

USIP INAUGURAL NELSON MANDELA LECTURE

WASHINGTON DC

Delivered by Cheryl Carolus

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Honoured Guests

Good Afternoon

We meet today to honour one of the greatest leaders of our lifetime, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. We gather to honour him not only for his resilience, nor only for his courage. We are not here only because of his wisdom and principled leadership. We are here especially because of the overwhelming humanity that was the very essence of his being. Nelson Mandela valued his own humanity.

Throughout his life he remained resolute that no one would deprive him of his humanity, his sense of self or his dignity. He was a man who refused to allow his soul to be taken or destroyed. He was a man who acted in response to the hurt that apartheid and colonialism inflicted on him. But he understood that his own humanity and dignity existed only in the context of humanity and dignity of all of his people and humankind.

So we stand here tonight, in this Nelson Mandela Centenary Year, to honour and to celebrate, to learn and to teach the values of this mensch that was given to the world 100 years ago.

I was blessed with the opportunity to serve with him, to work with him, in different ways I guess, from 1989 when I was one of the leaders of the liberation movement he asked to consult with when the apartheid regime started negotiating a possible transition in South Africa with him. By then the National Party had tried, over a few years, many ways to get him to accept conditional release of himself as a means to ease the rising tide of resistance mounted by the people of South Africa. Our country was gripped in a civil war. The Defence Force was deployed into every township in the cities and in the deep rural areas. Tens of thousands of activists were in detention, some were brought to trial and some were sentenced to death by hanging for acts of treason which were largely the things that are

enshrined in our constitution and which we use today, with much pride to guide our everyday life. It is unreal to imagine how much and how deeply things have changed in such a short space of time. It is also truly remarkable that this deep change came through a negotiated settlement which was accepted unanimously by all those who participated in the negotiations.

How did we do it? We did it because we had good leaders. And yes, we did do it because we had Nelson Mandela. And no, it wasn't only because we had Nelson Mandela. Madiba was the first to always acknowledge that he would never have been freed if the resistance movement had not become so strong that the apartheid government knew they had no choice but to negotiate. When ordinary men and women, particularly young people, were again prepared to live out those famous words of Nelson Mandela when he stood in the dock for treason expecting the death penalty "these are the ideals for which I hope to live for, but if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die..." , the apartheid regime knew they had lost all power they had and which they retained through the might of their military, judicial and extra judicial means.

Wars are nasty things. They take lives, they break lives. They create scar tissue, they create psychoses and emotional memories which are very difficult to break out of to start afresh. And even when you start, the scar tissue is so delicate, it is so easy to pull off a scab to a wound that has not healed fully or properly.

And we in South Africa and on the African continent are grateful that we had Nelson Mandela and that he found counter parties like F W De Klerk with whom he could lay the foundations for peace in South Africa and stop the war that was waged against the entire African continent in pursuit of white supremacy.

My journey with Madiba during those very fragile times was a time of huge personal and political growth. He was a strong leader; he led from the front. And he got into trouble for it many times. But mostly he won and mostly he was right. It was difficult for him to accept defeat but he did. I remember the fight we had about the voting age. He felt strongly it should be 16. The rest of the ANC felt it should be 18. He used fair means and foul to convince us, but he lost the argument. There were many lessons in that. It demonstrated to us that Nelson Mandela is not God. SA is a deeply religious country. It is a country where most members of even the Communist Party would go to church, the mosque or shul. So if you took a vote between God and Madiba, God would probably win but by a very narrow margin.

There were some more serious learnings from that process. Madiba's motivation was that very young people were forced to take on very adult responsibilities and should have the right

to decide who leads them through those responsibilities. His motives came from a place of empathy, it came from his enduring passion about how our decisions impact so profoundly on those most vulnerable who had no voice. We understood that but we felt that we needed to strive to change that, not to further embed that. We felt we should not make our children co-responsible to get us out of the mess we created for them.

He used that same street fighting strategy for another round, one that he won and for which we are grateful.

Somewhere along the line in the negotiations Madiba proposed that the ANC should unilaterally suspend the armed struggle. At this stage the armed wing of the ANC, Umkhonto We Sizwe still existed. Whilst we were always quite clear that change was not going to come through an armed seizure of power but through mass struggle, the armed struggle was an important pillar. So, at that stage we had not disbanded our camps or our structures. Most of us thought this unwise at best and probably a complete sell-out and proof that “the old man had gone soft” He called us in and called on key individuals one by one and convinced us that it was a gamble, but a calculated one. Then he got us to be his foot soldiers. And it worked. It was harder for the apartheid government to openly deploy official and unofficial armies against the citizenry. It created the space for us to mobilize on a mass scale more easily.

Most importantly, it made us remember that our goal was not to fight. We were fighting to create the conditions to build peace. We wanted peace so that we could build prosperity for our people. It would stand us in good stead if we could start to turn the economy around in parallel with the negotiations. And it has. As our economy grew and our black middle class grew, more and more citizens felt they had a vested interest in peace.

But in our journey we also learnt you cannot have peace if there is no justice. And you will not get there if there was no integrity. You could not build foundations on sand.

So we set off on a somewhat convoluted journey to build a sustainable peace that would enable us to build a different future. That journey was the writing of a new constitution; a constitution that would go beyond redress; a constitution that rise above the pain of our past, above the hurt and the division and that would take us to a shared future. We had “Talks about Talks” where I was one of only two women (both of us were from the ANC whose delegation had black and white, men and women, Muslims, Christians, Jews, atheists . The other side of the table had only white Afrikaans men). Then we had the negotiations process which created an interim constitution that enabled the first ever democratic elections that constituted a parliament which doubled up as a Constitutional Assembly. That Constitutional

Assembly wrote the final constitution which now creates the umbrella for life in the Republic of South South Africa.

During the negotiations process there were many trying times where the caliber of the two leaders, Mandela and De Klerk, were severely tested. There were times when they had to stand together against actions by forces which may have been part of their wider constituencies at some time and they did. And there times when they had bruising public disagreements. And then they had to find the wisdom and humility to get back to the table and forge ahead. And they did.

In that time I got to know Madiba really well. I got to know and respect his remarkable intellect, his canny ability to assess tricky situations and his ability to chart a way out of those. I got to know a man who felt a huge guilt about the fact that his brave leadership which saw him incarcerated for the better part of his adult life, took him away from his young wife and their children. It tore him apart that he was mostly not there for those important moments in their lives and more so that his choices left them subjected to the most cruel acts of retribution by the apartheid police. It made him proud that his young family never bowed to the campaign of terror visited upon them by the police in order to break him down. But it pained him to witness the painful personal consequences in his family and his family life that were triggered by his absence as a father and as a husband.

I was privileged to see him lead with confidence and humility. I saw him enjoy the joint soft leadership triumvirate he enjoyed throughout his life with Oliver Tambo and Walter Sisulu when they were reunited in the newly elected ANC leadership in the last years of their lives. And I understood why the ANC remained resilient throughout the difficult years of exile, prison and brutal repression for those who were in ANC structures inside South Africa and how it still is today resilient and able to have survived some grueling times of late and managed to land on its feet by electing a new President who was in fact the midwife of our Constitution.

Our new President of the ANC and the Republic of SA, Cyril Ramaphosa, was the person closest to Madiba during the negotiations. And it shows! He is smart, tough and decent. He is resilient and knows how to play a long game. He has learnt well at the feet of Madiba. And I am confident that, like Madiba, his quest will not be to seek retribution. He is well equipped to know how to firmly draw a line beneath impunity and how to focus on liberating the good that human beings so unfailing are capable of if they have good leaders. And we will need this because corruption and crass accumulation by a few had become rampant and the levels of social exclusion and neglect of the desperate needs of poor communities has resulted in daily protests by desperate communities who feel their voices are not being listened to.

In this Centenary year of Nelson Mandela, we find ourselves in a very troubled world. There are several intractable conflicts, most of which passes over our heads most of the time until something dastardly happens in our backyards. We sit up and notice when a bomb goes off on a public square or on our subways and takes the lives of ten or twenty people. Yet we have become numbed to the daily bomb blasts in marketplaces in Iraq and Nigeria that routinely claims hundreds of lives at a time. What all of these have in common are they are no longer wars waged by one nation against another; they are wars waged internally amongst nations. Sadly, many of these were started or given impetus to by sometimes ill considered and sometimes cynical interventions by external forces. The situations in Iraq and Syria are such examples.

Then there are signs of nations engaged in different kinds of internal trauma. I do not want to oversimplify by putting very complex problems all into one pot, but perhaps we ought to look at some very worrying indicators inside countries that seem to come from very similar feelings of alienation from pockets of our populations. What makes a kid who grew up with us go out and strap a bomb to their bodies to blow us up? What makes the teenager who shared pimple remedies with your children walk into a class and shoot and kill? Why has it almost become the norm in current day democratic political processes, like voting, that the majority goes with anti establishment choices? Instead of judging “them” maybe we should look at ourselves. I’m taking huge license here to say we in this room are what is generally considered to be “the establishment”. Well we suck. The establishment sucks. It was easier to be self righteous when this manifested through nasty and or crazy people who blow things up. But when the majority votes for Brexit or choose decidedly odd characters as Presidents or Prime Ministers, maybe it’s time for us to democratically accept that the system as it stands is failing our peoples.

The levels of exclusion and the levels of poverty and inequality that that exclusion creates is explosive.

Maybe it is time for us to take a fresh look at power - what it looks like and how it is exercised. Maybe it is fortuitous that we are confronted with these challenges in this Centenary year of Nelson Mandela. Maybe it can sensitize us again to what made him a good leader. Maybe we can be reminded that social cohesion is only possible when there is social solidarity. Social solidarity inside our borders and with those outside. Maybe we will remind ourselves that peace can only reign and endure if there is justice and equality. Justice and equality inside our borders and in relation to other nations - nations we trade with, nations we engage with.

We in South Africa are the beneficiaries of one of the most powerful international solidarity movements, the Anti- Apartheid Movement. And I stand here to say thank you to those decent American women and men who stood with us and paid their own prices often for taking a stand against the injustice, inequality and exploitation that was legalized in the apartheid system. Our victory is your victory. In these troubled times it is time to rebuild those people to people links not only between our two nations but also within our own divided communities and with the rest of the world. It can bring change where our elected leaders may be reluctant to lead.

It is perhaps a good time to look at how we interact as equals in a new world order. It is a good time for powerful nations to embrace the fact that leadership has to be earned not decreed. And maybe our multilateral systems that institutionalizes our interaction as nations need to better reflect the realities of a changing world. In its current form these institutions have been incapable of responding and leading in the biggest crises facing us. They are not capable of ending the raging wars. They are floundering to create a global economy that support the closing of the gaps between the haves and the have nots.

Individual nations ought to recalibrate what makes them a nation; what are the values and aspirations that bind them as a nation and that links them to other nations and the world. Because we all know that globalization is here to stay. There are such huge possibilities if embraced well or, as we see too often, there is disaster if abused for the benefit of a few.

We have had another Damascus moment in South Africa. We just got rid of a President who took our country down such a scary road. Across political parties we stood together again for the sake of our country and voted unanimously for a new leader. Unanimously all parties in parliament rose to give President Cyril Ramaphosa a standing ovation when he delivered his State of the Nation Address that speaks to the values we all hold dear. And the work has already started to put his mettle to the test - in his own party, the ANC, and among parties as they unpack the HOW of what he says.

In South Africa and indeed in the world, we enter this Mandela Centenary year with a common script that has to have robust debates about how we achieve some very ambitious goals. We have to have a diversity of opinions and we have to create, once again, a wider rather than a narrower space for engagement. We have to reignite the sense of power of ordinary citizens when they feel they have the ability to help to create the change. When they have that, they will build it and they will defend it.

And let us remember again that half of our feet on the ground are women. Let us push back the creeping misogyny that has been so rampant in our societies. Not only to deal with women

as survivors or victims of the most awful abuse, discrimination and exploitation, but also as full human beings with great potential that contributes greatly already and can do so even more when allowed to flourish. Let us rededicate ourselves to liberate men and women to respect and to celebrate diversity and equality in order to use the full 100% of our human potential to build our societies and to deal with our challenges.

Let us see our growing populations of youth as our future. Let us see them not as a responsibility, a burden, but as our assets for our future. Let us invest in them accordingly. Let us give them hope as we were given hope even in the most difficult times when we were young. We were given the hope to dream of a better world and we went out and built it.

The world today is actually a very different world to the one of our parents. It can be a much better world. But only if we, the creators of today, take responsibility to deal with the Frankenstein elements that dominates this world we have created. Only then can we fully reap the benefits of globalization and technology. Only when we assert and institutionalize the interrelated benefits of the mobility of capital, goods, skills and people, for the benefit of all, will we reap the true benefits. This can only happen when, in the words of Madiba, our “choices reflect our hopes, not our fears”

So I end off with much thanks to USIP for according me this honour to do this first Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture. I hope every year this lecture will seek to not only remember a great man for his great contributions. My hope is that it seeks to be an annual occasion to remind us of the power that we have to take a stand for justice, equality and dignity for all in our world. I hope that it will be an occasion to strengthen us all through tough times and that it will enable us to measure and to celebrate success - big and small - in building a better world.

I thank you.