

SPEECH FOR THE CEO OF FREEDOM PARK,

Dr Mongane Wally Serote

For

The Central University of Technology, Free State

Subject: The Significances and Relevance of the Freedom Park in the South African Context

The Council of the Central University of Technology

Vice Chancellor and Rector Prof A. Koorts

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Students

Being asked to delve into the uniqueness of the country's national heritage site the Freedom Park, always stirs up much emotion and passion on my part. Indeed it is a case of having to watch my thoughts getting ahead of my tongue whenever I have to prepare for such a lecture.

I am infinitely grateful to be able to deconstruct and impart the ideals and spirituality that gave rise to the monument we are building on Salvokop Hill in the nation's capital, Tshwane.

Again I commend the management of this institution for their eagerness in disseminating the message of tranquility and freedom that was denied from us for so long.

The past is littered with the corpses of intolerance, bigotry and bitter inter-racial violence – it is arguably the most volatile and complex history in the world.

The complexity of South Africa's history (and indeed the world) is inherent in a quote by former TRC chairman, Desmond Tutu: "I oppose both, the violence used by those who defend an unjust system and the violence used by those who want to defeat it." South Africa's involvement in many international and domestic wars have resulted in an immense loss of lives, wars that senselessly left wives without husbands, sisters without brothers and parents without children.

The sheer destructiveness of the Anglo-Boer War where white was pitted against white. Slavery saw the European denouncing the existence of the indigenous people. Genocide in all its forms – linguistic, racial and religious and the Struggle for Liberation. It is said that in a perfect world, the Liberation Struggle and all the others should not have taken place.

Our history is deeply divided.

Centuries of colonial rule has imparted a message of subservience in the African psyche. Many of our principles and doctrines were seen as archaic and dare I say ... evil.

A new democracy not only gave the masses their dignity, but also our future generations are open to learning from age-old wisdom that would have gone to waste and later forgotten in the annals of time.

The much-publicised African Renaissance seeks to emancipate the African Voice and engage stakeholders from various sectors to take an active role in the process.

I am pleased to say, we at the Freedom Park have answered that calling, with the re-introduction of IKS (Indigenous Knowledge Systems). Many of our forefathers used herbs and natural remedies to treat ailments before the advent of Western medicine. Colonisation can be attributed for the decline and eventual loss of this knowledge. Another aim of Freedom Park is to rejuvenate this forgotten discipline.

The message is that while we advocate this alternative form of treatment we do not neglect the benefits of the tried and tested Western forms. We hope to establish a relationship with the Western Doctors and Traditional African Medicine.

Our president, Thabo Mbeki has aligned himself to the development of the 'African Renaissance' by saying:

'This is Africa's century...'

Statistically, the most significant war of South Africa was the Struggle for Liberation. Eleven years after democracy, we are still uncovering the bodies of soldiers who lost their lives, randomly found in open and unknown graves.

The nationwide court-like hearings by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission uncovered atrocities in the past and indeed many of them would have gone unnoticed if it wasn't for this body.

Over the months, the country heard shocking stories of murders, threats and espionage as the veil of the previous era was lifted.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was an important pre-cursor to the Freedom Park, which was established after a recommendation made by the Commission to the Government. The Commission recommended that a body had to be formed to address the hurts and pains of the past.

Through Cleansing and Healing and Symbolic Reparations, the country will be able to reconcile with the past as a platform to moving forward.

The Freedom Park's primary role is to be a 'leading national and international icon to humanity and freedom'. The Freedom Park aims to reconcile a bruised nation from the hurts of the past and practice sound principles of Nation Building.

Located on a 52 hectare site in Salvokop, Tshwane the Freedom Park started construction in 2001.

The precinct is made up of three pillars: the Garden of Remembrance - the eternal resting place of the heroes and heroines of our wars: *Isivivane*.

This is described as a circular structure of rocks taken from the various provinces – again this symbolizes a nation in unity. An international boulder reflects on the way the international community helped South Africa during the Struggle years. An important element is that of the *Spiral Path (Mvedzo Path)* that has to be undertaken to reach Isivivane.

This long and winding path symbolizes the long and arduous walk to freedom. However it culminates at the spiritual resting place – Isivivane.

Many students will ask: What possible relevance does this hold for the generations after the war epochs? We were not involved in the Struggle? How would it affect over lives?

It is an unfortunate fact that biasness and racial intolerance is a symptom of human failing and intolerance has been indelibly ingrained into the South African psyche. The past needs to be addressed, issues ironed out before reconciliation and a platform for reconstruction can take place. Decades of indoctrination has caused a society to live in preconceptions and biasness. Our efforts to Nation Building have been targeted at the youth as they accessible through their innate ability to harmonize.

It is important that history classes teach their students about the past for fear of it being perpetrated again

This important element has been completed and was handed over to the President in 2002.

It was Thabo Mbeki, patron of the Freedom Park proposed that a ‘tangible memorial’ be constructed to give names to the spirits who are laid to rest in Isivivane – hence Sikumbuto. Our researchers have done a phenomenal task in identifying the deceased and verifying the names of those who really were influential during the Struggle period.

For inclusion on the Wall, the short listed candidates had to have had a positive effect on the country: to date names like Lillian Ngoyi, Mahatma Gandhi, Oliver R. Tambo, Julius Nyerere and Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara have been identified.

Construction, I am pleased to announce commenced as of October last year. The completed structure will be handed over to the nation in November 2006.

The Museum – ‘The Dream’ or using the Nama word: //Hapo will be the centre of knowledge capturing the South African history as far back as 3,6 billion years ago to date. The overriding idea behind its inclusion is that many distortions have been postulated, in particular the first inhabitants of the country. European history accredits explorers like Vasco da Gama and Jan van Riebeeck as sole claimants to this. The San people have been in the country long before European and African cultures migrated from the north. The primary objective is to create a deeper understanding of the South African people and to place the country’s history in a context whose integrity will be respected nationally and internationally.

Allied to correcting history, the Freedom Park has taken on the duty to educate the future leaders of our country and schools are encouraged to include excursions to the Freedom Park as part of their curriculum. It is hoped that the Museum will act as a one-stop resource facility for study purposes. Here scholars and students will be welcome to research their assignments.

The ultra-modern Museum, will cater for the visual appeal of today's society. The traditional museum is a passive collection of artifacts and archives – the Dream will employ both with interactive touch-screens to inform and educate.

Within the Garden of Remembrance, adjacent to Isivivane will be Tiva - a still body of water that will remind one of the all encompassing symbolisms of water. Water is synonymous with all religions. I cite examples like the Christian sacrament of baptism, Catholicism and Judaism. Much like other religions, African Traditional Healers revere the spiritual cleansing power of water.

Here visitors will be able to reflect on the various religions and how they can benefit from elements of doctrines.

It is of utmost importance that the overriding purpose of the Garden of Remembrance is that it is 'intended to become a national symbol for reparation, a symbol of healing, a symbol of cleansing – a place where the spirits of those who lost their lives for freedom must rest!'

Almost as important as preserving the past – the past can only be quantified by what happens in the future.

The saying: “History is taught so that we can learn from the past and improve our present,” rings true. A society is judged by the way its government learns from past experiences.

The highest accolade a country can be given is that the tribulations of the past are addressed so no more does she ‘suffer the disgrace of being the skunk of the world.’

Words by Dr Nelson Mandela.

The true test Freedom Park will encounter is to preserve its sustainability for generations to come. After construction is complete, we will face our most formidable challenge: How do we sustain the dream from becoming a pariah of the past?

Tellingly, the Freedom Park’s strategic positioning was not by accident. If one of our core functions is to improve the present, we need to accept the past to move forward into a brighter tomorrow

Across to the south west, Isivivane has an unobstructed view of the bastion of Afrikaner identity – the Voortrekker Monument. The reason behind this is that at Freedom Park, we accept the past and would like to marry the two and as both move into the future. Here I’d like to use the analogy of sticks – try breaking one.

It is possible with relative ease. The minute you put a few together. The effort is greater if not impossible.

It is the mandate of the South African nation to pioneer reconciliation – not only for today but for future generations. We at the Freedom Park firmly believe in a continuous effort in proclaiming a message of goodwill that will sustain humanity until the end of time. History must be seen as living, so at Freedom Park our Sikumbuto will have a series of blank walls owing to the future collection of names. This will conclude a comprehensive list of heroes past and present.

The //Hapo and Pan African Archives will be a constant grounding force as we are reminded of all the South Africans who contributed in the spheres of medicine, arts and literature.

//Hapo – a living archive that will constantly be updated to reflect a changing society.

The Pan African Archives have a strong role to play in the preservation of the personal struggles the nation had to endure before ultimately achieving freedom.

The ever continuing Cleansing and Healing Ceremonies – challenging participants to reflect on the past, renew their conviction to peace in our country and strive for a better future.

It would be a sad day on our part should the Freedom Park lose its perspective of cleansing a broken nation from the scars of a heinous past.

Our challenge to you is – take up the fight and reclaim the peace love and tranquility that is rightfully yours. Let's realize the words of Thabo Mbeki:

“We will act together to build a South Africa that truly belongs to all who live in it – both black and white.”

Public awareness has really boomed over the past year. The Park has seen significant visits by among others: Wreath Laying by the Prime Minister of Turkey and Malaysia as well as visits by the Cuban government and Gerry Adams, Sinn Fein President.

We have had university groups from America and Europe. Yes indeed, the Freedom Park's ideals are unique and have traveled far.

We are blessed in that regard.

In conclusion, I myself and our Board of Trustees extend an open invitation to your institution to visit the monument. Take time to marvel at the courage of our nation, reflect on the hurts, atrocities and pain that were to shape our future. Ultimately realize the peace, freedom and love that one experiences after a visit to Isivivane.

I thank you for your attention.

