

SPEECH BY STEFAN LAING, SRC CHAIR, S.U., 27/5/2015

Today is a momentous day. It is a monumental day. A day worth remembering and a day with great significance. Today, ladies and gentleman, we are not just removing a plaque which honours a president from our less than perfect past; we are erecting a new monument. A monument which bears testimony to how far we have come as a society, yet at the same time indicates the long road that lies ahead of us.

As the citizens of this country, we are caught in a uniquely ~~curious~~ position. On the one hand, we have a nation with the brightest of futures; despite the grim picture ^{often} painted by the media. ^{There} are still ^{many} signs of hope. This is a land of opportunity and we have the means to turn it around and turn it into something great. South Africa *will* once again be the bread basket of Africa. However, on the other hand we also have our sordid apartheid history. A history riddled with the bullet holes of oppression and subjugation which has caused immense pain. Quite ^a ~~the~~ contrast which frames the following questions; to whom does it all belong? Who gets what? Who takes the future and who takes the past? Who won and who lost? Who should cry about our past and laugh about our future? Who should be angry and who should be happy? There is one simple answer to all of these questions and it is: all of us.
"South Africa belongs to all who live in it."

This is our country and together, we should take ownership of it. We should take ownership of our past and acknowledge our injustices. We should take ownership of our present as we are doing here today to ensure that our future will not look like our past. Now, in a moment such as this, unity is paramount to ensure that no one gets left behind as we progress.

Today we should also seek to acknowledge the strides which have been taken in creating a more inclusive society. The removal or changing of certain elements on campus to engender a more welcoming atmosphere for all, should be celebrated. The acceptance of the role that all of us have yet to play in creating such a space, should also be encouraged. In recent times this has been no more evident than in 2012 when the primarius of Dagbreek at the time, Pieter Nel, apologised on behalf of his house for its involvement in the ~~Andringa Street Attacks in 1945~~ as well as the role it

Battle of Andringa Street #39 [1940 - ed.]

played in the formation period of apartheid; especially having housed both Verwoerd and Vorster whilst they studied at this university. Even though the approach to transformation after this event has been perceived as being staggered, it definitely set the process in motion.

That act in itself, was a monument erected to symbolise the steps we should take to break down the barriers erected in our past which still come between us. It was a conscious decision to acknowledge the past and to start looking for ways in which the process of reconciliation could be furthered.

After our celebration of unity here today, our greatest challenge is however yet to come. Will the removal of a bronze plaque from a concrete wall tie all of us together? Is what we are doing here today going to guarantee a more inclusive and welcoming environment which will grant us all a sense of belonging? Essentially, this is what we should be aiming for; but in order for this ideal to be realised we should first remove the bronze plaques which we have placed on our own hearts. We have to ask ourselves what it is we cling to, why we cling to it and what the effects are thereof on our community. The removal of the HF Verwoerd plaque will mean nothing if we don't remove the plaques of apartheid from our hearts as well. We cannot hope for a bright future if we cling to a dark past. This does not mean that we should forget about our past; it only means that our past should not steer us into the future. It should be a monument, stationary; a reminder of who we used to be but aren't anymore. The hope of a bright future should always be our driving force.

Today we have to make a conscious decision to build. We have to keep on building monuments such as the one we are building here today in remembrance of where we are heading but also to remind us ^{of} where we have come from. It is our responsibility to remember that whilst we are building these monuments, we are also building our nation ~~as well~~. We are building on the solid foundation which Nelson Mandela and FW De Klerk have laid for us. We are moving forwards and we are moving upwards. We are the co-owners of this nation's future. Let us make it a better one for all.