

**Launch of the 'Mandela' – Book, Film and Documentary
Festival**

Remarks by Professor Sibongile Muthwa

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Colleagues, friends, students, Professor Harris

It gives me great pleasure to share a few thoughts at the launch of the inaugural 'Mandela' – Book, Film and Documentary Festival. I am also exceptionally pleased to welcome Professor Verne Harris to his first official engagement with the university since accepting a professorship here.

When the honour to carry the name of Nelson Mandela was bestowed on our university in 2017, the University Council *'reflected on the moral and social responsibility associated with embracing this name, its implications for our identity and strategic choices, as well as transformations we need to make in order to align ourselves more appropriately to the name'*.

In essence, crucial to taking on the mantle of the name, the university has to, more than ever before, recommit itself to work towards a more equal, socially-just and democratic world order.

I have, with my predecessor, put a think-piece together in our effort to inquire into what it might essentially mean to be Nelson Mandela University as it relates to our posture, what we teach, the impact of our research, and engagement, the symbols that we choose to depict our identity in public spaces, and the tone of leadership conveyed in our governance processes and structures.

In the think-piece we refer to how, ‘*at the launch of the new name of our University [in July 2017], South Africa’s then-Deputy President, Cyril Ramaphosa, dedicated most of his speech to addressing the new consciousness that we have to inculcate to demonstrate that we are truly deserving of our name. He challenged us to rethink the content and approach of our teaching and learning, our research agenda, to re-examine our attitude to Africa, and to pay attention to the lasting impression and resultant attributes of the students that have come through our University*’.

Stated differently, our university needs to respond to the grand challenges of our time by developing itself into the pre-eminent academic expression of *Mandela*, like no other institution of education. Our university should be known as the foremost scholarly formulation of the Mandela legacy, with pragmatic import and real-life programmes that make a difference in the lives of ordinary people.

Far from being about Mandela (the person), the scholarly formulation of *Mandela* (the construct, the embodiment, the touchstone) is the endless, relentless pursuit to bring an intellectual angle to this figure of justice, to generate new praxes for engaging social injustices...to move the very idea of justice further than *Mandela*.

When we chose ***Dalibhunga*** as one way to signal our engagement on *Mandela*, we had the convening of dialogues, as the name intimates, in mind.

But, we also ask, **This time? That Mandela?** to put upfront our conviction that *Mandela* can only be encountered in the plural.

The myriad number of books, films and documentaries *about* Mandela underscores this plurality, this multiplicity, this plenitude. But, even in this sea of ‘things’ about, on and for Mandela, *Mandela*, the social figure, defies figuring. Around the *idea of Mandela*, there is always more, something continually coming from the future; *and* the past, at one and the same time, because legacy is not a ‘static inheritance, but a disruptive re-visitation of the past’.

On the basis of this plurality, our university is framing *Mandela* as a social figure, more than simply a persona, deeper than a global icon. The space of *Mandela*, the social figure, is the dense location of scholarly work where history and subjectivity make social life (paraphrasing Marianne Hirsch, 2012).

And, we have already begun delineating this dense site through my listening campaign and inaugural address and wide stake-holder consultations. This site include studies and programmatic work around social justice; poverty, inequality and unemployment; public, transformative leadership; university transformation; non-racialism, equality, human rights and democracy; university, community, society (including engagement/hubs of convergence); the Mandela identity and posture (memory and legacy); renewal of academy and curriculum; humanising pedagogy; transdisciplinarity (commons/innovations/redrawing frontiers between science and humanities); revitalising the humanities; student-centrism.

In addition, we can, via *Mandela* the social figure, also engage with our Institutional Research Themes of Ocean and Coastal Sciences; Social justice and Democracy; Environmental Stewardship and Sustainable Livelihoods; Innovation and the Digital Economy; Origins, Culture, Heritage and Memory; and Humanising Pedagogies in a truly transdisciplinary fashion. In essence, the key focus of these studies is set out in my inaugural in the following way: ‘the expansion of human understanding; pushing forward the frontiers of knowledge in all sciences to cultivate humanity; and contributing to the well-being of our city, our province, our nation, our continent and our world’.

Let me conclude. The book, film and documentary festival is a special genre of *knowing Mandela*, representing Mandela. Wide in scope, creative in skill, imaginative in thought, prolific in styles, productive in education, ingenious in historical interpretation, this regime of representation *on Mandela*, is a continually growing national and global treasure. Professor Harris will, without doubt, provide an in-depth analysis of this.

Once again, I welcome all. I hope you enjoy the event, and in particular the talk by Professor Verne Harris. Many thanks to colleagues who put it all together. I declare the ‘Mandela’ – Book, Film and Documentary Festival as launched.