



# ENGLISH SPEECHES

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## NELSON MANDELA

### FREEDOM AND JUSTICE

<https://youtu.be/w42rHdvFpVM>

Ladies and Gentlemen.

This may very well be our last official visit to the United States before retiring from office next year. There could not be a more moving start to the visit than one which included being honoured in this way by one of the great educational institutions of this nation and of the world. I know that through this award you are not so much recognising any individual achievement, but are rather paying tribute to the struggles and achievements of the South African people as a whole. I humbly accept the award in that spirit, while at the same time wishing you to know that we are not unaware of nor unmoved by the great compliment you pay us by conferring this degree at a specially convened Convocation.

To join George Washington and Winston Churchill as the other recipients of such an award conferred at a specially convened Convocation, is not only a singular honour. It also holds great symbolic significance: to the mind and to the future memory of this great American institution, the name of an African is now added to those two illustrious leaders of the Western world. If in these latter years of a life lived in pursuit of equality, we can at last look upon our own country as one in which citizens, regardless of race, gender or creed, share equal political rights and opportunities for development, we do so with great gratitude towards the millions upon millions all around the world who materially and morally supported our struggle for freedom and justice. Together with those freedom- and justice-loving citizens of the world, we do at the same time, however, note that at the end of this century - a century which humanity entered with such high hopes for progress - the world is still beset by great disparities between the rich and the poor, both within countries and between different parts of the world.

If in individual life we all may reach that part of the long walk where the opportunity is granted to retire to some rest and tranquillity, for humanity the walk to freedom and equality seems, alas, still to be long one ahead. This august institution gains its standing and reputation also from the manner in which it has conducted, and continues to conduct, itself as an international presence. Wherever men and women of learning and thought gather, its name and work are known. It embodies that spirit of universality which marks great universities. To join the ranks of its alumni, is to be reminded of the oneness of our global world. The greatest single challenge facing our globalised world is to combat and eradicate its disparities. While in all parts of the world progress is being made in entrenching democratic forms of governance, we constantly need to remind ourselves that the freedoms which democracy brings will remain empty shells if they are not accompanied by real and tangible improvements in the material lives of the millions of ordinary citizens of those countries. Where men and women and children go burdened with hunger, suffering from preventable diseases, languishing in ignorance and illiteracy, or finding themselves bereft of decent shelter, talk of democracy and freedom that does not recognise these material aspects, can ring hollow and erode



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confidence exactly in those values we seek to promote. Hence our universal obligation towards the building of a world in which there shall be greater equality amongst nations and amongst citizens of nations. The disparity between the developed and developing world, between North and South, reflects itself also in the sphere of educational and intellectual resources. When in Africa we speak and dream of, and work for, a rebirth of that continent as a full participant in the affairs of the world in the next century, we are deeply conscious of how dependent that is on the mobilisation and strengthening of the continent's resources of learning.

The current world financial crisis also starkly reminds us that many of the concepts that guided our sense of how the world and its affairs are best ordered, have suddenly been shown to be wanting. They are seen to have hidden real structural defects in the world economic system. The precepts of the economic theorists who could so confidently prescribe to all, now appear to have drawn much of their apparent intellectual validation from having been unchallenged by the day-to-day operations of a system that operated in the interests of the powerful. Not only does this crisis call for fundamental rethinking and reconceptualisation on the part of the theorists of the North. It more particularly and urgently emphasises the need for thinkers and intellectuals of the developing world to sharpen their skills and analyses, and for a genuine partnership between those of the North and the South in helping shape a world order that answers to the shared and common needs of all peoples, and not just the riches. This university already has had a long partnership of learning and teaching with the South African people. There are many names that one could mention of persons now holding office in government or in institutions of civil society who spent time at Harvard or benefited from programmes conducted jointly with this institution. For that, our fledgling democracy faced with enormous tasks of reconstruction and development owes your institution a great debt of gratitude. As South Africans play their role in helping to conceptualise and give content to the African Renaissance, we continue to draw upon the intellectual skills nurtured and honed here. The United States of America and democratic South Africa have in the course of these last four years built a relationship of mutual respect and co-operation, each country respecting the sovereignty of the other while co-operating as partners. As part of this relationship the scholars who had the benefit of studying here, returned better equipped to deal with the local challenges and problems as Africans. It is therefore a source of great encouragement and inspiration for us to learn about the "Emerging Africa" research project housed in the newly-created Centre for International Development at Harvard. Its objective of undertaking an appraisal of Africa's economic, social and political history, as well as the problems facing the continent, is timely and to be greatly welcomed. That it will be doing this in collaboration with African research institutions and scholars, will serve to strengthen and build African intellectual capacity to take charge of its reconstruction and regeneration. I am confident that it will also strengthen and build your own understanding of African reality and your capacity to analyse that reality as part of our shared world.

Mister President, we accept this great honour bestowed upon us today as a symbol of how South Africa and the United States, Africa and the West, the developing and the developed world, are reaching out and joining hands as partners in building a world order that equally benefits all the nations and people of the world.

For three hundred years this great institution has served its nation with distinction. We enter the new millennium in the hope that the rich fruits of learning, science and technological progress will in this coming

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century truly be shared by all in this global village in which we live. We are confident that this institution of which we are now a proud member will play a leading role in achieving that.

Thank you.

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