

VREDE EN VERZOENING

het bijeenbrengen van en bruggen slaan
tussen diverse bevolkingsgroepen

Tekst van de eerste Mandela lezing
uitgesproken door

Cyril Ramaphosa

op 19 juni 2003
in De Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam

MANDELA lezing

LEZING

Mandela lecture

by Cyril Ramaphosa

**Amsterdam
19 June 2003**

*Peace and reconciliation,
South African lessons in a global context*

It is a singular honour for me to have been invited to deliver this, the inaugural Mandela Lecture.

I am delighted to be able to take part in the founding of what will no doubt become an important and prestigious event.

May I congratulate the Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa for their initiative in organising this lecture, so that we may pay tribute to Nelson Mandela by strengthening the bonds of understanding between South Africa and the Netherlands; and thereby build a bridge of friendship and cooperation between the peoples of Africa and the peoples of Europe.

I can think of no better person to name this lecture for, than Nelson Mandela – a person whose life and work embodies so much of what we value and seek in humanity; a person who represents so definitively the attainment of peace, reconciliation and progress.

He stands astride an era in South African history in which the forces of racism and oppression were vanquished by the collective will and action of the South African people.

He was chosen not only to lead the country to democracy, but to be the embodiment of the struggle that created the new democratic order and the values which underpinned them.

It was a suitable choice. Thanks to his attributes as a person and as a leader, Nelson Mandela more than adequately met the expectations which the people had of him.

Forged over decades over relentless struggle; amid hardship and sacrifice; and surrounded by people of great integrity and insight, Nelson Mandela gave the people of South Africa the leader they needed and deserved.

Nelson Mandela has not stopped serving the people. He continues his work to uplift and empower the poorest and most vulnerable in society. He also devotes much time to the resolution of problems further afield, acting, for example, as the chief mediator in the Burundi peace talks.

Just as important, and just as powerful, is the legacy which Nelson Mandela has already – in life – bequeathed not only to the people of South Africa, but to humanity as a whole.

It is a legacy which we are gathered here this evening to celebrate and, whether we realise it or not, a legacy which we are gathered here to nurture and develop.

When, in 1963, the apartheid government sentenced Nelson Mandela to life imprisonment, they could not have realised the profound consequences of their actions. They thought they were ridding themselves of a troublesome man and many of his troublesome comrades. Yet they were sowing the seeds of their own demise.

Thanks to the sustained struggles of the South African people, and the tireless campaigning of millions of others around the world, Nelson Mandela became an icon of the universal struggle against racism and oppression.

The Dutch anti-apartheid movement played no small part in this. As activists at home, we were continually encouraged and emboldened by the efforts of those in countries far away who nevertheless fought with us and alongside us to end apartheid.

We were often amazed that people whom we did not know, who appeared to have nothing to gain from our liberation, could be so dedicated and so active in taking up our cause.

And from this we learnt many lessons. We learnt that human suffering does not recognise national boundaries. We learnt that an injury to one is an injury to all.

And we learnt the meaning of human solidarity.

And so, it is appropriate that following his release from prison, Nelson Mandela should have become a global icon of peace, reconciliation and democracy.

You, the people of the Netherlands, taught us that to struggle against oppression is a universal responsibility. Through the person of Nelson Mandela we want to answer by saying that achieving peace and pursuing reconciliation are also universal objectives.

South Africa is not the first country in the world to confront racism and exploitation, nor will it be the last. It is not the only country to have scored astounding progress in securing peace and working towards reconciliation.

But in this historical epoch, South Africa is a living and evolving testament to the power of national will and human determination. It is seen by many people as a signal of hope that what is desirable in human affairs can also become possible. It is an indication that there is a way out of conflict, an answer to hatred, a bridge for every chasm.

This does not mean that South Africa has overcome the many problems of its colonial and apartheid past. There still exists a massive gulf between black and white in South Africa. The black majority are overwhelmingly poor. The white minority generally affluent. Poverty, unemployment and under-development continue to make life an ongoing battle for millions of our people.

But at least we are now in a position, as a nation, to tackle these problems together. We have achieved a democratic breakthrough, conferring equal rights to all South Africans, giving all citizens the opportunity to choose their own leaders, and laying the foundation for economic growth and social development.

We should also acknowledge that what is true of the South African situation is not necessarily true of the situations of other nations. What was effective in South Africa may not be applicable in other situations.

If there are lessons to be learnt for other parts of the world from the South African experience of resolving conflict and initiating reconciliation, they are lessons in basic principles rather than actual detail.

Scholars of human history would confirm that whatever we may learn from the past, we are bound to consider the circumstances of each place and each era afresh. In solving the world's various problems, one size does not fit all.

Yet if there is one lesson which we in South Africa have learned, and which is probably applicable to many similar situations, it is that freedom cannot be imposed on a people.

For freedom to be meaningful and sustainable, people must be the agents of their own liberation. They must free themselves.

During the long struggle against apartheid, the people of South Africa had many friends around the world who did much to hasten the demise of apartheid. Yet it was the South African people themselves who directed this

global campaign, and turned out in their millions to challenge the might of the apartheid state.

The South African people sat down amongst themselves and negotiated an end to apartheid. South Africans wrote the country's new democratic constitution, and worked together to build the institutions of the new democratic state.

It is true that what has been achieved in South Africa would not have been possible without the active assistance of many around the world. Yet it was critical that the people of South Africa themselves acted to change the circumstances of their oppression.

This a very basic, yet profound, expression of democracy at work and of a people struggling to empower themselves.

It is similarly true that freedom cannot be delivered by one person; or even a handful of people; or an organisation; or an army.

We would not be here tonight to honour Nelson Mandela if the people of South Africa had not chosen him to be the personification of their values and dreams. He would not occupy the position that he occupies in history, had the people not decided that he and the African National Congress should lead their struggle for freedom.

Too often, freedom struggles have floundered on the cult of the personality – as people begin to believe that only one person has the capacity to deliver the people from hardship and torment. Too often, these 'liberators' are elevated to such a status of omnipotence, that the people believe they can no longer do anything for themselves.

A leader who is considered indispensable may lead the masses to think that they are dispensable.

A great leader is one who understands that their stature and their power derives from the people, and must at all times be subject to the wishes of the people.

A great leader is one who understands that there will be a moment when they will need to exit the stage; that there are others in whom the people have confidence, and to whom they will pass on certain responsibilities.

A great leader is one who has the courage to let themselves be led by the people.

As we gather here tonight we can declare with confidence that this understanding of leadership is a central part of what we are coming to know as the legacy of Nelson Mandela.

This legacy has many other parts. Among these is an appreciation of the value to conflict resolution and reconciliation of a generosity of spirit.

By seeking neither revenge nor retribution, Nelson Mandela and his comrades effectively disarmed those who opposed change in South Africa. They made it plainly known that in a new nation there was place even for those who had been oppressors.

This was not merely a tactical move. It was a principled position. It is now almost fifty years since the Freedom Charter was drawn up, declaring for all the world to know that: 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white'.

This generosity – a morally remarkable and unassailable position – eventually melted the last pieces of resistance to democracy and set the stage for lasting reconciliation.

It is no coincidence that new government of South Africa chose as the nation's motto an expression in the Khoisan language of the /Xam people which means 'Diverse People Unite'.

For if there is any universal lesson that can be drawn from the South African experience it is that through tolerance and understanding it is possible to find great richness in diversity. There is a vast wealth of human experience to be found in a society of different peoples, different experiences and different cultures.

Too often, people regard difference with mistrust and suspicion – even hate. We see in many parts of the world how people feel threatened by difference. We see it here in Europe, in the United States, in Asia, in Australasia and in Africa. We see ethnic violence, xenophobia, religious intolerance – each a response to difference between people which is both destructive and unsustainable.

The best response to difference, we have found, is to acknowledge it and appreciate it; to use it not as a force for division and discord, but as a source of opportunity and progress.

For amongst all this diversity, there is more that unifies us as humans than could possibly divide us. The challenge is to find and nurture those values which we all share, while creating the space for the culture, history and experiences of all to be celebrated.

In a society recovering from conflict, this tolerance and this accommodation are critical to reconciliation.

However, it must be acknowledged that reconciliation is not simply about the oppressed willing to accommodate the oppressor. It is also about the oppressor acknowledging the errors of the past and relinquishing the privileges which have for so long kept their fellow citizens in servitude and consigned them to under-development.

South Africa has taken many important steps towards reconciliation. Yet this reconciliation can only be fully achieved once the very material inequalities which divide South Africans into rich white and poor black are overcome.

True reconciliation requires the dismantling of the entire economic basis of apartheid – racially-based exploitation and a wholly skewed distribution of resources.

It requires that those who have for decades been forced off their land; who have been excluded from beneficial participation in the economy; who have been denied access to education and skills development opportunities, now have the chance to partake of the economic life of the country.

The economic empowerment of South Africa's black majority is central to the search for lasting reconciliation, stability and peace.

South Africa may have one of the highest levels of income inequality in the world. However, the situation the country finds itself in is not unique.

Vast differences in wealth within and between nations is one of the defining features of the world we find ourselves in today.

Much of the conflict and instability which plagues our world; much of the

prejudice and the hatred; much of the xenophobia, racism and sexism, is borne out of global and national inequality and a fierce competition for resources.

The wars that we see being fought – the terror attacks that we witness – are not so much caused by a ‘clash of cultures’ or religious fundamentalism, as they are caused by the failure of humanity to find fair and equitable ways to manage and distribute the earth’s resources.

It is no accident that South Africa sought to host both the World Conference against Racism in 2001 and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. From our perspective, these world forums are inextricably linked. To tackle racism, xenophobia and related intolerances we need to be able to confront and overcome poverty, environmental degradation, wealth inequality and underdevelopment.

It is for this reason also that we should seek a reorganisation of the rules that govern international trade. The Doha round of global trade negotiations offers an opportunity to dismantle the discriminatory practices which bar agricultural products from developing countries from being sold in the countries of the North, and thereby effectively locking many of these countries into a cycle of perpetual under-development.

We should also seek the democratisation of multi-lateral institutions like the United Nations, World Bank and International Monetary Fund – ensuring that through their policies and programmes they respond more effectively to the interests of developing countries.

In this effort, the private sector has a critical and important role to play. Across the world, much of humanity’s wealth and productive capacity rests in the hands of the corporate sector.

It should be wielding this capacity in support of human development and progress. There are numerous opportunities for investment and trade particularly within Africa and other parts of the developing world that have yet to be noticed by business in the North.

This is not simply about contributing to the betterment of humanity. It is about contributing to economic development, global stability and global prosperity. And it is about unlocking value for shareholders in the process.

Companies need to take the long view, seeing that the investments in progress they make now will stand both their business and the global business environment in better stead in the years ahead.

South Africa has made great strides in the last few years to make the country an attractive investment destination. Many international firms have successfully invested in the country, and are making an important contribution to developing the country's economic capacity – and, by extension, have become valuable partners in the process of reconstruction.

We are working hard not only to encourage other firms to follow in their footsteps, but to develop Africa more broadly as an attractive and stable destination for investment and trade.

At the same time, we should insist and ceaselessly strive for a multi-lateral response to the world's problems. Events of the last few months have demonstrated that international conflict resolution will neither be successful nor sustainable if they cannot be resolved through dialogue and global consensus.

The world will not become a safer, better place as long as those who wield overwhelming economic and military power act with impunity, having little regard for the views and wishes of the majority of the peoples of the world.

But above all, we will not achieve peace, stability and progress on this planet until we recognise that the peoples of the world, now more than ever before, are so very interdependent.

We need to acknowledge, and need to be guided in our actions, by the fact that our fortunes are all so closely interwoven, whether we live in Amsterdam or Johannesburg, Ankara or Jakarta.

We cannot hope to build a better life for ourselves unless we are prepared to help our neighbours, no matter how far away, to build a better life for themselves.

As South Africans we have recognised that the better life we seek will not be lasting if we do not work to build a better life for the entire continent.

It is for this reason that our government has been so deeply engaged in efforts to end a number of African conflicts. It is the reason that we have

worked with other countries on the continent to develop a programme for Africa's social, economic and political regeneration – the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

It is for this reason that we have travelled the world, urging countries of the North and South alike to be part this regeneration – to invest, to trade and to partner in giving new life to a continent poor in fortune, but rich in potential.

We do so, fully aware that what we seek is ambitious. We do so, knowing that there are enormous challenges and numerous obstacles that we must overcome. We do so, conscious that even today there are powerful forces who do not want Africa to prosper, free and independent.

Yet, we do not give up.

We take heart from the fact that we have faced seemingly insurmountable odds before. When we stood up against apartheid, were we not being ambitious? Did we not face enormous challenges? When we said that the people shall govern in South Africa, were we not dismissed as foolish dreamers?

When we marched through the streets of Soweto – and gathered in the squares of Amsterdam – shouting 'Free Mandela', did we not believe that some day he would be free? And were we not right?

As Africans – as humanity – we still face enormous challenges.

Yet we do not give up, because history tells us that a people united in struggle can be free. It tells us that a single idea can move the world.

We, who are gathered here this evening, are beneficiaries of a rich and enduring legacy of hope and faith. It is a legacy of unity and democracy. It is a legacy which lives in the hearts and in the actions of millions of people.

It is the legacy which Nelson Mandela received from the resistance fighters of old, and which he has now handed on to us.

It is the unbreakable thread which joins us all.

It is the desire and the determination to live in a better world.

Let us embrace this legacy, let us celebrate it, and let us live our lives so that we may be worthy of it.

I thank you.

Cyril Ramaphosa (50) raakte als sympathisant van Steve Biko, de vermoorde pleitbezorger van het 'zwarte bewustzijn', betrokken bij het studentenverzet aan de University of the North. Als secretaris generaal van de National Mineworkers Union (NUM) bekeerde hij zich in de jaren tachtig tot de principes van de 'charter beweging', het ANC. Medio jaren tachtig was Ramaphosa een van de grondleggers van de invloedrijke vakcentrale Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu). Een jaar na de legalisering van het ANC in 1990 werd hij tot secretaris-generaal van deze beweging gekozen, een functie die hij tot 1996 bekleedde. Na een hoofdrol te hebben gespeeld in de onderhandelingen met het toenmalige blanke minderheidsbewind nam Ramaphosa het voorzitterschap van de Constitutionele Vergadering op zich. Daarmee verwierf hij zich, in de woorden van Nelson Mandela, het imago 'de architect te zijn geweest van het huidige Zuid-Afrika. Inmiddels heeft Ramaphosa de overstap naar het bedrijfsleven gemaakt. Met zijn bedrijf Millenium Consolidated Investments is hij doorgedrongen tot meerdere sectoren van de Zuid-Afrikaanse economie. Aan het eind van de jaren negentig wordt hij gekozen als voorzitter van de Black Empowerment Economic (BEE) Commission, die zich inzet om zwarte werknemers meer invloed te laten krijgen in de nog voornamelijk witte zakenwereld. Ramaphosa is tevens adviseur bij het Noord-Ierse vredesproces en wordt door velen gezien als kandidaat opvolger van de huidige Zuid-Afrikaanse president Thabo Mbeki als die in 2009 zijn tweede termijn heeft volbracht.



www.icco.nl

ICCO is hoofdsponsor van de Mandela lezing

MANDELA lezing

NiZA

Nederlands instituut voor Zuidelijk Afrika

Prins Hendrikkade 33

Postbus 10707

1001 ES Amsterdam

Tel: 020 - 520 62 10

Fax: 020 - 520 62 49

E-mail: niza@niza.nl

www.niza.nl/mandelalezing



Nederlands instituut voor Zuidelijk Afrika