

INVITED ARTICLE

COMMEMORATING THE CENTENARY OF PRESIDENT NELSON MANDELA: ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY ON JULY 17TH 2018

SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY GQM DOIDGE, AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THAILAND, CAMBODIA, LAOS AND MYANMAR

Reverend Brother Dr. Bancha Saenghiran, President
Dr. Uree Cheasakul, Dean of the Martin de Tours School of Business and Economics
Glen Chatelier, Director Office of International Affairs
Distinguished Faculty members

We are honoured to be invited to address you on the eve of the centenary of Nelson Mandela who was born on July 18th 1918.

Twenty-one years ago, on the 17th July 1997, a very significant event took place here in Bangkok, when Chulalongkorn University bestowed an Honorary Doctorate on President Mandela.

Today I have been afforded the opportunity to say thank you to Assumption University for always rendering the National Anthems of both countries at our Freedom Day. Part of the current anthem that you sing, Nkosi Sikeleli iAfrika (meaning God Bless Africa) was composed by Enoch Sontonga in 1897, as a hymn composed in Xhosa and the hymn tune was the work of Joseph Parry: the melody is from the hymn tune Abe-ryst-wyth. This anthem has five languages, Xhosa, Zulu, Sesotho, Afrikaans and English. This is the National Anthem of several African states. The

Hymn God Bless Africa was banned during apartheid.

We invite you well in advance for next year's celebration and we do hope that you will consider adding some songs recorded by the late Miriam Makeba – Mama Africa, to your list, these are easy to learn and this could be a significant tribute to Mama Africa. We could arrange for you to have access to the CD's and see where to assist you further. We could free up some time for you to do a performance in honour of President Nelson Mandela and Mama Africa. I will leave this idea with you. Last but not least, thank you for singing happy birthday for me!

When South Africans travel abroad, and this has happened to me just recently in several high-level meetings, after introducing myself as the Ambassador of South Africa, the most likely response that I get is: "Nelson Mandela!" The recognition of his struggle and sacrifice,

for freedom, liberation and human rights, is a reminder of how the global community sees this great man. Mandela is globally synonymous with the timeless humanist ideals of: truth, honour, justice, rights, equality, redistribution, fairness, forgiveness, tolerance and peace. Something sorely lacking in the body politic and leadership in modern times.

Whilst these are the most traditional of values, they are also the most radical virtues of the “good society” that we should all strive for. Nelson Mandela, by contrast lived by the courage of his convictions.

This year marks the centenary of the birth of this remarkable leader, who established the foundation stone on which to advance the “good society” in South Africa, and through his influence, globally. We celebrate him by internalizing the values he stood for; we should emulate the manner in which he lived and died. So many of us quote Mandela, but how many of us emulate his selfless leadership?

The 18th of July is Mandela International Day. In November 2009, the United Nations declared the 18th of July, Mandela International Day, of which the decision was informed by the 67 years that Nelson Mandela fought for social justice. We are all called upon across the globe to observe Mandela Day and to do something extraordinary for 67 minutes. **“Let’s be the legacy”** and spend 67 minutes every year doing something for others in his honour. I am sure you have also heard of Mandela’s prisoner number which is derived from him being the 466th prisoner in the year 1964, so it reads 466-64, or 46664 and is used as a referential title for Nelson Mandela.

Mrs. Doidge and I are spending this time, our 67 minutes, with you and will share with you some experiences of having served under the most amazing President of all time. We do

hope that you too will be inspired by the Mandela way, and we invite you to subscribe to these noble values, **to be the legacy**, whatever your future plans, or careers may be.

I am reliably informed that you are in the midst of your Final Examinations for the undergraduate classes for the summer session of 2017/18, that being so, let me wish you every “Mandela” success.

This then, is also an opportune time for me to share with you some of the life lessons that you can draw on, from one of the most revered leaders in modern history, President Nelson Mandela.

In South Africa, before an important national sporting event takes place, the National Teams would pay President Mandela a courtesy visit and he would wish them success, the media mischievously labelled this “Madiba Magic”, sometimes it worked and others not. So, I will leave you with some of the Madiba Magic and wish you every success in the exams.

If it works, ok, if not, do not call me!

There are several significant legacy initiatives that capture Mandela’s values and the ethics of this great leader of modern times. One of which has been launched here in Thailand as recently as last year. The United Nations revised the “Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners” which were first adopted in 1957 and later revised in 2015 with South Africa taking a lead role in the revision process which started in 2010. This revision was informed by Mandela’s experiences in prison and what he fought against on behalf of fellow inmates. On the 17th December 2015, the United Nations

General Assembly adopted the revised rules and named these after President Nelson Mandela, **“to honour the legacy of the late President of South Africa, who spent 27 years in prison in the course of his struggle for global human rights, equality, democracy and the promotion of a culture of peace”** The rules ensure the inherent dignity and health services for inmates, globally. Today all prisons are required to adhere to the Nelson Mandela Rules.

I am pleased to say that last year, I spoke at an event here in Thailand, to mark the implementation of these rules in Thailand.

Mandela, in his vision for a new South Africa, two years before he became President of South Africa, appointed, Judge Mervyn King, to commence work, to formulate **a new code of corporate governance for transforming the South African private sector**. Today we have the well-known, King Reports (King I, II, III) King III, deals with environmental governance. This work continues long after Mandela’s passing. These are the Mandela values and vision for Good Corporate Governance that he fought for and stood for. These have been accepted globally and are now being practiced in multinationals across the globe.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu¹, described Nelson Mandela as: “A colossus of unimpeachable moral character”.

The Archbishop stated that “never before has one human being so universally acknowledged in his lifetime as the embodiment of magnanimity and reconciliation as Nelson Mandela was”.

This year we sadly witnessed the passing of Mrs Winnie Madikizela Mandela. Both President Mandela and Mrs Winnie Mandela stand out in our history. Never have we

witnessed a married couple demonstrate such enormous **courage** to stand up for the human rights of all human kind knowing that they could ultimately face the death penalty or be sentenced to life imprisonment.

They did not look the other way, rather they owned and led the struggle for the freedom of the oppressed. One of the principles of Mandela’s Leadership as written about by Richard Stengel: Mandela said **“Courage is not the absence of fear”** he himself admitted there were times when he was afraid but he would not succumb or allow himself to be complacent in the face of adversity and continuing oppression of the majority of South Africans. Instead Mandela did the opposite, an example is his statement from the dock.

“During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”

Mandela was a leader of principle and courage, he was prepared to pay the ultimate price for what he believed in.

On the other hand, Mrs. Winnie Mdikizela Mandela, was 36 years old when she was jailed in solitary confinement for 491 days in a cell that was so small that it was unfit for human occupation. Today an exact replica of this cell is on display at the apartheid museum in Johannesburg. Mrs Mandela, released a book based on her experiences in prison and the indignity and inhumane treatment she endured,

which nearly cost her life. The only crime she committed was that she was the wife of Nelson Mandela, she too persevered and was released.

When President Mandela, also known by his clan name Madiba, was released he had the wisdom and capacity to set aside the bitterness of enduring 27 years in a brutal apartheid prison and the weight of centuries of colonial division, subjugation and repression. He was the personification of the spirit and practice of UBUNTU, or human kindness. He perfectly understood that people are dependent on other people in order for individuals and society to prosper.

His 27 years had the exact opposite effect than what the apartheid government intended. Prison moulded him, it deepened his compassion and capacity to empathise with others. On top of the lessons about leadership and culture to which he was exposed to when growing up and his developing a voice for young people in anti-apartheid politics, prison seemed to add an understanding of the human condition.

Upon his release he surprised the world, instead of calling for his pound of flesh, he proclaimed the message of **forgiveness and reconciliation, inspiring others by his example to do extraordinary acts of nobility of spirit**. He invited his former jailer to attend his presidential inauguration as a VIP guest, and he invited the man who led the state's case against him at the Rivonia Trial, **calling for the imposition of the death penalty**, to lunch at his presidential office.

He visited the widow of -the high priest of apartheid, -Betsy Verwoerd, in the white Afrikaner-only- enclave of -Orania. He had a unique flair for spectacular, hugely symbolic acts of human greatness. Who will forget the

electrifying moment in the 1995 rugby World Cup final when he stepped out on the Ellis Park pitch with Captain Francois Pienaar's No. 6 on the Springbok jersey he was wearing? (Rugby was seen by the majority as the sport of the oppressor) It was a gesture that did more for **nation building and reconciliation** than any number of preacher's sermons or politician's speeches. The movie of this, is named *Invictus*.

Although, always a team man, Madiba was also sufficiently comfortable in his own skin, in his own ability to determine right from wrong, that he displayed few of the insecurities associated with many politicians. He was able to accept criticism — and even prepared to apologize when he felt an apology was due.

He had the moral and ethical courage, during and after his presidency, to do and say things that were not always in accordance with the official policy of his beloved African National Congress.

When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) published its findings, some of which his organization, the ANC was strongly opposed to, Madiba had the grace to publicly accept the report and endorse it.

Archbishop Tutu said the following of Mandela in an interview:

Can you imagine what would have happened to us had Mandela emerged from prison in 1990 bristling with resentment at the gross miscarriage of justice that had occurred in the Rivonia Trial? Can you imagine where South Africa would be today had he been consumed by a lust for revenge, to want pay back for all the humiliations and all the agony that he and his people had suffered at the hands of their white oppressors?

It came as no surprise that his name towered above those of any others when the

BBC conducted a poll to determine who should head a world government to guide the affairs of our conflict-ridden global village. A colossus of unimpeachable moral character and integrity, he was the world's most admired and most revered public figure.

People warmed to him because they knew, they felt in their bones, that he cared genuinely. He was consumed by this passion to serve because he believed that a leader exists for the sake of the led, not for -self-aggrandisement or -self-promotion.

People sense this; you cannot fool them. That was why workers at the Mercedes-Benz plant in the Eastern Cape presented him with a special car they had made in appreciation. That was why, when he went to Britain on his farewell state visit, the police had to protect him from the crowds that might have crushed him out of love. Usually, heads of state are protected on state visits to ensure their safety from those who may be hostile.

His passion to serve drove him to continue his long walk, even after retiring. Thus, he campaigned vigorously for those affected by HIV and AIDS, even as the government that succeeded him appeared to falter in the face of the epidemic; and he continued to raise funds for treatment of Aids, and children and many other projects, like building schools — all for others, and not for himself.

Was he a saint? Not if a saint is entirely flawless. I believe he was saintly because he inspired others powerfully and revealed in his character, transparently, many of God's attributes of goodness: compassion, concern for others, desire for peace, forgiveness and reconciliation. Thank God for this remarkable gift to South Africa and the world. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

Once again thank you for this wonderful opportunity and for hosting Mrs. Doidge and myself.

¹Tutu is archbishop emeritus of Cape Town, South Africa. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984