained committed to the liberation of South Africa from racial and other forms of oppression.

His release from prison began the most remarkable political transition our country has ever known.

His example of leadership set in place a unique process of forgiveness and reconciliation, allowing former antagonists to pursue the transition to a fully fledged democracy.

March is Human Rights Month – a month in which we recall great sacrifice and remind ourselves of the commitment Mr Mandela and many of our leaders made to human dignity, equality and non-racialism, asking for nothing except that all should enjoy these rights.

He helped to transform South Africa from a pariah nation into a nation that was admired throughout the world.

This year, 2012, is also the 100-year anniversary of the ANC, an organisation whose essential being Mr Mandela helped shape with radical thought, courage, and a full understanding of what it takes to build a modern democracy.

He is an inspiration to us all. His qualities as a person inspire us. And they inspire our children.

It is a pioneering step to digitise Mr Mandela's own records and to post them online.

Mr Mandela has made his own intellectual property available to all.

The digital world offers an important bridge between access to information and no or inadequate access. I think as we leave this room today, we should begin planning how to work with the foundation to derive real national value from this archive.

A couple of years ago I attended a Cisco networking academy here in Johannesburg and I became acquainted with the thinking of Cisco's CEO, John Chambers.

“I truly believe,” John Chambers said, “that the Internet and education are the two great equalisers in life, levelling the playing field for people, companies, and countries worldwide.”

Education can certainly level the playing field for some of us, but it is the idea of the internet as a great leveller that I find most intriguing.

What he means is that the easy availability of information and knowledge – information and knowledge of course being two different things – makes us all more equal than before. The more we all have direct access to information and knowledge, the better our lives will be.

There is a big proviso here: cost. Information and knowledge are valuable and are not generally online for free.

Most path-breaking science research is locked up by academic publishers, a small group of academic publishers who exercise a monopoly over journals and magazines, and require users to pay them and not the authors for knowledge.

The very odd thing is this: much of the research that is locked up behind publishers' paywalls is funded from the public purse.

So we subsidise academics to undertake cutting-edge research, they publish it in long-established journals owned by international publishers, who then sell it back to us for a fee!

That cannot be right.

There is a move afoot to break down these paywalls. Some universities have refused to allow academics to give copyright to international publishers. Others have developed open access repositories on their university web sites. Under

advice from the Academy of Science for South Africa (ASSAf), our science academy, the DST is championing [the open access route in South Africa](#).

The aim is to move forward resolutely with a well-resourced programme for expanding our electronic access to the global and national scientific literature.

And this is partly why I am so pleased that the Mandela Foundation has set an example in digitising records for online use.

Besides we must take advantage of the digital world to improve our education and training systems.

Government's role is to facilitate that process, to assist young people to develop the basic skills to benefit from IT.

It is for this reason that government has been quick to seize the opportunity of working towards the achievement of the practical benefits of digital technology.

This can be seen in our focus on basic literacy and numeracy at school, our focus on new vocational learning, and our focus on skills for the knowledge economy at university.

This year our government programme of action has placed greater emphasis on the drive for infrastructure development than ever before and this also includes IT infrastructure.

Furthermore, we have acknowledged the importance of creating a knowledge economy in South Africa as part of a sustainable basis for socio-economic development. These archives form part of this knowledge enterprise and allow the world to draw on the Mr Mandela's example of leadership and humility.

Let me close by congratulating the Mandela Foundation in leading the way in digitising the apex of our social and political archive.

I thank you.