

Speech at Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland

13 June 2001

Your Worship the Mayor,
Councillors of the City of Glasgow,
The Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor of Glasgow Caledonian University,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for inviting me to your beautiful city and distinguished university. I am quite sure that our meeting at this university is important in many ways.

This being an important centre, not just of learning, but of inquiry and on-going probing into the various aspects of life that inform and guide humanity, I am confident that we will at the end of our interaction today, cement the crucial bonds that tie us together and perhaps even expand the relations between the people of this city, this university and the whole country and our people in South Africa.

A university such as this one, is like a torch that illuminates the dark corners of our existence that we always strive to discover, so that humanity can understand itself better. As humanity grapples with the myriad of challenges of ensuring that our common habitat, the Earth, is indeed a humane place for all, we always see the role of centres of excellence such as the Glasgow Caledonian University as light keepers that assist us to clear the mists as we navigate through our chosen paths.

The Victorian poet Robert Louis Stevenson in a poem entitled 'The Light-Keeper', says:

The brilliant kernel of the night,
The flaming lightroom circles me:
I sit within a blaze of light
Held high above the dusky sea.
Far off the surf doth break and roar
Along bleak miles of moonlit shore,
Where through the tides the tumbling wave
Falls in an avalanche of foam
And drives its churned waters home
Up many an undercliff and cave.
(The Penguin Book of Victorian Verse, Daniel Karlin, P 321)

Indeed, we see your role as that of 'the brilliant kernel of the night', whose 'flaming lightroom circles all of us'. Accordingly, those of us who have the advantage of being circled by the flaming lightroom, should forever seek ways of extending this light to the most remote areas of our globalised world.

We need to use the brilliant kernel to light up the undercliff and the cave so that our abilities and expertise are used to face our common challenges, wherever they may be. That responsibility is shared with the leadership of the City of Glasgow and I am sure, the whole of Scotland.

In his novel, *Astonishing the Gods*, Ben Okri, the Nigerian author, writes:

Suddenly, he saw the city as a vast network of thoughts. Courts were places where people went to study the laws, not places of judgement. The library, which he took to be one building, but which he later discovered was practically the whole city, was a place where people went to record their thoughts, their dreams, their intuitions, their ideas, their memories, and their prophecies.

They also went there to increase the wisdom of the race. Books were not borrowed. Books were composed there, and deposited.

The universities were places for self-perfection, places for the highest education in life. Everyone taught everyone else. All were teachers, all were students. The sages listened more than they talked; and when they talked it was to ask questions that engage endless generations in profound and perpetual discovery.

The universities and the academies were also places where people sat and meditated and absorbed knowledge from the silence. Research was a permanent activity, and all were researchers and appliers of the fruits of research. The purpose was to discover the hidden unifying laws of all things, to deepen the spirit, to make profound the sensitivities of the individual to the universe and to become more creative.

Love was the most important subject in the universities. Entire faculties were devoted to the art of living. The civilisation was dedicated to a simple goal, the perfection of the spirit and the mastery of life.

Well, I think we will all agree that this is really astonishing the gods.

What Ben Okri visualises through this passage is a city and a university whose functions and approaches to their work are interwoven with those of society as a whole. Okri's city is a place that reflects the dreams, ideas and prophecies of its people. Its university is not an Ivory Tower, but an extended home of all the people. It is a place where everyone is in perpetual learning and discovery. It is a location that propels society forward. The daily work of both the city and the university are complimentary, to the extent that the success of one is dependent on the progress of the other.

We are happy to be at such a place; a place that is forever seized of the challenge about its own role in bringing about a society based on a caring spirit, human solidarity and cooperation, and, the manner in which its people can continue to make a humble contribution to the all-round development of all humanity.

It is because of this desire to bring about a humane society, that this university forged ties with two of our educational institutions, the University of Transkei (Unitra), and the Medical University of Southern Africa, (Medunsa).

Through collaboration between your distinguished university and our two higher education institutions, we are working together to ensure that our people have an opportunity to lead better and healthier lives, as a result of using modern medical techniques and sharing information and expertise with you.

You took this important decision to link up with our universities because you wanted to ensure that the thoughts, dreams, intuitions, ideas, memories and prophecies of the people of South Africa are also yours and that they translate into practical and beneficial action.

In so doing, you wanted to increase the wisdom of humanity. Undoubtedly, you were responding to one of the main challenges of our time, which is the struggle against underdevelopment in all its manifestations: poverty, disease, illiteracy, famine and social marginalisation. As we are all aware, this underdevelopment and disempowerment is juxtaposed, globally, with areas of high development, great wealth and concentrated global power.

Indeed, today's world is characterised by the strange bedfellows of poverty and opulence, famine and over-indulgence, highways of development and footpaths of degradation.

To address this modern anachronism is the central challenge facing the people of the City of Glasgow, the citizens of Scotland and United Kingdom and their counterparts in places such as South Africa and other developing countries.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 1999 Human Development Report, by the 1990's, the fifth of the world's people living in the highest-income countries had:

- 86% of world GDP, while the bottom fifth had 1%;
- 74% of world telephone lines, while the bottom fifth had 1,5%;
- 82% of world export markets - the bottom fifth just 1%. (*Human Development Report, 1999, P3*)

It is to these inequalities between countries and people of the world that our two countries should respond.

It is to these challenges that we should seek common ground and unified programmes, using both this city and this centre of excellence, the Glasgow Caledonian University, as catalysts that would help to bring about the required changes.

Clearly, the combination of the problems of underdevelopment and poverty poses specific challenges to different constituencies all over the world. The consequence of this has been a number of responses to the whole range of issues that in one way or another either contribute to continued underdevelopment or stultify measures aimed at pulling the developing countries from the quagmire of poverty.

Some of the responses to the inequalities of our societies have been sporadic and issue based. Without doubt, most of those who participate in these programmes are, in the main, driven by a vision of a world order that will empower the poor and the weak and assist in the development of billions of our fellow human beings who survive on less than a dollar a day.

At the same time, it seems there is a need to ensure that we engage in programmes that will develop a pervasive consciousness of solidarity and co-operation between the peoples of developed and developing countries. This is particularly important to those of us who are in privileged positions to influence the course of events in a manner that brings to an end the economic, political, social and cultural marginalisation of the major part of humanity.

The city of Glasgow is in such a privileged position.

Together we can and must find a common approach that will effectively address all the challenges that face us.

In this regard, I would like to make bold to say that we who have gathered here today are enjoined to explore, further, the issues of solidarity and co-operation, within our individual countries, between our different countries and across the various continents.

I am raising the question of solidarity and co-operation because, we will all agree that it is impossible to create a decent and prosperous country or group of countries in one corner of the world, while the rest of humanity live in dire poverty. It is unsustainable to build an affluence enclave in a sea of degradation, inequality and poverty.

Accordingly, the only way of securing and expanding the developmental gains that have been achieved in the countries of the North, is to extend these advances to the countries of the South, and in so doing, seek international co-operation and solidarity so as to harness the power of the process of globalisation for the good of all. Of course, the question is how shall we achieve international co-operation and solidarity!

In his book, 'Future Positive', Michael Edwards says there are three schools of thought about the practical ways of ensuring co-operation:

"The first includes those who believe that economic growth is the problem, so if we are to co-operate it should be to reduce consumption in the global North and encourage everyone to become self-reliant. In this vision, co-operation implies a harmonious patchwork quilt of self-governing, self-provisioning communities interacting with each other through consensus, in order to call higher-level institutions to account. Their slogan is 'globalise consciousness, localise economies'.

"In view of the social and biophysical limits to world population and consumption levels, economic celibacy is the only answer".

The second school of thought, according to Edwards, "wants to 'humanise' capitalism rather than replace it, but this school covers a wide range of positions: economic liberals see virtue rising up through civil society to correct the 20 percent or so of market economics that do not work; advocates of 'stakeholding' and social market theorists stress the need to widen corporate accountability and incorporate 'human values into the core of market processes' to promote 'inclusion'; communitarians emphasise the role of small groups in teaching people moral values and responsibility at a scale where they can see that the welfare of the whole depends on the actions of individuals; and further to the Left are those who advocate more government intervention and a bigger role for the 'third sector' in doing what markets don't or won't do."

The third school of thought, says Edwards,

"is the most interesting of all because it rejects the validity of all universal models. This group stresses the importance of capacities and mechanisms that enable people to make their own choices about the good life - to decide what sort of 'third way' they want to pursue. It is less about particular policies and more about giving everyone the tools to create a better society. Since that requires equal access to economic resources and political voice, good policies are still important".
(*Future Positive*, Michael Edwards, P11-14).

In looking at the best ways of forging relations that will help us to overcome all the challenges we face, we need to look at the best that is available to us in these and other models.

As we strengthen old ties and forge new relations according to the current realities, we need to give a much deeper meaning of international co-operation and human solidarity. This must mean that we recognise the fact that our success must be based on the will to act both by the main beneficiaries of the process of globalisation and the poor of the world. Secondly, it is critical that today's winners and today's losers should accept that we will succeed when all the participants are able to co-determine the future.

It is on this basis that I believe that our coming together here, at the place that is clearly a locus of new thinking, should help us to work out co-operation strategies for our mutual benefit.

The leadership and people of the African Continent, are working to produce a far-reaching and integrated programme that seeks to put the Continent on a sustainable path of development. This is in the form of the Millennium Partnership for the African Recovery Programme (MAP).

It is a programme that seeks to ensure that democracy is entrenched in every part of Africa and that normal democratic political processes are the norm rather than the exception. In this regard, decisions have already been taken where strong measures will be adopted if, for instance, groups of people were to take power through the force of arms.

It is a programme that seeks to ensure that we are able to harness the African resources, technology and human skills that we need to defeat poverty and underdevelopment.

It is a programme through which we seek to reverse the unacceptable marginalisation of Africa from the global processes.

This programme is a tool that should help us to end the social exclusion of the vast majority of the African people.

Furthermore, it is agreed that there is a need to strengthen economic and social conditions to ensure that there is sufficient and favourable space for domestic and foreign investment, as well as other critical engagements that will help to revive many economies that are in a state of collapse.

In this regard, we are also agreed that while we create these positive conditions, we should bring about a situation whereby resources on the continent have to be utilised for the development of the African people. Accordingly, the necessary empowerment of the people themselves must take place as a matter of urgency.

This is a programme that I am confident will, as Ben Okri suggested, contribute to the effort towards self-perfection, teaching and learning from one another, and engaging in a profound and continuous effort to discover the road we must take to ensure the betterment of all humanity.

Chairperson;

We all remember that the introduction of the railway to the different parts of Britain revolutionised many aspects of the British life. It connected one city to the other, ensured that goods reach their destinations quicker than was the case previously and made human contact easier, thus creating the possibility for people from distant locations increasingly to break down the walls that made contact difficult between localised cultures and sub-cultures.

Accordingly, the railway played a major role not only in substantially cutting time and space between the different corners of this land, but in assisting in the formation of a new culture, a new consciousness and a new interaction between all the people who constituted the various social segments of the United Kingdom.

I am sure that we will all agree that this process of increased and easier human contact led to a situation where people could learn from one another, improve their mutual understanding and begin to forge bonds of friendship and solidarity.

Clearly, the technological changes occasioned by the railway brought about dramatic and far-reaching social transformation. I want to believe that the seeds of solidarity that were developed amongst and between the people of the United Kingdom, germinated during the later years when you occupied the frontline in the solidarity work against apartheid.

We come back today to thank you for the selfless assistance you gave to the people of our country during the long years of struggle against the evil of racism and apartheid.

Today, we meet in times when the communication and connections between our countries and peoples are not defined almost exclusively by the railways, but are centered around a communication and information technology that is bringing about a new culture, in the entire world, constructed by a pervasive and interconnected media system.

The question that we may pose to ourselves is what is this culture that is brought about by the communication and information technology?

It may be important to address the question whether this is a culture of virtuosity for its sake, whereby the excellence and dazzling skill in the advancement of technology is for individual and subjective ends. In other words, this would be a culture that does not assist humanity as a whole to use technology to fight poverty, to eradicate diseases and banish famine.

I think we need to come to an understanding that we should construct a culture that will utilise technology to help give birth to a new form of society which, while it creates wealth, it simultaneously tackles the urgent question of poverty, and, in the process, also helps us to eliminate preventable diseases such as malaria, HIV/ Aids, TB and many others, amongst the poor.

I am confident that we all want a social culture that, while it shakes and transforms institutions so that they perform better in response to the new challenges, it will, at the same time, bring in more and more innovations and co-operation among all the people of the world.

It will empower those who are at the end of the development chain and impart skills to the 80 percent of the world population that is not only unskilled, but has never made a telephone call.

Together, we should work for a culture that eschews greed and the imposition of hardships on millions of people in the developing world. We need a social and universal culture that, instead of instilling despair among poor people, it brings hope.

Indeed, there are already many across the globe who have formed multiple and highly diversified formations and fora to express their dissatisfaction with the development of a culture of greed, selfishness, exclusion and marginalisation. Many fellow humans are rebelling against the macho cowboy culture of winner takes all, that imposes an enervating sense of hopelessness among the poor of the world.

I know that our existing bonds, which we have come to strengthen, are based on a culture of caring, of collaboration and solidarity.

Allow me to borrow the words of another Victorian poet, William Allingham, who wrote during the 19th century:

By and by, we shall meet
Something truly worth our while,
Shall begin to live at last,
By and by.
(The Penguin Book of Victorian Verse, ed. By Daniel Karlin, P408)

I thank you.