



**RHODES UNIVERSITY**  
*Where leaders learn*

**2008 RHODES UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATION CEREMONIES ADDRESS**

**27-29 March 2008**

**OFFICE OF THE VICE-CHANCELLOR  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Chancellor

The Chairperson and members of the University Council,  
our guest speaker, distinguished guests, colleagues,  
ladies and gentlemen

Good evening/morning/afternoon, molweni. It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this graduation ceremony, and to say a few words on this special occasion at which we recognize and celebrate the achievements of the students of Rhodes University.

## **RECOGNITION**

First and foremost, I wish to congratulate you, our students, on your tremendous achievement. This is truly a proud day for you, your parents, families, guardians and loved ones.

To be here this evening/afternoon/morning, you have worked hard and long hours, days, months and years. This is a fantastic achievement in the context of a higher education system that still struggles to realize the talents and potential of all our students. Your success is also a testimony to the contributions of your lecturers and tutors, and of laboratory and computer technicians, administrators, wardens, cooks, cleaners and gardeners,

all of whom have created a special intellectual, social and physical environment to enable you to succeed. It is important that we also acknowledge their sacrifices in enabling you to be here and to graduate from Rhodes.

I want to also acknowledge the women and mothers that will graduate today. In the context of a still all too patriarchal, sexist and abusive society, in some cases you will have had to overcome additional burdens and obstacles to achieve your dreams.

I want to especially recognize the parents, guardians and families of those of you who will graduate. You have possibly endured many hardships and made many sacrifices to enable your loved ones to receive a Rhodes education and to graduate. Let me also thank all the benefactors who provide scholarships and bursaries to Rhodes students. I wish to acknowledge specifically the Zenex Foundation, whose generous support for the B.Ed programme has resulted in 27 mathematics teachers graduating this evening.

This, however, is our graduands evening/day, to remember, celebrate and cherish. No doubt the parties will extend long into the night, and many refreshments of all kinds will flow. You have earned it and I wish you a pleasant and joyful night/day.

Before you receive your hard-earned degrees, diplomas and certificates and begin your celebrations, permit me a few comments about your responsibilities as graduates of Rhodes University.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES OF RHODES GRADUATES**

As graduates you have had the honour of studying at a very special and distinctive university, one that takes pride in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding, in enjoying the highest pass and graduation rates and the best research outputs per academic staff member of all South African universities, in being a cosmopolitan institution with students from 48 countries, and in ensuring an intellectual environment in which knowledge, human understanding the intellect can flower.

It is important to recognise that as a Rhodes graduate you will become part of a very small section of the South African population, and one which enjoys many advantages and privileges in our society.

For one, with a Rhodes degree your prospects of securing employment are infinitely better than those of others. Second, you will earn substantially higher incomes than most fellow South Africans. Third, you will

enjoy a higher standard of living, many more doors will be open to you, and many more of life's pleasures will be available to you than for your fellow citizens. These are just some of the benefits you will enjoy because of your Rhodes qualification. Indeed, the context of the ongoing inequities and deprivations of our society, humility of the kind that all great leaders personify will be a great virtue.

No one in this audience will begrudge you your benefits or the successes you achieve in the years ahead. On the contrary, we will laud them and toast them.

Indeed, we will especially celebrate if you don't forget your *alma mater* and as alumni you contribute generously to our fundraising for new institutional development.

Later this year we wish to begin refurbishing our current library and building a new state of the art and technology library, which will cost over R 100 million. This will be the single most expensive project in the history of Rhodes and Grahamstown. Having opened two new residences this year, the construction of two more new residences that will house an additional 208 students is underway at a cost of R 32 million. In addition, we need to invest in new teaching and research

facilities and programmes to ensure that we remain an outstanding university that is at the forefront of the production and dissemination of knowledge.

In as much as we seek to be a great small university we are, alas, a relatively poor university. Our needs, as you have heard, are great, and the support of friends and alumni like yourselves is vital to our development.

With your graduation this morning/afternoon/evening you stand on the threshold of a new and exciting life. This new life also, however, brings with it new obligations to the general South African community and greater responsibilities.

This is because your university education and qualification has been paid for in large part by public funds. It, therefore, cannot be solely for your private benefit, but must also yield social benefits and contribute to the public and social good.

Moreover, Rhodes seeks to be an institution 'Where leaders learn'. It is our hope that you leave Rhodes possessing not only knowledge and professional and technical expertise and skills, but also embodying enlightened, ethical, critical and compassionate

citizenship deeply committed to remaking our society and continent in the interests of all our people.

In the light of recent events at the University of Free State, it is necessary to reiterate that Rhodes University seeks to 'respect, protect, promote and fulfil' the values of human dignity, and is committed to social equity and equality, the advancement of non-sexism and non-racialism, and the human rights and freedoms that the South African *Constitution* and *Bill of Rights* proclaim. This means that our *Constitution* and *Bill of Rights* must be the fundamental bedrock that informs your responsibilities, guides your conduct, and animates your existence and social relationships with others.

In the *Algebra of Infinite Justice*, Arundathi Roy writes 'the only dream worth having ...is to dream that you will live while you're alive and only die when you're dead'. This means

...to love. To be loved. To never get used to the unspeakable violence and vulgar disparity of life around you. To respect strength, never power. Above all, to watch. To try and understand. To never look away. And never, never to forget.

I hope that in the years to come you will 'never forget' or 'look away' or 'get used to' the coexistence of unbridled wealth and desperate and grinding poverty, great privileges and huge deprivation, unbound economic and social opportunities for some and the absence of such opportunities for many others.

That, instead, as a Rhodes graduate you will continuously ask yourself:

- How do I help to extend the benefits and success I enjoy to greater numbers of South Africans and Africans, and especially to those that are disadvantaged and marginalised?
- How do I contribute to ridding our country and continent of inequality, poverty, hunger, abuse of power, AIDS and other diseases?
- How do I counter racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia and intolerance of all kinds and promote tolerance, the value of diversity, and the 'oneness of humanity'?
- How do I help to create a caring and humane society, advance social justice, build a substantive democracy, assert a culture of human rights, and ensure a vibrant civil society characterized by open, vigorous and critical public intellectual debate?



- How do I creatively and boldly make our young democracy and our economy and society, so full of promise and potential, work for all South Africans?

Your knowledge, expertise and skills make you precious and vital people who are capable of making a difference. I urge each of you to think about how you can harness all your capabilities, here in this province, this country and this continent, now and in the future.

The Rhodes motto is '*Vis Virtus Veritas*' - 'Truth, Virtue and Strength'.

In the spirit of the Rhodes motto I hope that you will pursue the *Truth* that derives from knowledge, understanding and reason; that you will practice the *Virtue* of social justice, commitment, compassion and tolerance; and that you will also possess the *Strength* of courage and boldness to help remake our society so that all South Africans and Africans possess the political, social, economic and human rights that are fundamental to living full, decent, productive, rich and rewarding lives.

I wish you every success, and you and your loved ones a joyous day/night of celebrations of your achievement and your future promise.

Thank you.