

Acceptance Remarks: Distinguished Old Rhodian Award

IN Mkhize: August 30, 2014

I am completely honored and thankful for this gracious recognition from my favorite alma mater. The time I spent here as a student almost three decades ago, was an incredible growth experience and my association with Rhodes is one of my most treasured legacies.

When I came to Rhodes to begin my tertiary education, I had absolutely no idea what to expect. Everything was entirely new and daunting – for one thing, I had never physically touched or seen a computer and yet I chose to pursue a degree in computer science. I guess like many first year students who experience a mixture of intimidation and determination, I spent the early months trying to find my feet. And in my view, there is no better place to experiment and discover yourself; explore new interests and abilities than this fine institution. Geographically, it's a perfect location for learning and teaching. As you all know, it's also a nurturing environment with supportive and challenging faculty.

Allow me for a moment to reflect on some of my personal indulgences of those wonderful years: Apart from academic classes which I attended with 'diligence', I took interest in arts and cultural activities around campus; I dabbled in quite a few sporting activities, and got - really addicted to squash - spent so much time at those squash courts. As for my esteemed residence, Canterbury - actually I do think the setting of Allan Webb Hall has the most elegant character on campus. With the music department right next to us, I took piano lessons twice a week with Mrs Bremmer. I remember that most of her students, were aged between 5 and 9 years, and I would queue up right behind them for my turn. It was also in Allan Webb Hall that I was introduced to chess. I became so obsessed with the game, and at some point I had to deliberately stop playing chess after dinner because I started dreaming about pawns and checkmates almost every night. Suffice to say, I had a really great time here and I believe both my academic and recreational experiences opened a floodgate of possibilities, which I pursued as I began my career in Johannesburg.

As I left Rhodes, it was with confidence that I would handle any diverse and robust working environment in my path, and I ascribe that optimism directly to Rhodes. The university was at the forefront of history when it acted on the need to recognize, and embrace ethnic and cultural diversity in all forms of engagement. For instance, the integration of students in residences occurred for the first time when we entered Rhodes in 1981, well before the dawn of a new democratic society that was to emerge a decade later. So we were the early beneficiaries of that bold foresight, and credit goes to the leadership of the university for those decisive, unprecedented actions. What a privilege, to have been part of that history and breakthrough!

Now, as we count the passing decades, we can also count the enormous strides that many graduates of this special institution have made in almost every field of business and other segments of society. Indeed, this is a place [‘where leaders learn’](#). The educators, the instructors here at Rhodes, have continually demonstrated their commitment to help shape the foundation that produces graduates who are poised to be visionary leaders, leaders

who are adequately equipped and informed; leaders who are socially sensitive and emotionally engaged.

I must point out, however, that today's graduates are not entering the same predictable work environment of my time. Today's business environment is a hundred times more complex and uncertain than any scenario we could have predicted many years ago. Businesses are seeking to adapt to the dramatic changes that are constantly occurring, locally and across the globe.

Technology has not only changed the access that we have to information, but it has also produced industries that are conceived, created and even die in a few years. We are grappling with the challenges of persisting allegations of corporate misconduct, and we are seeing a breakdown in leadership accountability in both socio-economic and political structures. This has become a major societal menace, and indeed a high profile issue. Today, more than ever before, the world needs responsible leaders, who will be courageous in sounding the message of high integrity in political halls, in board-rooms and in the court rooms.

It is my sincere hope, that Rhodes will continue to produce future leaders, who are eminently prepared to fill this role, leaders who will stay grounded in ethics and caring, both for our fellow man and for the environment we all share.

Let me conclude by reflecting on former President Thabo Mbeki's statement about seven years ago, when he said – *“we are entering the age of hope, the time to build on the foundations left by previous leaders.”* He asserted that it was time to produce an upgraded version of South Africa – Version 2.0 with more memory and more processing power. I submit, that perhaps it is now time to work on Version 3.0, probably as reflected in the *National Development Plan* and hopefully; the Rhodes graduates will be key contributors, to the creation of this new version of South Africa.

Once again, I thank you all for the profound honour of this Distinguished Old Rhodian award. I accept this as a call, to strengthen my continued engagement with the university.