



# RHODES UNIVERSITY

*Where leaders learn*

## VICE-CHANCELLOR'S WELCOME ADDRESS

### 2017 GRADUATION CEREMONIES

#### Thursday 20 April 2017

10:00: Faculty of Humanities & Social sciences  
Prof Penelope Siopis, DFA (*hc*)

17:00: Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences  
Mr Linton Kwesi Johnson, DLitt (*hc*)

#### Friday 21 April 2017

10:00: Faculties of Science

14:30: Faculties of Humanities and Education  
Ms Sheila Makate Sisulu, LLD (*hc*)

18:30: Faculties of Pharmacy, Law and Commerce  
Dr Marguerite Barankitse, LLD (*hc*)

#### Saturday 22 April 2017

10:00: Faculty of Commerce  
Prof Barney Nyameko Pityana, LLD (*hc*)

#### OFFICE OF THE VICE-CHANCELLOR

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## **Your country needs you!**

- The Chancellor, the Honourable Justice Lex Mpati,
- The Chairperson of the Rhodes University Council, Mr Vuyo Kahla, and other members of our Council,
- The Chairperson of the Rhodes Board of Governors, Mr Mike Spicer,
- The Chairperson of the Rhodes University Convocation, Professor Emeritus Peter Mtuze,
- Our honorary graduands,
- The University Public Orator, Distinguished Prof Paul Maylam,
- Deputy Vice-Chancellors,
- Deans,
- Registrar,
- Heads of Academic Department and Administrative Divisions,
- Academic and support staff colleagues,
- President and other members of the Student Representative Council,
- Proud parents, guardians, siblings and friends of our graduands,
- Honoured guests,
- Ladies and gentlemen,
- And most of all, our graduands.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome each and every one of you to this joyous and memorable occasion, the first of six graduation ceremonies of 2017 at Rhodes University.

Graduation ceremonies are a major highlight in our university events calendar. They afford us a special opportunity to recognise, honour and celebrate the academic success and achievements our new graduates. Graduation marks one of the most memorable experiences in the life of a young person. It is a moment of joy and pride; a time for celebration, reflection and thanksgiving.

On behalf of our Council and the entire Rhodes University community, I warmly congratulate each one of you, our graduands, on your great accomplishment.

You and your family are justifiably proud of your remarkable achievement. We take great pride in your fine accomplishments!

I wish to extend special, warm and heartfelt congratulations to those graduands who are the first in their family to earn a university degree. Having been one myself, I know too well what a proud and special moment this is for all of you. Years from now you will look back on this day with great fondness and deep pride.

For some of you, the journey to this day has been a long and a difficult one. It has been marked by twists and turns, failures, disappointments and losses that threatened to derail your dreams, hopes and aspirations. The fact that you are here this morning is testament to your incredible resilience, resolve and fortitude to rise above all hurdles that lay on your way. Your steadfast determination, perseverance and commitment to succeed have carried you through. You know what? You've made it! You've succeeded against odds! Hearty congratulations!

To the parents, guardians, siblings, friends and loved ones, I wish to extend our deep appreciation for the unstinting support, encouragement and constant reassurance you have given our students over the years. You were always there to cheer them on, you were there to lift them when they lost hope and, above all, you were there to love them when they needed you most. This graduation is a fitting tribute to all that you have done for our students. Congratulations! I can only imagine the deep sense of relief you must be feeling now that you don't have to worry about tuition fees!

On behalf of our graduands, I wish to offer profound gratitude and sincere appreciation to their lecturers, tutors, laboratory technicians, computer assistants, support and administrative staff for their guidance, mentoring, support and encouragement during the demanding times of their studies. I also acknowledge with great gratitude the important role played by our cleaners, cooks, gardeners, janitorial staff, wardening staff, student leaders, sport societies and clubs in creating a rich and supportive intellectual, social and physical environment for

our students to develop, grow and succeed in their academic endeavours. The success of our students is their just reward!

Our University is very fortunate to have outstanding, loyal, dedicated and committed academic and support staff who take a deep and keen interest in the growth, development and academic success of each and every one of our students. As Vice-Chancellor, I could not ask for more!

In five of the six graduation ceremonies, we will recognise, honour and celebrate distinguished individuals whose profound and exceptional contributions to our nation and humankind are worthy of our recognition. Their personal journeys and selfless service and sacrifices serve as an inspiration and an example worthy of emulation by all of us. These are women and men whose significant achievements and distinction in some field or selfless leadership set them apart from others, and are consonant with our own institutional mission, purposes and values. We are deeply grateful that they have honoured us with their acceptance of our offer of recognition and have graced us with their presence in our graduation ceremonies.

### *Your country needs you...*

Our graduands,

Your graduation ceremony this morning takes place as a particularly challenging time in the history of our young democracy. You graduate at a time when our country is at a crossroads. You graduate at a time when our nation is engulfed with anger, turbulence, and racial polarisation. You graduate at a time when the foundations and pillars of our constitutional democracy are being challenged and tested.

You are graduating into a society in which greed, corruption, deceit, and malfeasance have been perfected into an art form. You are graduating into a society we could not have imagined even a month or so ago. These are extraordinary times. These are uncertain times. We are witnessing extraordinary events unfolding in front of our own eyes. Much is at stake.

Our country is in trouble;

our country is in a deep crisis;

our country has been pushed to a breaking point;

our society is unravelling. Fast.

Many in our society feel trapped in a state of powerlessness; in a state of hopelessness; and in a state of helplessness.

As you graduate this morning, I wish to remind you that your country has never needed you more!

Your country needs your integrity and honesty;

Your country needs your skills;

Your country needs your fresh and innovative ideas;

Your country needs your talents, knowledge and expertise;

Your country needs your youthful idealism and enthusiasm;

Your country needs your energy and your resourcefulness;

Your country needs your courage, courage that will speak truth to falsehoods and challenge the 'spin' and sham explanations that discredit and insult us all.

You have a significant contribution to make in ensuring that we pull our country out of the abyss in which it finds itself.

The recent political decisions with disastrous economic consequences in our country should give us pause for thought and reflection about the society we have become and what the future of our country might hold in store for us. We might argue, debate and possibly agree to disagree on how we got to this stage. What is beyond dispute though is that at the core of the challenges facing our society is the spectacular failure of political leadership. Indeed, if nothing else, the current crisis should underline the importance of electing leaders who are competent, accountable, honest and trustworthy.

Our country is in desperate need of quality leadership; good leadership, caring leadership, compassionate leadership, bold and courageous leadership, moral and ethical leadership; a leadership which, in the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, does not only inspire confidence in people but one that inspires people to have confidence in themselves; the kind of leadership which,

“is not a function of material wealth, high office or status, or bestowed by a degree or qualification, but one that must be earned through

ethical conduct, impeccable integrity, visionary endeavour, selfless public service and commitment to people and responsibilities.”<sup>1</sup>

In future when we choose leaders, we must take to heart the sage advice of Octavia Butler, a celebrated African-American science fiction writer, when she says:

“Choose your leaders with wisdom and forethought.

To be led by a coward is to be controlled by all that the coward fears.

To be led by a fool is to be led by the opportunists who control the fool.

To be led by a thief is to offer up your most precious treasures to be stolen.

To be led by a liar is to ask to be told lies.

To be led by a tyrant is to sell yourself and those you love into slavery.”

All our challenges notwithstanding, we should never allow apathy, despair, cynicism or despondency to take hold in our society. It is an inevitability of nature that even the darkest night has to give way to the light of a bright new day. This too shall pass! And this is the significance of your graduation this morning – hope, optimism and a promise of a better tomorrow.

Given all we have experienced in South African history, of all peoples we cannot afford to lose the hope that sustained us in the dark days of apartheid; **we** cannot afford not to imagine a better society and a better world than the one which we pray we inhabit temporarily.

You, our graduates, have received what is unarguably the best higher education from one of the finest universities in our country. Your education has equipped you with knowledge and developed the values to imagine a different and a better future for our society. Equally important, your education has given you the skills and abilities to be able to contribute to a tomorrow that is more just, more fair, more honest and more respectful of every citizen regardless of whether you are moving into the world of work or pursuing a further qualification.

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<sup>1</sup> S Badat.

Your graduation this morning fills us with hope that the future of our nation will be different to the one we experience today because of all that you can bring to the task of making it a better place. As you cross the stage on this auspicious occasion, your challenge is to hold fast to the belief that you can and will contribute to our joint future as a democracy in which so much is at stake. You are more than equal to the challenges that face our society and humankind.

With your graduation this morning, you join a small and privileged segment of our society, a knowledge elite. In the globalised world, membership of this knowledge elite has the potential to bring enormous financial and social rewards. However, it carries with it special duties, obligations and responsibilities you cannot and dare not shirk.

Never be afraid to raise your head above the parapet on social, economic and political ills that afflict our society.

Never allow the fear of failure to drive you into the safety and comfort of inaction.

Never sacrifice your values of personal integrity, honesty, trust, fairness and respect, for instant gratification or political expediency.

We expect you to use your knowledge, skills and ingenuity to improve the human condition.

We expect you to use your privileged position as truly educated men and women to advance social justice, substantive equality, and human dignity for all.

We expect you to stand up for what is just, right and fair.

We are sending you out into the world as liberated, educated, compassionate and caring people so that your presence can liberate others.

We are sending you out as a force for good.

We are sending you out to serve our society and humanity with honour, integrity and humility.

Above all, as a member of the knowledge elite, we are sending you out as a voice of the voiceless; as a voice of reason, truth, justice and hope in a society

and world fraught with frightening levels of anger, intolerance, poverty and inequality.

We may have not taught you everything you need to know to navigate the challenges and pitfalls of life. Reason and experience tell us we could not have done this even if we tried. However, what your education at a university like this has given you is the ability to learn how to do these things regardless of the mistakes you may make as you move forward. And, of course, as Alvin Toffler has pointed out, learning often involves unlearning and relearning.

As you move on with the next phase of your lives, never cease to appreciate the value of learning, the significance of knowledge, the strength of ideas, the merit of asking questions, the usefulness of theory, the need for reason and evidence, the power of logic, the benefits that come from clear thinking and thoughtful argument. Above all, never forget that one of the most important things we have tried to teach you here is the value of keeping a mind open to views and perspectives that are different to those you may hold initially.

As a graduate who has experienced a higher education, be especially vigilant of the anti-intellectualism, populist rhetoric and empty sloganeering that have taken root in this post-truth era. Bring all you have learned in your time at Rhodes to the questioning of unsubstantiated claims that pass for facts.

Whatever choices you make in life, never elevate personal ambition or single-minded pursuit of material or financial gain above everything else. Whatever the future holds for you, always strive to be the best that you can possibly be. Always strive to live a life of virtue and consequence, guided by Mahatma Ghandi's injunction that we should live simply so others may simply live.

My wish is that, through your individual and collective acts of care and concern for others, we might witness the emergence of a new society - a more just, a more humane, a more caring, a more equitable, a more compassionate, a fairer and an inclusive society.



### *Graduation statistics.....*

In the 6 graduation ceremonies of 2017, a total of 2 464 students will receive their degrees and diplomas. Of these, 1 328 (or 54%) are undergraduate Bachelor's degrees and 1 136 (or 46%) are postgraduate degrees and diplomas. Of the 1136 postgraduate students, 295 will be receiving their Master's degrees.

Of the 2 464 graduates, 59% are women (*Malibongwe!*), and 21% are international students.

This year we have produced 88 PhD graduates, up from 67 of 2016. We celebrate a new record of 29 PhD degrees for the Faculty of Humanities, up from the previous record of 19 achieved last year. The Faculty of Science has produced 38 PhD graduates, the Faculty of Commerce 6, the Faculty of Education 13, and the Faculty of Pharmacy 2. All Faculties have done exceedingly well. Our warm congratulations to all our Faculty Deans, Heads of Department and the academic and support staff of our academic Departments.

### *Our graduates...*

To our graduates, with your graduation this morning, you join a special family of our alumni – extraordinary women and men who are making remarkable contributions in many and diverse fields of human endeavour. They are found in our classrooms as educators; in our hospital dispensaries as pharmacists; in our courts as lawyers, magistrates and judges; in our financial institutions as accountants and CEOs; in our laboratories as scientists; in our news rooms as journalists; they are entrepreneurs and thought-leaders. They are all playing their part to create a better society and a better world. Animated by our motto '*Vis, Virtus, Veritas*' - 'Strength, Virtue, Truth', inspired by our slogan "*Where leaders learn*" and guided by our values of integrity, respect, social justice, human dignity, human rights, personal excellence and rational inquiry, they are committed to bequeathing future generations a better society and a better world than the one they inherited from the generation before theirs. We will expect no less from you! I welcome you to this special community and I invite you to visit the alumni table in the foyer to receive your special graduation gift as a momento of this special occasion.

With a qualification from Rhodes University, you have been prepared to negotiate successfully and overcome any challenge that comes your way. The quality education you have received has provided you with a solid foundation to launch a successful career. You have been educated at one of the finest universities in the world. Your future could not be brighter!

In the years to come, we will follow your growth and development as a professional with keen interest and we will applaud you for the honour and credit you bring to your *alma mater*.

When I was installed as the Vice-Chancellor of this fine institution, I made two important commitments:

First, that Rhodes University would be accessible to students from poor, rural and working class families so that they can benefit from the outstanding educational experiences it offers.

Second, that I would make it my personal mission to strive to ensure that no academically deserving but financially needy student is turned away from Rhodes University.

In this regard, my appeal to you is that you help us live up to these important commitments by contributing generously to our Alumni Annual Fund and other fundraising efforts.

I'm pleased to announce that in May we will be launching an ambitious fundraising campaign – *Isivivane* Student Financial Aid Fund - to ensure that we make quality and life changing education accessible and affordable to all young people of our country irrespective of their financial position. Your support is vital if we are to continue to make the learning experiences we value so greatly here at Rhodes University more available to all.

In the final chapter of his book, *Long Walk to Freedom*, President Nelson Mandela writes:

“I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the

glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can only rest for a moment, for with freedom come responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not ended."

This morning we are taking a moment to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista of your marvellous accomplishments, to look back on the distance you have travelled. This is a wonderful opportunity for you to pause and look back on the journey you have completed and look forward into the promising future that lies ahead. You dare not linger, for your own long walk is not yet ended.

Today is your special day to cherish and remember. You have earned it! May you look back on this glorious day with great pride and warm memories and may it serve as an inspiration and a springboard towards better and exciting things in life for you.

### *Appreciation....*

Let me conclude by paying a special tribute to the wonderful women and men who have worked tirelessly to make our graduation ceremonies possible. They normally work behind the scenes to ensure that our graduation ceremonies run without a hitch. These are the people who have worked extra hard to ensure that the names of our graduands appeared on the graduation programme, in the right place, in the right order and for the right qualification.

They wanted to be sure that the moment of glory of each one of our graduands was a truly memorable experience.

They are too many to mention, but permit me to single out a few:

- The army of student volunteers who are serving as ushers;
- Ms Desiree Wicks;
- Ms Suzette Flanagan;
- Ms Charmaine Avery;
- Ms Benita Rama
- Ms Lindy van Jaarsveldt;
- Mr Cromwell Dyala;
- Ms Natalie Ripley;
- The Faculty Deans;
- Master's dissertation and doctoral thesis supervisors and

- The Rhodes University Chamber Choir.

When you see these people around, please give them a bear hug, a smile and say a quiet 'thank you'. They are truly special!

Our Registrar, Dr Stephen Fourie, who has been central in our graduation ceremonies for the past 21 years will be retiring at the end of April. Steve, on behalf of our Council and the entire Rhodes University community, I wish to convey to you our heartfelt appreciation and deep gratitude for all that you have done for our University. We wish you a happy retirement and all the best for the future.

Let me conclude with the inspiring words of President Nelson Mandela which I hope will guide our graduates:

“What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.”

Congratulations!

Asante sana. Enkosi. Ke a leboga. Ngiyabonga. Ke a leboha. Ndo livhuwa. Ngiyathokoza. Obrigado. Inkomu. Merci beaucoup. Baie dankie. Thank you very much.

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