

MANCHESTER COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT  
MAY 29, 2008

President Daube,

Members of the Board,

Distinguished Faculty and Staff,

Friends and loving families,

and most importantly

All whose graduation we are gathered here today to mark and  
celebrate.

It is a singular privilege for me to share this important day with  
you. I cannot help but reflect on my own life which has been  
shaped as much by immediate family and community, as it has  
been by the human family at large. 27 years of exile due to  
apartheid taught me about the oneness of the human family. In  
Ghana, in Britain, in the US, Zambia, Angola, wherever I had to  
live became home and I found family in most of the people I met.

They identified with the plight of my country and all the victims of apartheid. By saying No! to apartheid in unison and resolve, men, women, children all over the world, gave unequivocal recognition to the fact that the dehumanisation of the oppressed in South Africa was a stain on all humanity. The current attacks against migrant Africans in South Africa are tragic and disgraceful.

However, these eruptions of hatred, this xenophobia is also being manifested variously in many corners of the world; Italy, France, Germany, Dominican Republic, even the US has led to debates about illegal immigrants. However, I have come here to rejoice in your achievement and to enjoin you to grow its practical value beyond mere academic premium. It must always have the flexibility to match the swift and sometimes unexpected changes that characterize the environment we share. Today you ought to take on climate change, tomorrow monetary volatility, next week AIDS and global migration and so on, but you must realise that each issue does not stand alone, nor that it is resolved when it is no longer in the headlines. Rather we must realise that these crises are

linked to each other global economic imperatives and more pertinently by the worth of the human lives it touches.

President Daube says that every generation thinks its rate of change is the greatest and I agree with him.

We live on a shrinking planet. It is shrinking not only because there are more of us than ever before occupying its surface and consuming its bounty. It is shrinking because we have never before lived in such close proximity to each other. We are all connected as never before in history.

People, goods, services and ideas move around the globe at hitherto unimaginable speeds. The greenhouse gases we pump into the air stand an impact half a world away. If 9/11 has taught us anything it is that conflict knows no boundaries. The global scope of markets means that a US decision to devote more of its corn crop to producing ethanol as a substitute for oil imported from the

Middle East can cause food riots in Pakistan. Like it or not we are all neighbours now. We pretend otherwise at our peril.

The challenges that this presents are enormous, but so are the opportunities.

Let's start with the fact that there are more of us. More people means greater demand for resources, especially if, as is now the case, global living standards are rising at an unprecedented, albeit deeply uneven, pace.

If demand can be met on a sustainable basis, the world should grow wealthier. If not, scarcity will cause pain for those least able to compete, and with it rising tensions.

My own country, South Africa, illustrates the challenges and opportunities now before us.

On the opportunity side of the ledger, the extraordinary growth of the Chinese and Indian economies, among others, is creating massive demand and record prices for the commodities South Africa has in abundance. This is underpinning our own growth and helping us raise millions of our people out of poverty.

Thanks to the world's greater connectedness, unprecedented numbers of people are now able to flock to our shores as tourists, also benefiting our economy by enabling us to transform assets like the hospitality of our people and the beauty of our land into jobs and better lives.

Not so long ago, few would have seriously entertained the idea that South Africa, set on the southern tip of the world's least developed continent, could host the world's largest sporting event, the soccer World Cup. But two years from now we will be doing just that, and fans not lucky enough to be among the half million we expect

to welcome in person will be able to watch the matches not just on television but on their cellphones almost anywhere in the world.

But South Africa is not only attracting tourists. As the region's strongest economy, it is attracting large flows of migrants, just like the rich economies to the North. And as in the North, the new arrivals have not been universally welcomed, even though many bring skills and energy their hosts need.

The South African economy is enjoying the longest upswing in its history, and even now, despite the current turbulence in global financial markets and spiraling food and fuel prices, we expect to grow at 4 per cent this year. The payoff has been rising disposable incomes, contributing to one of the most upwardly mobile societies anywhere.

Unemployment remains stubbornly high, the legacy of a system that deliberately denied most South Africans access to the kind of

skills needed in a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. In scenes of sickening violence, some of our people have taken to venting their frustrations, anger and fears on the immigrants in their midst.

This is by no means a uniquely South African phenomenon. Rather it is a warning of what we all face on this shrinking planet of ours if we do not address poverty and glaring inequality, if we do not deal with the conditions that encourage mass migration and, above all, if we do not learn to value each other as human beings regardless of our race or origin or creed.

Valuing each other as human beings is, in my view, the single most important thing we can do to see that the opportunities inherent in this new world of ours far outweigh the challenges. I congratulate President Daube for his commitment to building a community that cherishes diversity.

The dream of a society in which all would be equally valued fired our struggle for freedom. We have been reminded in recent weeks just how far we still have to realize that dream. Even so we have come a long way towards discovering how to live together in our corner of this oyster we share with the rest of humanity.

I would be remiss not to mention the name of the father of our nation, Nelson Mandela, who will celebrate his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday on July 18.

Thanks to him we have come a long way. At the end of his autobiography, Mandela reminded us that we were not yet free, that we had simply won the freedom to be free and the right not to be oppressed. We have not taken the final step of our journey, but the first step on a longer and even more difficult road. To be free, he said, is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.



Your achievement that we celebrate today must also mean that your journey is only beginning. Along the road ahead you should make a difference as others before you have made it possible for you to get this far.

I am certain that you join me in wishing President Daube even more work in his retirement from Manchester College, so that he can continue to enhance the lives of even more people.