

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT NELSON MANDELA AT THE RE-DEDICATION OF THE 1820 SETTLERS MONUMENT

Grahamstown, 16 May 1996

Your grace;
Ladies and gentlemen,

There are monuments which stand as mute pointers to a fixed and ever-receding past. Devoid of life, they have little meaning outside the history books and the minds of learned people. This National Monument is not of that kind. If it were it would not have found the resources to recover from the devastation it suffered two years ago, and improve itself in the rebuilding.

There are monuments which are dedicated to commemorating the past in a way which nurtures a particular tradition of our land, contributing to its vitality and growth. Such living monuments make a contribution to our society and enrich the life of our nation. But they may also exclude others. The 1820 Settlers Monument, perhaps, started its life in that way.

There are monuments which open the past to scrutiny; recalling it in order to illuminate it and transform it into part of our living and changing society; and merging the tradition from which they emerged with the rich diversity of South Africa's cultures. Such monuments, if they are successful, are a beacon for the future of all our people as much as a memory of the past.

Because this monument has set itself the goal of belonging to this last category, and because it has so forcefully identified with change and the reconstruction of our country, it is a great honour for me to share in its re-dedication today.

Pawns in a larger game, the 1820 Settlers came to the part of Africa at the behest of an imperial power seeking to use its own poor and unemployed in a bid to advance conquest and imperial ambitions. Though their own impulse to freedom rendered them largely unsuitable for that task, they were nevertheless caught up on the wrong side of history, unable or unwilling to acknowledge as equals those into whose homeland they had been implanted.

The founders of the monument two decades ago sought to redeem that limitation, without denying it, by dedicating the monument to the universal application of the ideals which the English Settlers cherished for themselves. Today, our country a democracy, and our people masters of their own destiny, we are re-dedicating the monument to the universality of those ideals at a time when we are working together to make them a reality for all.

Clearly, great strides have been taken in broadening the scope of the Monument's activities and towards turning it into a national resource centre for the arts and culture. By providing the infrastructure for the National Arts Festival and the School Festivals; through the many cultural projects and teacher training and development which it makes possible, the Monument is making a significant contribution to our nation's cultural life and the education of its people.

The plans for a National Festival of Science and Technology are most encouraging. Apartheid's education system and the exploitation of science for repressive purposes have, for most of South Africa's youth, robbed science and technology of the excitement and the attraction which it should have. Popularising science and demonstrating the capacity of technology to help us meet the challenges of improving the quality of life will enrich South African cultural and intellectual life.

These and other plans give reason for confidence that the Monument will rise to the challenge we all face, turning our goals into reality. In particular the far-reaching aim of making this national resource one which all our diverse cultures feel to be truly their own, will require hard work. But it is a task we must accomplish.

The coming of age of our democracy is also the recognition that national unity and reconciliation live in the hearts of our people rather than in law. The New Patriotism is a force that propels us towards a vital and unifying national culture which respects, promotes and celebrates our diversity.

To the extent that this Monument succeeds in achieving its goals, it will help us all to realise the broader vision of a new South Africa. In rededicating this restored and improved building, we are reaffirming the purposes for which it was built:

"That all might have life and have it more abundantly"

I therefore have the pleasure of unveiling the plaque commemorating the restoration and re-opening of this Monument.

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