

Members of the Walter Sisulu University Council

Interim Vice-Chancellor of Walter Sisulu University, Professor Khaya Mfenyana

Members of the Institutional Management Committee

Chairperson of Convocation Ms Nomnikelo Puzi

Student Representative Council Presidents

Staff of Walter Sisulu University

Government Dignitaries from National, Provincial and Local Government

Invited Guests from the business sector and the many communities of Walter Sisulu University

Graduands, your families and friends

All protocols observed...

I wish to thank the University for honouring me with the invitation to address this gathering today. This is indeed a first for me and I am very deeply touched to be asked to speak this morning. Thank you.

Dear graduands, today is one of the most significant days in your lives, signalling and symbolising your crossing a floor from being students to joining the labour market with your newly acquired skills and knowledge specifically, but also, more generally, going out into the big, wide world where you will make your mark in diverse ways.

Congratulations for having the courage, the perseverance and the resolve to undertake the hard work necessary to complete your degree. You have every right to feel proud about your success.

It is not the most important day in your life. I am sure that when you reflect back, you will each have moments which you hold on to as defining of who you are. And, in the years ahead, there will be important personal, family, professional and societal milestones which will have a most significant impact on your lives.

So, today is not the most important day. But, believe me, it is a huge moment. So enjoy it. Take as many photographs as you can today – including selfies and tweet them to the Dispatch!! N n

Do that because you want to remember and cherish this graduation for a long, long time.

Another reason, of course, why one would caution that today is not the most important moment in your life, is that there will be many challenges ahead. You cannot rest on your laurels and simply believe that you graduated here on this day; therefore you don't need to do anything further to achieve your personal or our societal goals.

This Faculty of Business, Management Sciences and Law has a very rich history. It has produced some of the top black chartered accountants and lawyers here in the Eastern Cape in particular and in South Africa in general. Therefore you have a responsibility as the current group of graduates to carry forward the proud tradition of this faculty.

At all times you must resist the temptation of being associated with mediocrity, which seems to be celebrated in every sphere of our society. That may seem difficult but I can assure you that every one of you gathered here has the potential to make it to the top if you internalize the principle of working hard and avoiding short cuts to the top.

You must work hard knowing that success is not cheap and you will strive for excellence, thus preserving the proud tradition that this faculty has over the years jealously guarded.

You are graduating at a time of heady events in our country and in the world.

This ceremony takes place at a time when our country is celebrating 20 years of a democratic dispensation. It comes just two days after our fifth democratic elections for the national and provincial parliaments.

Congratulations to the ANC for being returned to parliament as a governing party, as well as to all the other parties which have participated with passion, hard work and love for our country in this election process.

I also wish to congratulate the IEC for presiding over yet another free and fair election. This process must make each of us proud to be South African. Once again, we have come through a watershed moment in our country with dignity and with our democracy intact.

But this moment in our country is not simply and only about celebration. It is also about standing still, reflecting on, questioning, re-assessing, all that we have achieved and what we have failed to achieve.

And, therefore, it is a moment to commit and re-commit to the democratic processes underway. Those processes do not start or end with an election every five years. They must involve each of us in whatever ways are possible, in civic duties, in activism, in working towards and living in all areas of our existence to make our country better in every sense of the word.

A big challenge for our country at this time is the endemic corruption which poses a real danger of us reversing the gains that our hard fought democratic change brought us in 1994.

We all know that the country is grappling with cases of corruption or suspected corruption involving high-profile people and leaders in the public and private sectors.

Only those who consciously choose not to see this scourge would claim to be ignorant of what is happening in our country. Note, of course, that, as I am emphasizing here, corruption does not occur only in the public sector. It is equally a scourge in the private sector.

Indeed, bribery, which is a form of corruption very evident in our country, generally requires someone in the private sector who pays the bribe and someone in the public sector who receives the bribe. So, we cannot simply say that the problems in our country stem from a corrupt public sector and that, if you work in the private sector, you are immune from being caught up in corruption.

But the effect of corruption is that people do not enjoy a level playing field in business and commerce. And, sadly, in our country, the additional and more frightening effect has been that the much-needed services to our people are not provided or, if they do arrive, they come at an exorbitant premium which our country simply cannot afford to pay.

And, why should we pay that premium, even if there is a misguided view that the country can afford to pay it?

It pains my heart that in the first 20 years of democracy, South Africa does not have a record of people who, when faced with allegations of corruption; step down to save their institutions from embarrassment.

I considered this when, a few weeks ago, I read about one Barry O'Farrell, the Premier of New South Wales in Australia. This fellow resigned from office over an undisclosed wine gift. He had earlier denied receiving the bottle of wine.

When a "Thank You" that he had signed surfaced, however, he announced he was stepping down, despite still maintaining that he did not remember receiving the wine.

In a statement released to the media that morning he said: "I still can't recall receiving a gift of a bottle wine. I can't explain what happened to that bottle of wine. But I do accept that there is a thank-you note signed by me and, as someone who believes in accountability, in responsibility, I accept the consequences of my action.

"As soon as I can organize a meeting of the parliamentary Liberal Party for next week, I will be resigning the position and enabling a new Liberal leader to be elected, someone who will then become the Premier."

In South Africa this does not happen. Here they stick around or we re-elect them to office, regardless of the value of the deceit that they hide. We have just re-elected President Jacob Zuma for a second term despite Public Protector Thuli Madonsela finding that the President and his family had unduly benefited from the over R240 million spent on security upgrades at his rural Nkandla home.

Dear graduants, South Africa is in dire need of men and women; who are willing to lay down their lives in an attempt to defend the gains of our revolution and fight against the reversal of those gains. Laws have been passed in South Africa to combat the cancer of corruption that is eating and devouring the ethical and moral fibre of our society.

But, clearly legislation in itself cannot undo the damage that has been occasioned by the scourge of corruption in our country.

Business has a critical role in stamping the tide against corruption by standing up and be counted to ensure that they do not partner with politicians in perpetuating corruption in business practices.

The labour market you will enter – or which you may already have joined since you finished your studies - is a space characterized by a collapse of social values. These values have been replaced by the notion that what is good is what serves my individual material interest and pleasures.

So this morning I want to ask you, as you celebrate your achievements, to take a moment to pose some very tough questions to yourselves as young graduands ready to enter the labour market.

One of these questions that you must ask yourselves and which we all should continually ask ourselves, is: what must we, as patriots, do to rebuild a system of ethics and morality in our country?

In fact, the scary question which we may have to ask ourselves firstly is this: Is it possible to rebuild a society in our country which is premised on values that affirm the common good, rather than a “me, myself, I” kind of society?

Dear graduants, you have no choice but to ask yourselves the vitally important questions. Another question is: what are you doing today, what it is that you will be doing to ensure that Walter Sisulu University continues to be the incubator of South Africa’s business giants and a centre for the promotion of good business ethics, rule of law and excellence?

That is very critical for you as leaders of tomorrow to ensure that you do not allow the gains of the hard fought freedom to be eroded and undermined by allowing mediocrity to be celebrated as it is in our beloved country.

History will judge you if you do not carry in the footsteps of the giants of our revolution on whose shoulders you are standing.

I want to remind you that as a historically black institution you are moving from a premise of deficit in that, blackness has always been associated with all the negatives in our society be it corruption, mediocrity, under- performance etcetera.

However do not allow yourselves to be defined in terms of your class, racial and religious backgrounds. Believe in yourselves knowing that you have been moulded in one of the best institution. I believe that all of you are destined for great things provided that you do not fall in the trap of corruption and self-centeredness that is manifest in our country

Having said that let me assure you that South Africa is a country full of opportunities. You have a choice to go to the private sector as well as in the public service. It is incumbent on you to ensure that you grab the opportunities that are beckoning for you. Your future looks bright provided that you are not side tracked into unethical business practices.

Corruption and bad governance, where kickbacks are part of everyday life for millions of our people, undermine the country and therefore distorts the growth potential and inhibits development.

If you and I do not do anything about this, South Africa will head straight to becoming a failed state just like others such as Zimbabwe, Somalia, and South Sudan etc.

Thank you for having me as a guest speaker.

Bongani Siqoko

Editor-In-Chief

Daily Dispatch, Saturday Dispatch and Dispatchlive