

Nelson Mandela's Inaugural Address

Excerpts from Nelson Mandela's first inaugural address, May 10, 1994.

Let justice be for all. Let peace be for all.
Let there be work, bread, water, salt for all.

Your Majesties, Your Highnesses, Distinguished Guests, Comrades and Friends:

Today, all of us do, by our presence here, and by our celebrations in other parts of our country and the world, confer glory and hope to newborn liberty. (1)
Out of the experience of an extraordinary human disaster (2) that lasted too long, must be born a society of which all humanity will be proud.
Our daily deeds as ordinary South Africans must produce an actual South African reality that will reinforce humanity's belief in justice, strengthen its confidence in the nobility of the human soul and sustain all our hopes for a glorious life for all.

The spiritual and physical oneness we all share with this common homeland explains the depth of the pain we all carried in our hearts as we saw our country tear itself apart in a terrible conflict, and as we saw it spurned, outlawed and isolated by the peoples of the world, (3) precisely because it has become the universal base of the pernicious ideology and practice of racism and racial oppression. (4)

We, the people of South Africa, (5) feel fulfilled that humanity has taken us back into its bosom, that we, who were outlaws not so long ago, have today been given the rare privilege to be host to the nations of the world on our own soil.
We thank all our distinguished international guests for having come to take possession with the people of our country of what is, after all, a common victory for justice, for peace, for human dignity.

We trust that you will continue to stand by us as we tackle the challenges (6) of building peace, prosperity, non-sexism, non-racialism and democracy.
The time for the healing of the wounds has come.
The moment to bridge the chasms that divide us (7) has come.
The time to build is upon us.

We have, at last, achieved our political emancipation. We pledge ourselves to liberate all our people from the continuing bondage of poverty, (8) deprivation, suffering, gender and other discrimination. (9)

We succeeded to take our last steps to freedom in conditions of relative peace. We commit ourselves to the construction of a complete, just and lasting peace.

We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity--a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world.

NOTES

- 1) **Newborn Liberty**: Speaking of newborn liberty, Mandela referred to the transformation of South Africa from an “apartheid” nation (separateness in the Afrikaans language) to one of legal equality for all. Mandela also delivered his Presidential Inauguration in a remarkable moment of personal liberation, having just completed a 27 year prison sentence.

- 2) **Extraordinary Human Disaster**: Apartheid had a deeply devastating impact on the livelihood of non-white people living in South Africa. Black South Africans were deprived of their citizenship, forced to relocate to new residences, and removed from “white” institutions and services, including education and health care. Apartheid triggered significant internal resistance and violent conflict, including protests often met with police brutality.

- 3) **Outlawed and Isolated by the Peoples of the World**: The apartheid regime was met with widespread resistance across the globe and was boycotted and denounced as unjust by a great number of nations in opposition to its racist ideology.

- 4) **Pernicious Ideology of Racism and Racial Oppression**: Apartheid was a system of legal segregation in South Africa in which the non-white majority fell under the oppressive rule of a white minority. Under this system of rule, blacks were considered to be inherently inferior to white South Africans, and therefore unworthy of many of the rights and privileges enjoyed by their “superiors.” The aim of apartheid was to maintain white domination while preserving racial separation.

5) **The People of South Africa**: Mandela delivered the inaugural address in an enlightened spirit of reconciliation, hoping to unify all South Africans around the ideals of healing and equality.

6) **We Tackle the Challenges**: Mandela spoke of the political, economic and social problems facing the new nation. The legacy of apartheid has created formidable, long-lasting challenges for South Africa.

7) **To Bridge the Chasms that Divide Us**: The process of reconciliation in South Africa was arduous, a task demanding a dramatic transformation of the South African culture and political ideology. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a restorative justice body instituted in 1995, embodied this reconciliatory effort, helping to facilitate the transition to fuller democracy in South Africa. Desegregation of schools was a focal point of planning for the future.

8) **Poverty**: Blacks living in South Africa during apartheid suffered from extreme poverty, enduring very low standards of living largely due to the unavailability of jobs in a market geared towards job opportunities for whites.

9) **Gender and Other Discrimination**: Mandela pledged to liberate South Africans from all forms of discrimination, not only prejudice based on skin color. He advanced equality for women, ethnic and tribal groups, and people living in poverty.

Songwriters-spiritchild & Lance Fialkoff; Beat, Bass, Keyboard & Vocals-spiritchild;
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