

**UFS GRADUATION CEREMONY
FACULTY OF NATURAL AND AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES
20 JUNE 2017 (14:00)**

Good afternoon, Dumelang, Goeiemiddag.

- Today is a celebration – a celebration of time well spent – well done!
- A celebration of the cooperation between yourself, your parents and family, your friends, and staff at the University of the Free State.
- On this special occasion, I would like to remind you – our graduates – that it is not solely through your own dedication and hard work that you have reached the heights for which you are recognised today.
- You should never forget the role played by others in your success. This support could have taken the form of:
 - Sacrifices by family members and other support structures which made it financially possible for you to study,
 - Or the inspiration, motivation, and encouragement you have received from mentors and friends,
 - Or, when the road ahead seemed to be mainly uphill, the extra mile someone was willing to go to help you succeed.
- This month, we reflect on the events of 16 June 1976.
- It is an opportunity to honour the sacrifices made by young people in the name of education – 41 years ago.
- It started when school children took to the streets of Soweto to protest against the compulsory use of Afrikaans as medium of instruction in schools – that day erupted in total chaos!
- By the end of 1976, 575 people had died across the country, 450 of them at the hands of the police. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, political movements and people were banned and imprisoned. Liberation appeared to be an unattainable dream – and there was a general sense of hopelessness. Therefore, 16 June 1976 marked

the turning point in the struggle against apartheid for many people, and it re-ignited the hope which had been lost.

- It gave people the sense that a popular uprising would create a situation which would ultimately have to give, because it was impossible to maintain and continue normal life under those circumstances.
- The Soweto uprising was symbolic of the message that it conveyed – that things would have to change!
- So, what is the significance of 16 June 1976 for us today?
- It is disappointing that the key issue which gave rise to the protest – the state of education in the country – remains an issue for conflict today.
- The issue which we (as a democratic South Africa) have most significantly failed at was to fix the school education system.
- The Chancellor yesterday stated that, in reviewing the White paper on Science and Technology, one of the major inhibitors is the state of our basic education system.
- If we cannot get the school system right, we will still be in the same situation of 41 years ago.
- We have a joint responsibility to get it RIGHT.
- But, we should also learn from 16 June 1976 – what we should do, and what we should not do.
- The strategy then argued for liberation first and education later.
- What we have seen as a consequence of that strategy is a lost generation – a generation that did not achieve education – AND we should never make such a mistake again. The country cannot afford this!
- Young people, such as you, see the world with fresh eyes.
- They are idealistic.
- They believe that the world can be different.
- We need to value it and encourage this characteristic.

- I hope that our graduates moving out of the university and into the world today, will see themselves as active citizens, and see the need to be activists in all sorts of ways:
 - From ensuring that they vote, thus making sure that the right leaders are in the right positions to move the country forward, to making our country a better place.
 - To raise their voices:
 - In petitions, if they are unhappy with societal issues
 - In social media
 - To participate in protest activities and ensure that authorities are held accountable.
- Government is one authority, but the university authorities are certainly another, and holding us all accountable is part of the job of our youth and students.
- Today, we live in a constitutional democracy which we can and should protect.
- This constitution says that we must respect the rights of others.
- This means that we live by the rule of law and our protest activities have to be within the rule of law.
- We need to condemn the levels of violence and arson and some forms of protest that we have seen lately.
- However, we must applaud the students who have brought transformation into focus – Rhodes MUST fall and Fees MUST fall – student movements.
- Students who are members of the LGBTI community,
- Students with disabilities.
- Students with mental health challenges, as well as
- Students who have been the victims of sexual assault.
- EMPHASISING RIGHTS OF THE MARGINALISED.
- The university is and will be a better place for amplifying those voices and challenging us as the executive of the university to respond constructively.

- While activism and protest have been important in exposing the issues, the sacrifices of 16 June 1976 are also a reminder of the other roles that we as a university have to play.
- Many students across the UFS faculties plough their energy and passion into making a difference in the world in many practical ways.
- Through after-hours teaching and offering legal services to thousands of people who can't afford lawyers (Law Clinic), and students (Health Science students) working in clinics and assisting in providing health-care solutions to rural communities – Trompsburg Platform (Community-based Education and Rural Health platform).
- Many students, who are the first in their families to come to university, go back to their communities during the holidays as role models, encouraging friends and family members to go to university.
- Beyond the lectures and tutorials, we hope that you will carry forward the important values that you have learnt while at the UFS.
- We hope you will have a commitment to social justice, and respect for diversity.
- In particular, recognise the enormity of the privilege you have had in tertiary education, and in being part of the elite group having a degree from the UFS.
- With the privilege comes the responsibility to give back, and making the world a better place for people who have not had those privileges.
- I urge you as graduates to go out and make a difference in the world.
- Through your attitude and actions, you will be honouring the sacrifice made by young people on 16 June 1976, and the struggles that have followed until today.
- I congratulate you all and wish you the very best in your endeavours.
- Be excellent ambassadors of the UFS, and make the UFS, your families, and our country proud by your strong, innovative, ethical, and excellent contributions.

Thank you.