

MEDIA RELEASE

Oom Ray imagined a learned society driven by action, says Prof Mufamadi

Gqeberha – Anti-apartheid struggle stalwart Raymond Mhlaba dedicated his life fighting social injustice towards a learned South African society driven by agency and service before self, said Professor Sydney Mufamadi.

Prof Mufamadi, who is also an anti-apartheid activist and former cabinet minister, was delivering the second annual Raymond Mhlaba Memorial Public Lecture at Nelson Mandela University on Wednesday night (6 September 2023). The theme for the public lecture was “What does it take to create a society of Raymond Mhlaba’s aim: The nexus of moral competence, good governance, and ethical leadership”.

“What is important is to infuse, in the thinking of our people, a mindset that it is possible to have a better tomorrow. However, that better tomorrow depends on what we do today. It is thus important to then start a process to look at what it is that needs to be done and setting about to do it,” he said, to a near capacity filled South Campus Auditorium.

“Oom Ray, [Nelson] Mandela and ilk discovered their mission and set about to fulfil it. Today, we live in a democratic South Africa because they gave us the vision, which then served as a guide for us on where to go and what roadmap to draw from in order to get there.

“This is something simply called a purpose in life. It is what we need to give to the generation to whom tomorrow belongs.”

Mhlaba, who was affectionately known as Oom Ray, was a stalwart of the struggle against the system of oppression. He was also the first Premier of the Eastern Cape, serving between 1994 and 1997, and stood for the principles of ethical leadership, accountability, and integrity.

“Despite not having a formal education, Oom Ray understood complexity. In prison, when they talked about the society they hoped to build once out, they committed to wanting to create a society of learning,” Prof Mufamadi said.

“When we formed [the Congress of SA Trade Unions] Cosatu, we did so at a time where we were thanking the generation that came before us. The internal and external underground being mutually constitutive (having a symbiotic relationship). In other words, for people who are committed to strive for progressive change, it is important to build organisations for purposes of becoming not only instruments for resistance but also denying the other from hegemonizing common sense.

“We are sitting with so many problems today, which ought to have been avoidable because with the type of legacy left to us by Oom Ray’s generation, we should have a more

functional society than we actually have. If we were living all that is contained in the Freedom Charter, there wouldn't be this much despondency among the people.

“Does this then mean the aspirations of Oom Ray's generation have demised? No. While that was an ideal democracy, actual democracy can be a deviation from the ideal time. So, as progressive minded beings, we must see the task of democratising our country as a work in progress.”

The annual public lecture series in Oom Ray's name was launched last year, with the inaugural keynote delivered by Mandela University Chancellor, Dr Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, titled *“Asinakuthula Umhlaba Ubolile: Amplifying the call to action.*

Prof Mufamadi's lecture thus built on Dr Fraser-Moleketi's call to action, with researcher Xolelwa Kashe-Katiya being the respondent.

Kashe-Katiya, who, among other titles held, is an Executive Committee member of the Indlulamithi South African Scenarios initiative, drew from this research into social cohesion in the country.

“We did research to look at the key drivers towards cohesion in South Africa, or away from cohesion. In that research, we found that the issue of social inequality is what divides us for as long as the past hasn't changed, where we still have those who were privileged in the past continuing to be privileged, and those who were disadvantaged continuing to be disadvantaged and even being worse off than before,” Kashe-Katiya said.

“Those divisions actually then impact on cohesion. We can never find each other for as long as we have not solved those issues of social inequalities. And it is not just inequalities in terms of material means, but also in terms of networks that we have access to, gender, geographic location etc.

“A new indicator has also found inequality in terms of age, where young people are more disadvantaged. All of these issues are what lead us to this resistance, ramblings and bickering, especially over our Constitution, because even how we experience the constitution is in an unequal manner.”

A representative from Oom Ray's family, Sikhulu Ngodwana, said: “As a family, we are very glad to be invited to this occasion as it reminds us of our father and grandfather, and the work he did while he was alive. It shows that the people did not forget the work he was doing for them because they are reaping from what he has done.”

Earlier in the day, Prof Mufamadi gave a masterclass to students from the School of Governmental and Social Sciences, explaining what South Africa means when it refers to its active non-alliance concerning the current geopolitical international environment, and especially concerning the Russia-Ukraine conflict. – ENDS.

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ABOUT NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY

Nelson Mandela University is situated in the coastal city of Gqeberha, in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, with a campus in George.

The largest university in the southern and eastern Cape; its existence is a result of a merger of the University of Port Elizabeth, Port Elizabeth Technikon and the Port Elizabeth campus of Vista University. It was initially named Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in 2004, in line with the restructuring of the higher education sector. However, in 2017, it was renamed Nelson Mandela University, the only higher education institution in the world to carry the name of South Africa's former president, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. Its values are based on respect for diversity, excellence, Ubuntu, social justice and equality, integrity and sustainable stewardship.

This comprehensive University offers degree, diploma and certificate courses. Spread over seven campuses; it is home to over 30 000 students. More than 500 study programmes are offered in seven faculties: Business and Economic Sciences; Education; Engineering, the Built Environment and Technology; Health Sciences; Humanities; Law and Science.

Nelson Mandela University is reputed for its excellence in, among others, art and design, building, chartered accounting, engineering, health and environmental sciences and information technology. Its state-of-the-art Ocean Sciences campus is one of its kind in the country. This campus's range of marine and maritime education and training, research, innovation and engagement programmes is aimed at supporting the continent's blue (ocean) economy.

The University is home to the country's 10th Medical School, unique in South Africa as its comprehensive primary healthcare approach focuses on the four pillars of medicine: disease prevention, health promotion, treatment and rehabilitative medicine.

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