

Dullah Omar Memorial Lecture 2017 – Mrs. Graça Machel
“A Call for a Nation’s Soul Searching”

October 3, 2017

Outline

- I. Freedom Charter and Constitution - Founding Principles**
- II. Wounds Unhealed: Violence, Socio-Economic Inequality and Moral Degeneration**
- III. Ubuntu – A framework for Healing and a Call to Action**

I. Context: Freedom Charter/Constitution - Founding Principles

The Freedom Charter was the statement of core principles of the South African Congress Alliance which consisted of

- the African National Congress and its allies
- the South African Indian Congress
- the South African Congress of Democrats and
- the Coloured People`s Congress

Adopted at the Congress of the People in 1955, it stands as a reminder of the vision behind a people-led, human rights based vision for a new South Africa.

- *We, the People of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know: that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people;*
- *that our people have been robbed of their birth right to land, liberty and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality;*
- ***that our country will never be prosperous or free until all our people live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and opportunities;***
- ***that only a democratic state, based on the will of all the people, can secure to all their birth right without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief;***
- *And therefore, we, the people of South Africa, black and white together equals, countrymen and brothers adopt this Freedom Charter;*
- *And we pledge ourselves to strive together, sparing neither strength nor courage, until the democratic changes here set out have been won.¹*

Those who penned the Freedom Charter knew very well that a peaceful, vibrant, healthy South Africa would never be attained unless an equitable society was built ***“our country will never be prosperous or free until all our people live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and opportunities; that only a democratic***

¹ <http://ancyl.org.za/docs/political/1955/The%20Freedom%20Charterj.pdf>

state, based on the will of all the people, can secure to all their birth right without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief”.

Our Constitution lays out the blueprint for a new, equitable South Africa-

- *We, the people of South Africa, Recognise the injustices of our past;*
- *Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land;*
- *Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country;*
- ***and Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.***

We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as to –

- ***Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;***
- ***Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law; Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person;***
- *and Build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations. May God protect our people.²*

I stand here today, along with the memory of Advocate Dullah Omar and the principles of justice and equality he stood for, urging us not to spare the strength or courage required to collectively soul search and move us closer to the South Africa enshrined in the dreams of our Freedom Charter and Constitution. This evening we are honouring him as he embodied these values we hold so dear and dedicated his life in service to realizing these ideals.

² <http://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/constitution/SACConstitution-web-eng.pdf>

As a nation, we were spared the ravages of civil war as the Apartheid regime was dismantled and made a relatively peaceful transition to a democratic state. We are at war with ourselves and with each other.

We are plagued with deeply entrenched and festering wounds. The most visible manifestation of these wounds can be found in our violent, unequal society.

II. Wounds Unhealed: Violence, Socio-Economic Inequality and Moral Degeneration

Violence – A Society At War With Itself

In this country we call our home, brutal violence visits us in our streets and in our houses on a daily basis. Media reports of smash and grabs, kidnapping of young women, horrific gender-based violence cases, brutal xenophobic attacks, cyber bullying, service delivery riots and political assassinations are common place on news reels.

We are at war with each other and with our institutions. I will first speak of the violence we visit upon ourselves—our children, our youth, our women, our elderly and our immigrants, and then turn to our violent outcry against our institutions.

Violence Against Children

Madiba rightly said, **“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.”** Children are the most precious, the most revered gift any society has and is the bearer of its future. Any society vested in its own progress must ensure its children are protected and nurtured. Curiously, South Africans show little regard and value for its youngest generations.

UCT released South Africa's first study on the national annual incidence of child sexual abuse in the country last year and its findings were shocking. It found that:

- 1 in every 3 young South Africans has experienced some form of sexual abuse in their lives. This number translates into the population of Port Elizabeth and twice that of Bloemfontein.ⁱ

- Boys reported higher lifetime prevalence rates of sexual abuse (36.8%) than girls (33.9%) unlike previously thought. However, the nature of the abuse is often different.
- Girls are more likely to experience contact sexual abuse, where they are physically violated, and boys are more likely to experience exposure abuse, where the child is forced to see sexual images or acts.
- We have been shocked by news reports of infants as young as 9 months old being raped. ⁱⁱ
- In schools and in their homes, where they are supposed to find sanctuary and be the safest, children of all ages are victims of unspeakable violence. They suffer sexual violence at the hands of fellow students and teachers. Abuse of power by principals and teachers in schools, have made our classrooms and bathrooms unsafe for our pupils.
- For adolescents, physical bullying is commonplace and now cyber bullying has become fashionable with girls being “slut shamed” on WhatsApp groups, Facebook timelines and twitter feeds. There are well known cases of posts going viral on social media of gang rapes and sexual assaults on school grounds.ⁱⁱⁱ
- High prevalence of teenage pregnancy with around 30% of 15-19-year olds reporting having ever been pregnant.
- According to the **2015** annual school survey, over 15,000 pupils became pregnant during the academic year—many as a result of abusive encounters.
- Early pregnancies post health risks to the mother and child, make it more challenging for a girl to complete her education and reach her academic and professional potential, and puts significant financial and emotional strain on family members. More needs to be done to educate adolescents around sexual

reproductive health, and ensuring that girls and boys are making responsible decisions around their sexuality.

Not only are children and adolescents victims of sexual and physical abuse in alarming numbers, they are dying at the hands of adults at astounding rates.

Right here in Cape Town in **2016**, at Salt River Mortuary alone, at least 30 children were killed in their home due to child abuse and neglect.

- Every 3 days a child is killed due to abuse and neglect. The child murder rate for South Africa is more than double the global average.^{iv}
- Over the past decade almost 10 000 children have been murdered. Nearly 900 children were murdered in South Africa from 2015 to 2016 alone, the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) has revealed in their 2017 survey report.^v

The value of a child's life, their protection and wellbeing need to be our paramount concern as a society. As adults, it is our obligation to

- treat them with respect
- instil in them the value of life and the sanctity of their bodies
- reverence for authority, and
- empathy for their fellow human being.

These values can only be modelled by the love, care and nurturing that we pour into them.

When they grow up experiencing hostility, exploitation and abuse, it then becomes no wonder that they grow up devoid of a moral compass and react violently to their circumstances in life.

It should come as no surprise that many of our young people do not have respect for each other, figures of authority or adults in general—

- their parents,
- the elderly,
- the police,

- or government officials

Having been socialized in a culture of violence, a natural tendency will be to operate in the world from a place of aggression and physical combativeness.

We see this play out in young adulthood and beyond through gang violence, date rape, road rage and bar brawls.

In its most extreme form, when a society has lost its sense of boundaries and limitations and has little respect for human life, what results is the visceral violence attached to what in other countries is limited to petty crime. For example, home invasions and car theft escalates quickly here into kidnappings, rape and murder.

Speaking of murder, from **2015-16, over 18,500 murders** were recorded, which amounts to an average of **51 killings daily**. In this country, **51 people are murdered every 24 hours!**

This astounding statistic makes South Africa one of the most violent societies in the world, and a particularly dangerous one for its young people, its women and its elderly.

Violence Against Women

Women are under attack daily in South Africa.

- 40% of men assault their partners daily
- A woman dies at the hands of her intimate partner every 8 hours. This translates into 3 women being killed by their loved one every single day.
- It is reported that more women are killed by her current or former partner here than in any other country in the world.

According to the Victims of Crime Survey Data report released by Stats SA, most of these crimes are likely to occur either in the home or amongst people who know each other and with the influence of either alcohol or drugs. This implies that regardless of

whatever crime strategies the police adopt, many of these crimes will continue to occur unless behaviour and value change takes place in society.

Violence Against the Elderly

Any society that does not cherish and protect its most precious and vulnerable – its children, its women and its elderly is a **sick society**.

Elderly South Africans are regularly exposed to harm and violence. The elderly experience neglect, sexual abuse, home invasions, and theft at unacceptably high levels. Alarming rates of brutality against the elderly—particularly from men in their communities – turn often defenceless caregivers and matriarchs into victims of horrific violence. Rape, sexual groping, and assault of elderly family members is often accompanied by the use of drugs and alcohol of the perpetrators.

It is encouraging to see a recent push in tougher legislation in the form of life sentences for men who rape elderly women and having sexual assault of “older persons” being treated as harshly as the rape of minors and the disabled. ^{vi} But much needs to be done to protect those who should be living in their golden years.

This phenomenon is **a signal of the decay of our moral fibre** and the absolute minimal regard we have for each other as human beings as well as an indication of how broken our community policing and protection mechanisms in our cities and villages are.

Violence Against “the Other, the Foreign”

We have not only turned against our own, but towards those who have found refuge in this country as well. Waves of xenophobic attacks in 2000, 2008, 2013 and 2015 saw the killing of foreign nationals from Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Somalia, Pakistan, Ethiopia and Mozambique.

This violence, while seemingly a reaction to economic inequality and perceived threat to livelihood, is also a manifestation of Afrophobia and the lack of value and connection

we have to others from our same continent. Many of these countries played a significant role in the liberation of this country—and we have repaid their generosity with malice making our borders unsafe and unwelcoming to them.

Indeed, we are a nation at war with itself. At war with our fellow citizens as I have just explained and at war with our institutions.

Violence Against Institutions

There is still a commonly accepted notion that violent protest as an acceptable reaction to state action (or inaction, as the case may be), service-delivery protests and strikes, for example, often turn violent.

Municipal IQ, a web-based data service that monitors hotspots”, says **86% of service delivery protests** on its radar were characterised by violence in 2016.

Burning, looting, stoning and destruction of property are common place. There is also a severe mistrust between law enforcement and communities. Instead of peaceful means of conflict resolution, from Marikana to Limpopo, we see police turning against citizens they were meant to serve and protect with rubber bullets and live ammunition.^{vii}

Educational institutions have also become a target of violence. Students with legitimate demands around free and accessible education, for example, should not feel they have to turn to violence by burning libraries and defacing property to have their demands met.

While citizens should and have the right to protest and demand change, the first and immediate reaction in the form of violent protest should not be the normal course of action.

We have inherited a violent past and legacy of disregard for authority. As a society, **it is clear we have normalized violence and we have yet to unlearn how to interact with each other from a space of aggression.** We live in a climate and culture of hostility and violence that needs to be seriously dealt with.

As legal scholars and academics, you understand much better than I the attitude South Africans have towards each other, the law, and the criminal justice system and you are well placed to change these forces to ensure that the values of our constitution, which call for us to live in peace, bear fruit.

Socio Economic Inequalities

While we put in place a system of governance to replace our old political framework and gave great thought to our political institutions, we did not give the same consideration to revamping our socio-economic landscape.

We created mechanisms, however imperfect, to address the economic imbalances of the past. Clearly more work needs to be done in this regard as economic inequality is still a significant problem. **The gap between rich and poor is one of the widest in the world, with the richest 1% of the population owning 42% of the country's wealth.**^{viii}

We have yet to dismantle the contempt-breeding special inequalities that Apartheid created either. The stark dichotomy between Alexandra township and Sandton City, or Langa and Camps Bay is heart-breaking and unacceptable this far into our new dispensation.

For as imperfect as our political and economic transformation has been, our social transformation is woefully lagging, but we did not do the same soul searching and brainstorming to reconfigure how we live and operate as a harmonious society.

Having touched on some of the violence and inequality we are confronted with today in South Africa, it is clearly evident that our nation is entrenched in a state of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). We are still cocooned in a space of moral decay and an ethical crisis that manifests itself in our homes, our streets, our schools, our places of worship, and our government institutions.

Moral Degeneration

State capture and corruption have taken over our news headlines. We feel betrayed by some who we have elected to lead and govern us with responsibility, accountability and respect for the Constitution, yet opt to put themselves and their coffers ahead of the wellbeing of the country. Again, the response to the challenge of nation building and governance has been violence.

Intimidation and political rivalry have become destabilizing and escalated to the point, where in KZN for example, political assassinations have become shockingly commonplace. Since March 2014, there have been over 90 politically motivated killings in the province.^{ix}

Just a few days ago in East London, a political conference ended in bloodshed and mayhem with police firing stun grenades to disperse a crowd of violent delegates.

The predatory mentality and mindset of “get rich at all costs” is common to corrupt government officials and business alone, however. Even in our religious institutions we see a leadership crisis and lack of moral fortitude.

We see exploitative pastors enriching themselves at the expense of their followers: Preying on the vulnerable by seducing their congregations to give large donations to the church in return for miracles and spiritual proximity to God. Very often these church leaders live in opulence while their congregants struggle to make ends meet.

We have also heard of recent deranged and violently harmful acts of so-called worship and sacrifice in Gauteng and Limpopo, such as eating snakes and grass or drinking petrol and cleaning detergent.^x

There are also widespread stories of inappropriate sexual behaviour by church leaders right here in Cape Town as well.

Those we have entrusted with our wellbeing –whether in meeting rooms, classrooms or church halls-- are not all leading with a sense of ethics or morality.

We need a plan of redress for our social ills. A treatment plan for our broken society so that we heal from our divisions and are united in our diversity as well as respectful of the human dignity and rights of all our citizens.

We need rewire ourselves so that the natural response to the challenges we face is not violence and so that the challenges we experience are not so deeply rooted in the inequities and the trauma of our past.

III. Ubuntu – A Framework for Healing and a Call to Action

We need to fully articulate, internalize and institutionalize what it means to build and be a South Africa that is embracing of its diversity, at peace with itself, and dedicated to ensuring equality for all.

The philosophy of Ubuntu perhaps is a good starting point and framework for our soul searching and healing of our broken, disconnected state. We need to connect with ourselves and with each other better.

The notion of Ubuntu is underpinned by the recognition that a person is a person through other people. Our humanity is affirmed through the recognition of other – I am because you are.

The respect for human dignity is an obligation and condition of being human. The interconnectedness and interdependency of our humanity make such ills as violence against women, racial discrimination and oppression difficult to accept or institutionalize.

Conclusion – Call to Action

I look to you, UWC, as a stellar institution of progressive thought, to spearhead this process of societal transformation.

You are well poised to lead a movement of stellar social scientists, academic institutions and research bodies to conduct more research on unpacking our wounded psyche and mental health, and suggesting mechanisms that will lead to our collective and individual healing.

Identify strategies and build a movement that will enable us to heal individually and collectively, and repair our brokenness. Help us map out where we go from here.

As a starting point, we firstly need healing at the micro level:

- Within our hearts and minds as individuals
- Within our families
- Within our neighbourhoods and communities

So we can then transform and heal the macro level:

- Our schools
- Our places of worship
- Our workplaces

Please utilize your intellectual capital and build coalitions amongst your networks of other centers of excellence to help define for us the architecture of a society that we need to build and live so that we live together peacefully as equals and fully embracing of all our rich diversity.

Without serious soul searching and an operating framework for us to live into and transform the way we self and collectively identify and relate to one another in the spirit of Ubuntu, we will continue to be cocooned in an unhealthy death trap of inequality and violence.

Thank you.

ⁱ <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/1-in-3-child-abuse-stats-shocking-frightening-mec-20160602>

ⁱⁱ <https://theconversation.com/explainer-behind-the-scurge-of-child-rape-in-south-africa-43436>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-06-20-bloemfontein-schoolboys-in-court-after-filming-teen-rape/>

^{iv} <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2017-09-20-op-ed-child-murders-south-africas-preventable-tragedy/#.WdIP3FuCy4Q>

^v <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/mostly-children-murdered-in-sa-report-20170608>

^{vi} <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2016-09-19-government-wants-life-sentences-for-men-who-rape-elderly-women/>

^{vii} http://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/2017/05/10/whats-behind-the-violent-protests-gathering-pace-in-communities_a_22079475/

^{viii} <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/national/2017-01-16-sas-rich-poor-gap-is-far-worse-than-feared-says-oxfam-inequality-report/>

^{ix} <http://ewn.co.za/2017/07/17/commission-probing-kzn-political-killings-hears-zuma-may-be-linked-to-violence>

^x http://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/2017/08/17/spraying-doom-in-the-house-of-the-lord-the-struggle-to-regulate_a_23080296/