

**INAUGURAL INTERNATIONAL WEEK
OF
THE MANGOSUTHU UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY**

**RESPONSE BY
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The Honourable Minister Lindiwe Sisulu MP, Chancellor of the Mangosuthu University of Technology; Professor Hal Walker, father of the Laser Telemetry and retired Aerospace Engineer; Professor Marcus Ramogale, Acting Vice-Chancellor and Principal of MUT; His Excellency Mr Cyril Ndaba, former South African Consul General to the United States; Ms Mbali Mkhize, our Chair of this session; and distinguished guests who are joining us online from various locations throughout the world.

Let me begin by saying how wonderful it is to see Prof. Walker again and how much I appreciate this opportunity to listen to his reflections on the Apollo XI mission. When I met Prof. Walker, together with his remarkable wife, Dr Bettye Walker, in Durban two years ago, I was excited by their passion to see young South Africans provided with opportunities to excel in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

I felt I had met kindred spirits, for so much of my life's work has been focused on opening the horizons of young South Africans beyond the narrow confines dictated by poverty, ignorance and a lack of opportunity.

My introduction to the Walkers came through His Excellency Mr Cyril Ndaba, whom I met more than a decade ago when he was serving as South Africa's Deputy High Commissioner to the United Kingdom. He graciously met me and my delegation at Heathrow International Airport, when I was travelling to Wales to take the salute from the Royal Welsh; the regiment whose predecessors had fought my great grandfather's warriors in the Anglo-Zulu War.

Prof. Hal and Dr Bettye Walker happened to be staying at the same hotel as me in Durban in March 2019, and Mr Ndaba took the opportunity to connect us, for which I am deeply grateful. The Walkers work in our country is truly inspiring, as you have heard this morning. By the time they opened the first chapter of the National Space Society on the African continent in February 2018, they had already established computer literacy laboratories and STEM programmes in a number of schools in South Africa's townships.

We are indeed very privileged to have such a notable scientist take an interest in our youth. I thank His Excellency Mr Ndaba for introducing them to KwaZulu Natal, and I thank Chancellor Sisulu for engaging with the Walkers on the idea of launching a second Space Society right here at MUT. More than anything, however, I thank the Walkers for investing their intellect and energy into the development of the next generation.

As we listened to Prof. Walker speaking about the Apollo XI moon landing, I was taken back to that singular moment in history. I remember that my youngest daughter had recently been born. I wish I could paint a picture of our family, gathered around the radio, listening with rapt attention as Neil Armstrong took that giant leap for mankind. But South Africa was a different country in 1969. Under the oppressive fist of apartheid, we were forcibly shut off from the rest of the world.

While in America man was going as far as he had ever been, in South Africa the majority of citizens were barred from moving freely even within our own country.

In July 1969, as the world celebrated the moon landing, Nelson Mandela was in prison grieving the death of eldest son. Mrs Winnie Mandela had already been in custody for two months despite no charges having been brought. Just two months previously, the banned ANC had held its first National Consultative Conference at Morogoro in Tanzania, where Mr Oliver Tambo called on our country's youth to intensify the armed struggle.

Despite being a member of the ANC, I had not attended that Conference. My passport had been confiscated by the South African Government five years earlier in retribution for visiting Mr Tambo in London, *en route* to the Anglican Congress in Canada.

In **that** South Africa, everything was decided on the basis of one's skin colour: where you would live, how much education you would receive, and what jobs would be

available to you. Black South Africans were afforded the least resources and placed in the worst circumstances.

When the Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons visited South Africa in 1986, their Report became an eloquent testimony to the truth and the tragedy of the Apartheid system.

“The ‘homelands’,” the Report read, “are in reality rural slums, reservoirs of labour for the ‘white areas’ where more than four fifths of economic activity is located....

We were reminded by Ministers and white businessmen that there are worse slums in other parts of the world. ‘Here there is a First World and a Third World,’ we were told. ‘Do not judge the Third World by First World standards.’

Yet this is to ignore the calculated creation and maintenance of these different worlds in one country, and the determination that the demands of the First World should be met at the expense of the Third.

There is abysmal poverty elsewhere in the world, but nowhere is it institutionalised as in South Africa and with as little prospect for its victims to escape the poverty trap.”

Education for black South Africans was far from a priority of Government. Indeed Government invested a paltry amount in educating the oppressed majority. In part this was based on the colonial mindset that it was not worth educating those who would never be more than hewers of wood and drawers of water. But there was also the fundamental understanding by the regime that education breeds revolt against oppression.

Throughout history, universities have been the seedbed of revolutions. It is on university campuses, more than anywhere else, that the foundations have been laid for massive shifts in thought, particularly around politics.

This is why, when I became Chief Minister of the erstwhile KwaZulu Government, my foremost campaign was to provide quality education to all our people. While we struggled towards our political freedom, I knew that we needed to empower those who would inherit a liberated country, so that they could administer it with skill and wisdom. I balked against the idea of burning our country down in the pursuit of liberation, because I believed in protecting what was rightfully ours.

A decade after the Apollo XI mission, the economic situation in our country was deteriorating as the campaign of economic sanctions and disinvestment really started to bite. As the ANC's mission-in-exile convinced investors to pull out of South Africa, industries closed shop and jobs were lost. Indeed, jobs were becoming few and far between.

To further the campaign of ungovernability, the ANC's mission-in-exile was calling on students to abandon their education and burn down their schools. Across South Africa the cry "Liberation Now, Education Later" echoed through empty classrooms.

As much as I had invested in seeing my country liberated, I could not embrace a strategy that weakened the economy we would inherit, or compromised the future of our youth. My vision was to liberate our youth through education. Thus in KwaZulu, we pushed for oppressed young South Africans to pursue education with fervour.

Under the banner "Education for Liberation", Inkatha worked to see our country's youth equipped with the tools of knowledge, to leverage their own freedom. We were preparing them to become active, responsible citizens, economic drivers and leaders in a liberated country.

My commitment to education was well-known. I served as Patron of the LEARN Fund and Chairperson of the American South African Study Educational Trust. I also served as Chancellor of the University of Zululand, capping 22 successive years of graduates. It was in this capacity that I heard the lament of young graduates, and I was pained by their honest question: what use is a degree, when there are no jobs to be had?

The simple truth was that a degree or diploma did not translate into work. If we were to liberate our youth through education, we needed a specific kind of education. We needed a tertiary institution that offered vocational training, so that students could be equipped with the skills needed to get jobs, keep jobs and create jobs.

The difficulty was finding the resources to fulfil that vision.

Fortunately, not every strategy of apartheid was successful. In the seventies, when apartheid did its utmost to keep the races separate, I developed good friendships with men and women of all races, based on our shared ideals for South Africa. One such friendship was with the Oppenheimer family. They were liberals and had a tremendous desire to create social justice.

Mr Harry Oppenheimer often invited my wife and I to dinner. Afterwards, the women would retire to one corner of the room and the men to another where, over cigars, we would inevitably talk politics. Our friendship enabled me to speak freely. Thus, when Mr Oppenheimer asked me what business could do to support genuine liberation, I told him about the need to equip oppressed young South Africans with vocational skills.

I presented the idea of a technikon that would enable graduates to take up jobs and create jobs, becoming entrepreneurs and giving their contribution to our society and our liberation. Mr Oppenheimer immediately caught the vision.

As Chairman of the Anglo American and de Beers Group, Mr Harry Oppenheimer had created the Chairman's Fund to channel resources towards the Oppenheimer's philanthropic initiatives. Through the Chairman's Fund, Mr Oppenheimer provided R5 million to build a tertiary institution that offered vocational training. Thus, in 1979, the Mangosuthu Technikon opened its doors in Umlazi.

I never intended it to take my name. That was suggested by Dr Oscar Dhlomo, the Minister of Education in KwaZulu. But I was deeply honoured, for I knew that this institution would reflect a legacy of investment in education for generations to come.

It was a humble beginning, with just 15 students. But the value of what we were doing became evident as more and more graduates passed through this institution. My vision to liberate South Africa's youth through education was finally concretised.

Now, 42 years later, the Mangosuthu University of Technology continues to equip young South Africans to get jobs, keep jobs and create jobs. The graduates of MUT are taking ownership of building South Africa through their own initiative. They are breaking the bonds of poverty and ignorance, and shaping their own future.

MUT today is a thriving centre of academic excellence, research and collaboration. MUT graduates are thought leaders, activists and dynamic citizens. I am proud of the legacy of this institution.

I am also proud to see a leadership at MUT who understands the need to create partnerships and to collaborate, not only with institutions in Africa, but throughout the world. When I founded MUT it was patently clear to me that South Africa would need to take some giant leaps to catch up with the rest of the world. Having been a pariah for so many years, we had largely been left behind as the world progressed.

Now, as we engage the Fourth Industrial Revolution, we need to take care that South Africa will not be left behind again for lack of investment in critical skills, such as technology, science, maths and engineering.

In truth, South Africa has enormous potential. Considering all that we have overcome and considering the democratic system we have built on the painful past of oppression and divisions, our people are capable of facing the present challenges with courage, resilience and creativity. But there is no need for us to face these challenges alone. There is a global network of institutions and organisations who are focussed on the same goal of unleashing the potential of the next generation.

As MUT taps into that network, I believe that great things will be accomplished. We have enough to inspire us. It is up to us to help tomorrow's students look beyond the limits of what has been done already, and to empower them to take the next step.

There is no doubt in my mind that the establishment of a Space Society at MUT will take that vision to the next level. I hope to see it accomplished within my lifetime.

I thank you.

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