

# A CALL TO AFRICAN LEADERSHIP IN TURBULENT TIMES

*Welcome speech given at the leadership in Practice Award 2007, held at Emperor's Palace, Kempton Park, South Africa, 9th April 2008.*

Ministers of state,  
Honourable members of the diplomatic corps,  
Dr. Bongani Khumalo, Chairperson of the SBL Board and SBL Board members, as well as UNISA Council members here present,  
The Pro-Vice Chancellor of UNISA, Prof. Mandla Makhanya,  
Prof. Louis Molamo, UNISA Registrar and other members of UNISA Management here present,  
Our distinguished LIP Award winner, Cyril Ramaphosa and his guest,  
Previous LIP Award winners,  
Distinguished guest, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

*All protocols duly and respectfully observed.*

I will like to start by welcoming all of you to this auspicious event to honour a son of Africa, a great leader, philanthropist and businessman. Since our focus tonight is on leadership, it is therefore appropriate to use this occasion to send out a call to Africa's leaders to "lead" in these turbulent times.

## **Distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen.**

At the stroke of midnight on the 6th of March 1957, Ghana the first African country South of the Sahara attained its political independence from Britain, its colonial master. Its Pan-African leader, Kwame Nkrumah said, that "Ghana's independence is meaningless unless it is linked to the total liberation of Africa." Fast-forward to the year 2008, since that auspicious day when Ghana attained its political independence, almost all African countries have attained their political independence. Unfortunately, their economic independence continues to elude them. For a continent which is potentially the wealthiest on earth, it is a paradox that it is home to most of the poorest countries. According to statistics by the World Bank, most Africans live on less than one US Dollar a day.

## **Distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen, this is unacceptable.**

What is the major cause of this misery, one may ask? It is clear and simple, "it is the unwillingness of African leaders to rise up to the challenge of leadership" - which is to serve and to serve unreservedly. Yet, since independence what has been the *modus operandi* of most African leadership is to lord over their people instead of rendering service to them. Post-colonial African leadership are particularly guilty of this crime. The Mobutu Seseko's, the Sani Abacha's, the Marcia Ngeuma's and Idi Amin's and so many more of their ilk come to mind. For dashing the hopes, dreams and aspirations of their people, they are a disgrace to

Africa. Ayi Kwei Armah, the Ghanaian novelist asks in his famous book, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, “how long will Africa be cursed with its leaders? There were men dying from the loss of hope, and others were finding gaudy ways to enjoy power they did not have. We were ready here for big and beautiful things, but what we had was our own black men hugging new paunches scrambling to ask the white man to welcome them onto our backs.”

**Distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen, this is unacceptable.**

The call and indeed a challenge to the new generation of African leadership is not to repeat the mistakes of post-colonial African leaders. If they do, current and future generations will not treat them kindly. To paraphrase Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian Nobel Laureate, they must understand that, they cannot claim like the foolish egg, that because it rained the day it was hatched, foolishly swears that it is a fish. They are therefore challenged to build the new Africa, a renascent Africa, the United States of Africa (USA) that must be. This will be an Africa where the content of its people’s character is more significant than the colour of their skins. An Africa, where poverty, hunger and instability are things of the past.

**Distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen,**

We are delighted tonight, to honour one of Africa’s great sons and new leadership. A leader, who truly and sincerely believe, that the destiny of Africa and its people lie in the ability of Africans to find solutions to Africa’s problems. These new leadership must understand that, “until the lions have their own historians, tales of the hunting will always glorify the hunter.” It is therefore a challenge to them to ensure that “our-story” is no longer “his-story.” When all is said and done, no one, however magnanimous, concerned, caring, or highly intelligent can develop Africa for Africans. This onerous task is that of Africans and its leadership alone.

*Nkosi Sikeleli Afrika (God Bless Africa).*

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