

## **Education is Our Only Future**

Prof Tinyiko Maluleke

Mr. Tirhani Mabunda, CEO of the Tirhani Group of Companies

Pastors and Prophets in our midst

The Mayor of Greater Giyani

Chiefs and Councilors

Teachers and Representatives of Teacher's Unions

Pupils and parents

Ladies and gentleman!

What an honour it is for me to greet you all on such a glorious and remarkable day. On this day, we gather here, officially to unveil and launch the Nyukani Education Centre. Few things could be more important than a gathering that celebrates the establishment of a school and a learning centre. Few things are better to do on a Saturday than to engage in a celebration of knowledge and learning.

Some years ago, not far from here, at a village known as Ka-Mtsetweni, a woman was seen pulling a resisting and crying seven-year old boy. Under the firm grip of his abductor, the seven year old was half-walking and half-running. So fierce was the boy's resistance that at several points in the journey, his legs stopped moving so that the woman had to drag him like a sleigh along the stony and uneven village footpaths, kicking and screaming. As if to the rhythm of her beating heart, the woman marched on, with the screaming young man glued firmly to her hip.

Later, the unhappy couple stood in a queue at the head of which there was an enormous man wearing a suit and tie. With his face covered in a mixture of creamy snort and tears, the boy was so upset he refused to speak to anyone for the rest of the day.

The boy in the story was none other than myself. The woman in the story was my grandmother – Madzivandlela N'wa-Dick nkata Mhlava. These events happened on my very first day at school. The name of the school called Samari Primary School. Since the school has had two name changes that I am aware of. At one state it was called Pinimini Lower Primary School. Pinimini Lower Primary was later moved to a different site and the old Samari became Vhafhamadi High School. Sadly Vafhamadi – the very site upon which my schooling journey started – is one of the schools that were recently torched in the protests engulfing parts of the Vhembe district.

Ladies and gentleman, I was shown the way to school – literally - by a poor illiterate old woman who had never set foot at any school. The educational journey into which she launched me has been the richest most rewarding gift anyone has ever given me. For me education is a life-long and still continuing journey. It is a journey that only ends they done one dies. But no! It does not even end there. Those who drink from the fountain of education well enough, will also make their own contribution to ensure that the fountain never runs dry. The research and work of truly educated (not certificated) people continues to live long after they have passed on.

They say Albert Einstein is dead, I say he is not dead because his theories and discoveries continue to influence research and education in various ways.

They say Paulo Freire is dead but hell no, Paulo Freire remains alive because his groundbreaking theories about the nature and methods of education continue to enrich the practice of teaching and the theory of education.

Frantz Fanon is not dead for as long as his insightful and incisive analysis of the Algerian revolution continue to inspire our theories of decolonization and post colonial thought.

Ladies and gentlemen, development is the synonym of education. Where there is no education there will be no development, either personal development or national development.

Ladies and gentleman, whereas the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a century of military might and conventional war, the 21<sup>st</sup> is a century where knowledge is power and its engine runs on the fuel of technology.

To send our children into the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century without education is tantamount to sending them in a den full of hungry lions. It is like handing them a car without having taught them how to drive. To let our children navigate this world without skills, knowledge and education is to set them up for misery and spectacular failure.

Whereas the 20th century was a century of powerful nation states, the 21st is a century where the world has become a village; where national boundaries are collapsing; where the rural is literally meeting the urban. Ours is a century where goods and money travel back and forth in mazing speeds, between countries and between cities. It is a century when where we have television, radio and news on demand. We are the hashtag generation.

My friends let me tell you something, it is not the loudest or the most muscular who will rule and run this country and the world. The panga wielders will not run this country, the beer holding youths who stagger across our roads at night or the groups that burn and destroy will not rule this country. This country will be ruled by the educated. The sooner we recognize that, the better.

The 21st century is a century where the strongest economies are those, which trade not in gold, copper and platinum, but those, which trade in knowledge, skills and technology.

We live in a century when, for the first time, the world has, generally speaking a common agenda for development. That common global developmental agenda has been known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Seventeen big problems facing humanity and the world have been identified. Now here is the thing. None of the 17 SDGs can be addressed without education and knowledge. None of the problems we face today in this country can be addressed without education. The problem of water will not be solved by protests – we need engineers and chemists to help us solve it. The problems of energy will not be

solved by ESKOM but it will be solved when our geologists, physicists and metallurgists' use their skills to bring about new and innovative ways of dealing with the problems we face. The problem of food security will not be solved by war but by science and research and by the fashioning out of advanced systems of agriculture. There is no problem under the sun that will be solved without scientific imagination and education.

But here is the question that bothers me: If countries are clear about the big goals and objectives: are individuals living in the 21st century also clear about their personal and individual goals and objectives?

If we live in a century of knowledge and technology, a century of mobility and speed; the question is, are you and your children roadworthy for this century? Are you fit to travel in and on this century? Do you have the license to walk the streets of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with purpose and with confidence?

My good friends, those who have little or no education will be reduced to the pedestrians of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In life there are three things for which there are no substitutes and no artificial replacements: These are water, experience and education. Education cannot be faked. It cannot be bought cheap and it cannot be attained via some short cut.

When people ask me what was your first most memorable trip and where was the furthest you ever travelled initially? They ask me

this, because without meaning to me vain, I am a very well travelled person. I have been all five continents and I have lived in a few – thanks to that old woman who set me up for all this fun, many years ago when she dragged me to school.

So when they ask me which was your first trip and where did you go? I say, my first most memorable trip happened was inside a dilapidated classroom at Samari in Give-Shandaan, Ha-Mashau. I went on a mental trip the first time a book was opened and a story was told to me. I discovered then that books were the wings upon which I could fly to far away lands inside my curious little brain. Inside books I met so many characters, so many friends, so many worlds, so many ideas.

Until today, I do not spend two weeks without reading and finishing a new book!

Twenty two years since Apartheid, there are millions who are content to travel only around the block and within their small villages. These kinds of people are not roadworthy for the 21st century. Our world is a world fit only for global citizens and only education can convert a rural boy like me, into the global citizen that I have become.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the 20th century, the ability to read and write, was the greatest skill of all. Those who could read and write were village stars - getting paid for reading letters and telegrams. Today, your ability to read and write is something we take for granted. Other forms of literacy are more crucial. We no longer ask

you if you are literate, the question we now ask is, are you computer literate? We no longer ask you if you can type, but we ask, are you technologically literate? You, my friends must do much more. You must be fluent in the coding languages of computers. You must write the computer applications not merely buy them. You must create the mobile phones and not merely pressure your parents and partners to buy you the latest. You must make phones, cars, computers and television sets. But without education you will be relegated to consumption and gullibility.

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and comrades, girls and boys, I have nothing against your vast knowledge of fast cars and top label clothing. I have nothing against your high tastes for the finest things in life. But you can take all those kinds of skills, wrap them up and throw them into the dustbin. The skills you need, are not the skills of consumption and slavery, you need financial literacy. The basics of finance, namely that before there is expenditure there must be income. The 21st century demands financially literate citizens.

So why is this school, Nyukani Education Centre, this moment, at this place, today, and matter so much? What has it to do with any of the things I have said? Look around you. Look carefully. What you see here is a factory of young leaders of tomorrow. Ladies and gentlemen, you are standing at a fountain, where the thirst of hungry young minds will be quenched. The structures you see are idea labs, within which the young will discover and fashion new ideas. These buildings you see are the spaces where our young will develop wings with which to fly away to the worlds out there.

Here is a place where the minds of our children will be stretched. Here is a place where their spirits will be kindled, a place where their characters will be formed. Mark this place, take this moment in, for here, your children will be prepared for the world. And yet this is the place where they will be equipped to go and change the world and make it a better place.

Mr. Tirhani Mabunda, the staff and principal of Nyukani and the community of Giyani, we could never thank or pay you enough for your investment in education, your investment in our future. Education is our only future. Education is the only tool with which we can shape the future and design it for our needs.

With this investment into the future of our children, you challenge us to start investing in the life and education of our children, instead of investing in their deaths and funerals – like so many parents mistakenly do.

Please accept my congratulations on this giant milestone. I wish you all of the best.

Professor Tinyiko Maluleke is Advisor to the Principal and Vice Chancellor at the University of Pretoria. Amongst others, he is an elected member of the Academy of Science for South Africa and a rated researcher by National Research Foundation. He is a member of the Boards of the Khulumani NGO for Human Rights and the South African National Research Foundation. He has supervised a dozen PhD students to completion and published more the 100 peer-reviewed articles. Amongst others, he has been visiting Professor at the following universities:

Hamburg University, Germany

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He has also published dozens of opinion pieces on social and political issues pertaining to South Africa and the continent of Africa. Prof Maluleke has held various executive management positions at various South African universities, including, Deputy Executive Dean, Dean of Faculty, Executive Director for Research, Deputy Registrar and Deputy Vice Chancellor. Currently, he serves in the executive management of the University of Pretoria as Advisor to the Principal and Vice Chancellor.

## **Speech reader:**

**Chauke Khensani Richard**

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**Previously been with:**

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