

**Address by Dr Frene Ginwala at the University of Connecticut on the
occasion of the conferment of the degree of Doctor of laws *honoris
causa*
- 19 May 2002**

Chairman Gelfenbien,
Members of the Board of Trustees,
President Austin,
Vice Chancellor Maryanski,
Distinguished Faculty,
Members of the Graduating class and families,

I am proud, humbled and moved that the University of Connecticut has chosen to honour me today by conferring the degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*.

I am proud that the honour comes from a public university that chose to look beyond the borders of Connecticut and the United States and reached out to a people who were still struggling for basic democratic rights, and joined the international campaign against apartheid. But even more, under your courageous leadership President Austin, the University put its principles and vision into action by co-operating with a liberation movement and establishing a Partnership with the ANC, and as well as supporting a struggling University in South Africa, the University of Fort Hare, which had been severely damaged by apartheid.

Earlier today, 650 people shared a meal on top of Table Mountain in Cape Town. They sat together at a 250 meter table, probably one of the longest luncheon tables set anywhere. At this Annual Table of Peace and Unity, South Africans and guests break bread together and commit themselves to reconciliation and building peace among our people, our Continent and the world.

The occasion is one small part of an ongoing process to achieve the deepest aspirations of the democratic South Africa that emerged from a period of intense darkness and conflict with an enormous legacy of poverty, disease and deprivation.

Peace, reconciliation and unity among all our people, are characteristics for which post-apartheid South Africa is now known and acclaimed. But that such should be our commitment should come as no surprise, for this vision is deeply rooted in the history and tradition of the African National Congress, and has permeated our people's struggle for liberation for over a century.

The formation of the ANC sprung from the recognition that European conquest had succeeded only because the conquered had not resisted as a united people. Since its inception, the ANC assumed as its historic mission, the responsibility of uniting first the African people, then all the oppressed and eventually all South Africans.

At the same time, the prime objective of the organisation became the establishment of a democratic, united South Africa without distinction of black or white.

Notwithstanding that we were a conquered people, subjected to racism, dispossession and violation of customs and traditions, the demand was not for vengeance or retribution, but for an inclusive society in which race should not be the criteria for the franchise, or for any right including ownership of land or mineral claims. Regrettably at that time, our political consciousness had not progressed to the point of requiring the franchise and full equality of women.

Inclusivity has remained our goal. For my generation it was a given. It is rooted in the African concept of Ubuntu, which considers the fulfilment of an individual as part of the community. It was reinforced by moral and ethical principles, and cross-fertilised with Mahatma Gandhi's political philosophy and presence in South Africa at that period.

Though challenged by racism and the violence used to maintain it, the basic commitment was constantly re-iterated, and maintained.

The culture of an inclusive non-racial society was sustained throughout years of oppression, and was nurtured by the late Oliver Tambo in the field of battle and anti-apartheid struggle, and by Nelson Mandela behind prison bars. In 1994, it was entrenched in our Constitution.

South Africa is not unique in its problems or history. In this country, you had a war against slavery, and a civil rights movement to try and overcome racism and the legacy of poverty. At this university at the Dodd's Centre, you have housed documents revealing that racism is not only a black-white issue, and that religious and other forms of intolerance can have devastating consequences. The images of genocide in Rwanda and ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia are still fresh, as are those of the ongoing wars in the Middle East, and religious intolerance in parts of Asia. The emergence of political leaders in Australia and Europe who are invoking racism and promoting xenophobia as solutions to genuine economic and social problems must raise concern among all of us.

In South Africa, we have yet to overcome the intertwined racial and material legacies. Poverty has a strong racial dimension. Nearly 95% of the poor are African, and they suffer nearly ten times the unemployment rate as whites. The impact on all other aspects is obvious.

However, amongst all South Africans there is a growing realisation that our futures are interdependent and that poverty and material inequality needs to be addressed as a national priority if we are to live in peace. Our inequalities are mirrored in the international community.

According to the 1999 Human Development Report, the income gap between the poorest and richest people and countries has continued to grow. In 1960, people in the richest countries had 30 times the income of the poorest and by 1997 it had increased to 74 times as much. Gaps are widening both between and within countries. In Sub-Saharan Africa and other least developed countries, per capita incomes today are lower than they were in 1970.

Apart from the humanitarian concern, such disparities endanger international peace and security and are not in the long term interests of any nation.

We could justifiably have hoped that the loss of millions of lives in global and local wars in the 20th Century would have drawn people and nations together - a process facilitated by technological development and the establishment of multi-lateral agencies and organisations.

Globalisation at the end of the 20th Century has created an immense capacity to alleviate suffering, to produce food in abundance, to educate the ignorant and cure the sick. But simultaneously it has led to greater divisions and new inequalities as the rich have prospered, while the poor have descended even deeper into misery and impoverishment.

Such development is not sustainable. Our experience in South Africa demonstrated the unseverable links

- that prosperity could not endure in a sea of poverty,
- that inequality and injustice however reinforced by modern weapons of war could not prevail against a people's determination to be free,
- and finally, that those who build ever higher walls or stronger prison bars succeed only in imprisoning themselves, and find their weapon of violence turned against them.

While reinforcing this view, the events of September 11th have profound consequences for us all.

The world shared your shock and grief as thousands of innocent US citizens lost their lives, as well as from other countries including my own. This University was directly affected as family members of students and faculty were among the casualties. I share your grief, and we extend our condolences to you, your families and this community. No grievance, no injustice however grave, could be invoked to justify the attack.

For those of you who graduate today, these events must raise additional concerns.

September 11 forces us to review the popular understanding of security. Globalization has not only fueled internal and local conflict but has also created the possibilities of militant and aggressive terrorist action across borders. The former UN High Commissioner for Refugees and now Co-Chair of the Commission on Human Security, Sadaka Ogata, has pointed out that "those who felt marginalized by what they perceive as injustices caused by poverty and inequity have now found new ways of grouping themselves together. The network of al-Qa'ida, that resorted to international terrorist attacks against the United States reflects the new threatening linkages in the globalized world".

The acknowledgement of racial, religious and ethnic diversity and the need for tolerance is made in many international documents and resolutions. But the application of the universality of human rights has yet to be achieved in practice.

At the Millennium Summit, the world's leaders agreed that the greatest challenge for the 21st century was to attain the twin goals of "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want", and the conceptualisation and realisation of these was entrusted to the Commission on Human Security, on which I serve.

Human security is people centred and the emphasis is on individuals and their communities. As in human rights law, human security shifts the focus to people irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, or any other characteristic. It is closely interwoven with human dignity and fundamental human rights (political, civil, socio-economic and cultural) and with good governance, transparency and democracy.

States remain one of the core actors in promoting and protecting human security, but they also need to be held accountable for their actions and we need to ensure that they respect international law, treaties and obligations.

The international community cannot continue to allow some countries to use the international system selectively and escape responsibilities and duties when it does not suit their interests - even when applied to fundamental international issues such as: the use of force, the development of weapons of mass destruction, the treatment of prisoners of war, racism, the imposition of collective punishment, denial of self-determination, and selective and one-sided applications or interpretations of international agreements.

My respect for this University and desire to remain associated with its development is enhanced, as I note that your work on human rights has moved in this direction. It is not surprising that the first and so far the only United States UNESCO Chair in Human Rights has been awarded to the University of Connecticut. I take this opportunity to congratulate

Professor Omara-Otunnu on being the first holder of this Chair in Comparative Human Rights.

Finally, there is a need to re-examine the global village we speak of so blissfully and redefine it as a global community - for a genuine sense of community brings with it an acknowledgement and recognition of the interdependence of its members, both the powerful and the disempowered.

The concept of an all embracing community of peoples, acknowledging the diversity that enriches their commonality and working together by building peace, reconciliation and justice, to achieve a society imbued with a culture of human rights, must become our collective priority.

The honour this University bestows on me today confirms your recognition of this need. I accept the honour in acknowledgement of those who made that commitment in South Africa a century ago, the hundreds of thousands who have given their lives, and the millions who still strive for the realisation of the aspirations for non-racism, unity, peace and reconciliation in South Africa, the Continent of Africa, the United States and around the world.

I thank you.