

**ADDRESS BY FORMER PRESIDENT NELSON MANDELA DURING THE  
HONORARY DOCTORATE CEREMONY,  
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, GALWAY.  
20 JUNE 2003**

Chancellor  
Vice-Chancellor  
President of NUI Galway  
Members of the University  
Distinguished Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Coming to Ireland is always a very pleasurable experience. Not only is this one of the most beautiful countries I have had the privilege of visiting; it is also inhabited by people whose friendliness and hospitality seem inborn and natural. In few other places in the world is one made to feel so immediately welcome and at home.

Thank you for once more receiving us in the Republic of Ireland and for the warmth and spontaneity with which we were met from the moment of our arrival.

We remember with warm admiration from our reading of Irish history the ancient traditions of scholarship and learning on this island. When large parts of Europe were still languishing in ignorance and backwardness there were centres of learning in Ireland, attracting scholars from far and wide.

It is therefore a source of great pride to be honoured by an Irish university. To stand here at the National University of Ireland, Galway and receive an honorary doctorate makes one feel part of that proud lineage of scholarship, learning and wisdom that had been passed down the centuries of Irish history.

We thank the university for admitting us into its ranks of alumni and making us an honorary member of that proud Irish tradition. We shall cherish this honour together with the other fond memories we have of Ireland and the Irish people.

One of the Trustees of my Foundation, Minister Kader Asmal will receive an honorary doctorate from this institute next week. Apart from remembering Minister Asmal as Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry in our first cabinet and as the one who woke the entire country up to the importance of water in national affairs, we of course know him for his long and deep connection with Ireland. He spent most of his years in exile here in this country where he excelled as a teacher, counting amongst his former students some famous Irish citizens.

His presence also reminds us of the solidarity of the Irish people with the suffering masses of South Africa during the anti-apartheid struggle. The Irish

rank with the Dutch and Scandinavians as the leading Western nations in the anti-apartheid solidarity movement. We cannot explain fully in simple words how much inspiration we drew from the support of the Irish anti-apartheid movement.

It is for that reason that we take such special pride in being honoured by an Irish institution of higher learning. We humbly accept this award, also on behalf of the people of South Africa who would wish me to convey their thanks and appreciation for your support to our struggle at a time when it was not fashionable to demonstrate such support in the manner that you did.

We do this not only behalf of the masses of South Africans that suffered so severely under the cruelty and injustice of apartheid. We do so on behalf of all South Africans who now live in a non-racial and democratic South Africa. The defeat of apartheid and the transition to democracy could not have been achieved in the manner it occurred without the support of the international community. All South Africans today share in the fruits of your contribution and would thank you for helping to achieve a nationhood that is inclusive and provides a place for all its people.

With me on this trip is another South African of renown, Cyril Ramaphosa. He was the chief negotiator on our side during the talks with the apartheid regime. Thereafter he became the Chairperson of our Constitutional Assembly that negotiated the final constitution for democratic South Africa. Like Kader Asmal, Cyril Ramaphosa also has some connection with broader Ireland having played an oversight role in aspects of the search for peace in Northern Ireland.

Their presence here hopefully also demonstrates our support for the search for lasting peace in Northern Ireland and reconciliation amongst all the people of Ireland. Our own experience in South Africa where we confounded the prophets of doom and achieved a peaceful settlement, inspires us to believe that no situation can be so intractable that it cannot be solved through negotiations and the willingness to compromise.

The world is now in greater need than ever for men and women of peace to stand up and let their voices be heard and their commitment felt. One should not allow yourself to fall too easily into alarmist readings of any epoch or period; but there are worrying signs of increasing unilateralism on the part of some nations or groups of nations.

We have not heard any reasonable voice in the world defending Saddam Hussein and his regime. The chorus of protest against the war in Iraq was directed towards the unilateral action taken and the disregard for the organs of multilateral governance, particularly the United Nations.

Let us hope that as the League of Nations and the United Nations Organisation grew out of the urgent recognition for multilateralism after a period of destructive

conflict, sanity will once more prevail in the wake of the war in Iraq. We cannot allow the world to again degenerate into a place where the will of the powerful dominates over all other considerations. That will surely prove to be a recipe for growing anarchy in world affairs.

The war in Iraq has created a challenge to the United Nations to reassert its role and place in world governance. All men and women of peace, all leaders committed to the ideal of world peace, all governments who seek democracy within and amongst nations, should rededicate themselves to the strengthening, and if needs be restructuring, of our world body and other multilateral organs.

We cherish our association with this nation and its people. The Republic of Ireland came out of great and often bloody struggle. It stands today as an example of a country that has built a better life for its people on the foundations of the peace and stability that developed within the republic.

We thank you once more for the honour you have done us today. Let us together hope and work for a world in which there will be peace and on the basis of that peace the building of a more prosperous life for all the people of the world.

I thank you.