

## **The Promise of Leadership Forum – 19<sup>th</sup> March 2009**

Setting the context and introducing President Paul Kagame by Tokyo Sexwale,  
Trustee of the Nelson Mandela Foundation

Excellencies, compatriots from across Africa, fellow South Africans, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. A warm word of welcome to all of you on behalf of members of the Board of the Nelson Mandela Foundation as well as its founder, President Nelson Mandela.

The Nelson Mandela Foundation and its partners are convinced that this inaugural event – the Promise of Leadership - will lead to a process where different stakeholders across the continent will continue to engage with each other beyond the next two days of intense deliberations. It could never have been more opportune for this gathering during this time on our continent to engage on the apt theme of Leadership, its Challenges and its Promise. It is true to say that across the African continent the greatest challenge lies in leadership.

We have been witness to terrible tragedies – civil strife, social conflict, civil wars, coup d'états - where effective leadership has been absent. We have also seen real progress where leadership has also come to the fore in defense of civil liberties, human rights and democratic governance. Far from despairing and being immobilized by negative examples, it is for us to recognize, celebrate and emulate good achievements of

leadership. We believe that Africa has a depth of talent capable of helping the nations and people of our continent to develop to our true potential. Of course, this must not lead us to being inward looking, but enable us to reach out to the world as equals.

In this respect, let us start closer to home – with Nelson Mandela. If one were to enquire from those of us who have observed him and worked with him over many years, what was the prime lesson we learnt from him? You will probably get many different answers, for he was never a one-dimensional figure; like a polished diamond he has many interesting facets. His true talent lies in his complexity. But one facet of this great leader stands out: his ability to address problems by reaching out across the chasms created by such problems. This is seen in the manner in which he and many others took part in the struggle against apartheid, as well as in finding solutions leading to its aftermath. He developed the art of listening to others – adversaries and friends - engaging with them as equals whilst maintaining his principles.

More importantly, he elevated that art to the ability of getting others to listen and talk to each other. Perhaps because he honed this skill in the bowels of prison, its intention was always to turn obstacles into opportunities, adversity into triumph without being triumphalist. He had a way of disarming his enemies by offering them friendship as a viable alternative to enmity whilst maintaining his basic values.

He was – and is - no saintly Mother Teresa, relying only on the innate goodness of people. The world does need Mother Theresa. However, on the contrary, Madiba is capable of being firm, of being defiant and on rare occasions, a touch of stubbornness. Yet, the freedom fighter in him never loses the focus of where tactical or strategic power lies for good or for bad. It is his approach to always make sure that confrontation does not occur for its own sake, or for the sake of a principle. As a consensus man his strategy is that of finding solutions where others would lament about problems. In a word, the complexity of Nelson Mandela's leadership method finds expression in the endeavour to capture one of the most elusive of objectives – reconciliation. The promise of his leadership is found in his maxim;

“One never negotiates with friends only with enemies. Yet one never enters negotiations unless one is willing to compromise.”

Therefore, if we are to take his example and that of many other leaders across Africa and elsewhere in the world, we can define the challenge of leadership as the search for solutions, being creative and pragmatic even as we are principled. That's where the promise lies as well. When we think of Africa in terms of resources, we immediately think about exploitable minerals. But our true untapped resource is our own humanity- our Africaness. It is not difficult to imagine how many people there are, from Presidential palaces, to cities and villages on the

continent, who have been schooled and hardened in adversity; who have learned how to be innovative and creative in order to survive. It is time to seriously invest in those people, so that their survival instinct becomes the ability to create wealth, foster peace, understanding and cooperation.

We can and must overcome the many challenges of poverty, of education and skills development, of hunger, of diseases such as HIV Aids and malaria, by investing in the poorest of the poor towards the attainment of the fundamentally important United Nations Millennium Development Goals. I can personally attest to this as one of the industrialists whose companies are investing in several African countries and in various sectors of their economies particularly natural resources and finance for the creation of decent jobs, inasmuch as for sustainable economic growth and development.

This challenge can never be overemphasized, particularly in view of the current global economic recession where our own continent, whose productivity as reported by the World Bank and IMF has been reduced by half, is likely to suffer more than the other continents. The demands upon quality African leadership from all walks of life – industry, politics, academia, labour, philanthropy, and so on are going to be ever increasing going forward, particularly in these difficult international market conditions. Again, we can address the challenges of

governance by drawing-in ordinary people, even from the remotest communities, closer into the political processes.

The touchstone of Nelson Mandela – the greatness of his leadership promise – has always been to understand that leadership is not confined only to the privileged members of society, but most importantly to ordinary people, for they are the makers of history. That is the spirit of true democratic inclusivity where the best ideas flourish arising from free debates and honest discussions. Democracy does not suffer when there is robust debate. On the contrary, it can only prosper. Today in South Africa, we have taken the definition of multi-party democracy to a different level. On April 22<sup>nd</sup>, in one month's time, 25 parties will contest the general election. This is not fragmentation, on the contrary this is a sign that our democracy is a healthy and vigorous one – the Mandela way.

Mr President, in welcoming you to the podium we hope that in the topic that you will be delivering today, “From conflict to reconstruction and Development: Rwanda's Story”, you will share the strategies you adopted against tragedies in efforts to rebuild your country, ensuring stability and sustained economic growth.

We hope for you as a leader and others that this will be about mobilizing the young and not so young to take more

responsibility for the society in which they live and work. Madiba has reminded us often that “it starts with you” – “it is in our hands”.

Mr. President, Paul Kagame, the floor is now yours.