

**VALUES - PREDICATED LEADERSHIP FOR
A SELF-RESPECTING EMERGING POLITICAL
ECONOMY**

29 March 2008

In acceptance of the Degree DOCTORATE OF LAWS Honoris Causa

Mr Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Members of Senate and Council here present, Members of Staff, Graduande and their parents and Kith and Kin, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Please allow me to acknowledge in our midst, my octogenarian mother, Evelyn Khoza, who travelled some 1500 km from Mpumalanga to witness this occasion, my family: my wife Mumsy, daughters Nkateko and Munene, my aunt Tintswalo and cousin Prof. Eddie Mhlanga.

I have chosen as the theme for my acceptance address: Values -predicated Leadership for a self-respecting emerging Political Economy. My choice is motivated by a cardinal belief that in addressing fundamental questions of human, progress, values, help to clarify the relations between individualism and collectivism, self-interest and altruism, liberty and equality, inclusivity and exclusivity, as well as the attendant moral and ethical considerations - issues at the heart of Africa's leadership challenge.

Graduates and Postgraduates - This day represents a landmark in your lives. You are here, successful, relieved, and some of you quite positively stunned that you have actually passed and obtained your degree! But have you thought about what lies unspoken behind your achievement? And what you probably didn't realise when you started out on your career path, would be the demands placed on you as individuals, on your character, your relationships, your very approach to the world around you and the evolution of your own philosophy and value system?

What has brought you to this point? Hard work certainly, perseverance, sacrifice and a goal you have been striving to reach. Beyond that, however, there lie deeper motivations. You would not be sitting here today had you not been driven at a more profound level by values, principles and an ethical mindset that have made you who you are.

I remain an inveterate student, and over the years of extensive reading and study I have understood that we are subject to different forces which predispose us to behave in a certain manner. Some of these are superficial - opinions for instance, which operate at a very shallow level. Yet people are so easily swayed by them, especially when they haven't taken the time to develop their own.

Operating on a stronger wavelength are attitudes - more ingrained than opinions, better formulated, these have already scored distinct paths in people's psyche and are somewhat more difficult to budge. Yet negative opinions and attitudes, from family, friends or communities, could have influenced you in such a way that instead of persevering, you gave up your studies. The fact that you are here tonight points to some element more fundamental than opinions and attitudes that operate in your life.

I firmly believe that the forces which truly define you as an individual are your values. Values give meaning and substance to your life and make it worthwhile. Values will predispose you to behave in certain ways, and if you react contrary to these internalised normative principles, you will experience a great measure of discomfort and dissonance. Values lie at the heart of compunction, the pricking of the conscience - that sickening feeling when you KNOW you are ashamed of what you have said or done. Shakespeare nailed it down in Richard the Third: "My conscience hath a thousand several tongues, and every tongue brings in several tales, and every tale condemns me for a villain".

I believe that with the proper set of values in business and politics, people will be led to behave in a manner which builds, inspires, motivates and has the courage to face unpleasant realities and address them constructively. Will you be such a person? This is the stuff that leaders are made of. And don't think of leaders just as the prominent figures in public and civil life that clutter newspapers and magazines. Wherever you find yourself in life, there you can lead.

Do you question that? Let us consider for a moment what constitutes leadership. But first let me describe leadership itself.

I do not believe that one can analyse leadership without associating it intrinsically with a value system. Leaders inspire - they do not coerce. As Ronald Heifetz points out in his book, "Leadership without Easy Answers," leaders mobilise people to tackle tough problems. They interact and are influenced by people as they in turn influence them. Such leadership creates value. It is socially enriching. It leaves a lasting legacy. It is impossible to consider that such leadership could be values-free.

Our own Nelson Mandela is an example of a true leader. He was motivated by a profound value system, believing intensely in the worth of every human being and in principles such as integrity, compassion, probity, responsibility and respect, all grounded on solid moral and ethical foundations. Could you honestly see such a man behaving in a reprehensible manner and then presenting himself as a leader? Or stooping to dishonest business transactions and not only hotly denying them, but continuing to operate unrepentantly in the public arena?

In other words, I argue that leadership is by its nature good. You cannot have "bad" leadership. That is simply not leadership. True leadership must be infused with values that create a value system that reflects the culture in which it has been born. Cyril Levicki in "The Leadership Gene" defines it as "a profound sense of decency with moral fibre." Without that, people can "lead" as it were, but be as great a danger as they seem leaders.

And we don't have to delve deep into history to find examples of effective but bad leadership - Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Suharto, and countless others who are frequently quoted - we have a perfect example right on our doorstep. Robert Mugabe, and before him Idi Ammin, have brought undying shame to the very concept of leadership. Ironically, Mugabe played an important role in helping to build Zimbabwe's economy during the first ten years of his presidency, but he has now plunged it into total ruin, so even by his own standards, he has to be counted a monumental failure. Not all that different from Hitler, who started off sweeping people up with his vision of the Greater Germany and solutions for his struggling people only to raze the country to the ground. They could drag

people along with them for a while, as they appealed to transitory emotions and instant gratification of immediate needs, and thus appeared at first sight to be dynamic leaders, but when the moral vacuum was revealed, they had to resort to coercion and oppression with the inevitable downward spiral to disaster.

Leadership must embrace a moral, even compassionate, dimension, not just a practical, material one. Different situations may well demand different personalities and call for different behaviours. So while it is true that “cometh the hour, cometh the man” as the old adage goes, and leaders might have to adapt their particular approach according to socio-political circumstances, they should never, ever, compromise their moral and ethical stance. There is no excuse for unjust behaviour. There is no excuse for a lack of compassion which is vital in considering the individual and the community. There is no excuse for irresponsible behaviour, which aims only at self-gratification and self-enrichment without recognising the consequences - not only on individuals, but entire societies and nations.

Both Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King Jnr embody these concepts: among the basic tenets of their worldview were respect for the individual, the betterment of others, the upliftment of society. Their immense popularity cannot be denied. Yet they never stooped to populism - sweeping up emotions instead of appealing to considered thought. Populism seeks the expedient which will advance only the short-term interests of a limited few. It has been one of the scourges of Africa. Both Ghandi and Martin Luther King Jnr nourished profound compassion, seeking to accommodate other points of view. They did not seek to impose their beliefs, but rather reason with others. They did not strive to coerce, but rather to persuade and inspire. Ghandi became the creator of “passive resistance” since he refused to resort to violence to attain his ends. The final outcome of his campaigns was eventually, the independence of India from the British Empire, and laying a sound and solid foundation for India as we know it today.

Martin Luther King Jnr’s “Civil Disobedience” was outspokenly nonviolent to achieve the end of racial discrimination and segregation. Think of our own internationally revered icon, Nelson Mandela and the quiet words of deep conviction he uttered at the Rivonia Trial: “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.” Populist leaders will live and strive for their own gain. They will not embrace ideals which will uplift their nations.

Societies which are led by purely materialistic leaders according to purely materialistic goals lack heart and soul. In foregoing values such as compassion, probity and integrity for mere physical gains, they strip people of the very essence of humanity and unconditional worth. Sterile leaders such as these undermine the long-term sustainability of a society. They void it of meaning. What is important to them are short-term objectives, like status, pseudo-importance, appearance, opinion, material rewards. The history of humankind has demonstrated amply that a society based on such transient principles produces nothing of worth and has, as Hobbes expressed it, an existence that is “poor, nasty, brutish and short.” It becomes fertile ground for the baser elements of human nature, which lead to violence, tyranny, oppression and might rather than right. Such societies are also notoriously devoid of what one could call the nobler, more spiritual products of its individuals: art, poetry, literature and philosophy.

Whereas those societies founded on and inspired by a values system produce the great milestones of our history: constitutions such as we in South Africa boast, the American Declaration of Independence, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, great works of literature which expound on the human condition. These are not written in limbo from outer space - they are created from a strong sense of moral beliefs and fundamental values.

It is values such as these that have led to the rapidly growing global understanding that companies, organisations and nations cannot continue their rapacious, exploitative ways. Enron and Worldcom sounded a clanging wake-up call and as a result, regulation, some would say over-regulation, stepped in to rein in these baser instincts in human nature. Corporate governance is increasingly recognised as essential if economies, indeed even small isolated communities, are to grow in the interests of all and not just an elite few. Corporate and political governance limit the possibilities of oppression and exploitation. Corporate and political governance spring from a profound acknowledgement of the critical role that values must play in developing our people and our countries.

And I must admit, it makes me immensely proud as an African to recognise that many of these leadership values: compassion, respect, responsibility and integrity - are those which are inherent to Ubuntu. Ubuntu values humanity, it seeks consensus through consultation and accommodation. It appreciates that those who differ from us are not necessarily against us. This recognition of shared intrinsic human values is critical to the makeup of true leadership.

As an emerging economy we cannot afford to be blase about the leadership which emerges to guide our nations and our continent. We are at a particularly sensitive stage of our African development where we need to attract foreign investors, we need to be respected globally, we need to be exemplary in corporate governance and seen to be free of corruption.

I put it to you that as an emerging political economy, we need to be prescriptive - even proscriptive - about the kind of leaders we want to lead us. We cannot leave it to fate or circumstance. We must groom our leaders and not allow them simply to emerge, as it were, by accident, as a result of socio-economic or political events. I believe that leadership in our 21st Century should be neither incidental nor accidental. It must be planned. It must be purposeful. It must be driven by ideals which we define and demand. And if any presumed leader does not stack up against those requirements, then I believe that we as an emerging political economy should put our foot down and say bluntly: this does not meet the requirements of our people. This person is not going to enable us to deal with the complexities and challenges of the 21st century, and to solve or resolve what has now come to be unpopularity known as the African condition.

We know what is required of visionary and inspirational leadership. Africa's own tragic history has thrown up countless examples of what we do not want or need.

We need an adaptive approach to leadership, evaluating "leadership in process" rather than waiting for what we know will be the inevitable result. This also means testing that leadership in terms of its social usefulness and its applicability to prevailing socio economic needs and cultural necessities.

So how does that relate to you?

You are carrying the future of South Africa on your shoulders. It is vital for you to understand the critical role which values play in our individual and national lives and appreciate the consequences when those are missing. Let a value system based on moral and ethical foundations influence your opinions, your attitudes and your behaviour - wherever you are. That will make you a leader in your peer group, your company and your business relationships.

A valedictory advice to those graduating today from BC Forbes: "Vitaly important for a young man or woman is, first to realize the value of education, and then to cultivate earnestly, aggressively, ceaselessly, the habit of self-education. Without fresh supplies of knowledge, the brain will not develop healthily and vigorously any more than the body can be sustained without fresh supplies of food".

She or he Who graduates today and stops learning tomorrow is uneducated the day after.

May I conclude by citing one of the leading thinkers of the twentieth century, Andrew Carnegie:

"Think of yourself as on the threshold of unparalleled success. A whole clear glorious life lies before you. Achieve! Achieve!".

Keep at least two things in mind:

First that the rung of a ladder was never designed to rest upon, but only to hold your foot long enough to enable you to put the other higher. Our forebears used to advise that behind every hill there was another. For you, after this mountain top experience, there is another.

Second, that the truly worthwhile achievements of humanity are those which are socially useful. Do not allow atrophy to render you ineffectual in facing the great challenges that characterise contemporary Africa. Lead the charge in ensuring that we are globally competitive and worthy of unconditional respect.