

Nelson Mandela

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was born in Mvezo village in the former Transkei, South Africa, in 1918. After finishing school he went to university and studied law. He joined the African National Congress in 1942 and devoted himself to the struggle against apartheid. In 1952 Mandela travelled the country organising non-violent resistance to discriminatory legislation. This included the 1952 Defiance Campaign, resistance to forced removals and to the introduction of Bantu Education in 1953. He advised community activists to “make every home, every shack or rickety structure a centre of learning”. He was banned more than once, arrested and charged several times, and in 1964 was sentenced to life imprisonment for his efforts to end apartheid. He became one of the world’s most famous political prisoners. After 27 years in prison, Mandela was released and helped steer South Africa through its peaceful transition to democracy. In 1993 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and became the first democratically elected president of South Africa in 1994. He retired from public life in 1999. He remains South Africa’s best-loved hero.



Extracted from Nelson Mandela’s speech at the launch of the National Campaign for Learning and Teaching in 1997

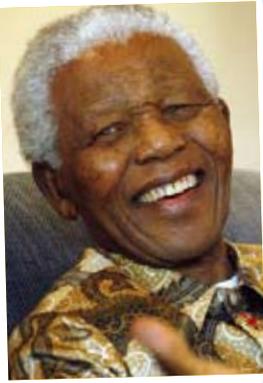


Our country is well endowed with natural resources. But our most valued treasure is our people, especially the youth. It is our human resources that enable us to reap the benefits of all our other assets.

Our fight against poverty, crime, and all the maladies of our society requires us to invest in the development of our human resources. ...

At the forefront of this effort is education and training. We are obliged to make it possible for everyone to develop their potential to the full; to provide opportunities for everyone to learn and nurture their talents. We have a duty to create a conducive environment; and to provide the necessary tools and the mechanisms to support people in their endeavours to better themselves. ...

The potential to be reclaimed is immense. The millions of our adults who never had the chance to learn to read and write; the hundreds of thousands of our youth displaced from education without any meaningful skills; the nation’s workers who must ensure that our country embraces the world’s new technologies – we can tap this power to build a better life by using every opportunity to ensure that our nation learns.



Our message to teachers on this occasion is this: let your watchword be unqualified commitment to the interests of those whose education has been entrusted to you.

Amongst other things, this means meticulous punctuality; thorough preparation for every lesson; dedication to ensuring that every student learns something from each lesson. It involves keeping abreast of developments in your subject areas and working co-operatively with both colleagues and management to ensure that our schools truly educate the nation. In short it means upholding the highest standards so that dignity is fully restored to the teaching profession. On your shoulders lies an enormous responsibility. If you fail our children you fail our country.

To students, this campaign is a call to make learning your main, if not your only, priority. For you too, punctuality, attendance and diligence in study must be the order of the day. Active participation in lessons and inquisitive probing to aid your own learning, respect for fellow students and for teachers; and a resolve never to use drugs or take dangerous weapons to school – all these and many more, make up the fabric of the culture of learning. ...

To parents, we say today that taking an interest in your children's education is as important as their own efforts and those of teachers. You can help educate the nation by participating in the activities of schools and protecting them from vandals; by supporting them, by working with teachers and students; and by constant guidance which ensures that your children always attend school and do their school work...

We can no longer afford to sit by while some schools are turned into havens of drug abuse, violence or vandalising of valuable property. We can no longer sit and watch while any of our country's children are held back in the mire of ignorance and lack of skills. ... Let us join hands, and work to make our schools work for us.

I thank you.”

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