

**Public Lecture by former South African President H.E. Kgalema  
Motlanthe**

7 July 2023, Campus The Hague

*Welcome Speech Annetje Ottow*

Your Excellency Kgalema Motlanthe and Mrs. Gugu Motlanthe,

Ambassador Vusi Madonsela,

Representatives from various Embassies here in The Hague,

Representatives from the Dutch Ministry for Foreign Affairs,

Students, Academic Staff and Guests,

It's an honor for me to welcome His Excellency Kgalema Motlanthe to the Campus of Leiden University today, here in The Hague. We very much look forward to your public lecture on Africa's economic transformation, and the discussion we can have with you, especially now, when geo-political tensions are high. As one of our Professors recently said, we seem to live in a 'poly-centric mess'.

South Africa has been a longtime partner for our University. Academic cooperation takes place with many of its excellent universities, in disciplines ranging from archeology to astronomy. And perhaps some of you were present in Leiden back in 1999, when Nelson Mandela

became a Leiden Honorary Doctor, something we are still very proud of. In his honour, a Mandela Scholarship Fund was set up, which allows South African students to study in Leiden. The fund is still in operation today and has enabled dozens of young South Africans to study here. *'Education is the strongest weapon that you can use to change the world,'* were Mandela's inspiring words.

This is still true today. As a university, we believe that research and education indeed can change the world. Universities are agents for change, as we formulate answers and solutions to major social challenges, together with a wide variety of international partners. And by educating the next generation of thinkers, doers, policy makers, and political and business leaders. The consequences of climate change are noticeable on a daily basis, and lead to increasing waves of migration, often as a result of major conflicts. Technological developments are moving fast, as are the risks related to it, such as knowledge security. Not only do we have to relate to all these developments as a university, but we are also empowered by them. We have so much expertise to contribute to all these challenges, together with our global partners. We respect four principles that guide our actions in this: connecting, innovating, responsibility, and freedom.

Africa, in all its diversity, is a priority in our global engagement. We have made this explicit in our institutional Strategic Plan. Building on the excellent work of the Leiden African Studies Centre, and the Leiden African Studies Assembly, we are currently developing our university-wide Africa Strategy, which we will launch this fall. We want to bring the large community of scholars in our University, working on and with Africa, together in a 'Africa Knowledge Hub'. Through this interdisciplinary approach, we will intensify our engagement with African universities, research institutes, NGOs, African students, and especially early-career researchers. Only together can we find answers to questions such as how to supply exploding cities with basic amenities, how to engage with migration, and how to challenge old power structures. With increasing globalisation, the reality in Africa has an immediate effect on the reality in the West, and vice versa.

We also cooperate increasingly with Africa by combining forces in Europe itself, through European networks. A good example of this is UNA Europa, a strategic alliance of 11 European universities, which prioritizes Africa in its global outreach.

International cooperation, learning from each other, connecting worlds is the only way to face our common global challenges. We are

therefore pleased that the Dutch government recently presented its integral Africa Strategy. This piece of foreign policy was based on extensive consultations in Africa. We do think however, that knowledge and education cooperation between the Netherlands and Africa should become more prominent in this Strategy. Why?

Science and education are a crucial part of foreign relations, and therefore of foreign policy. Not only do we insist on using the knowledge that universities have when developing and implementing government policy. But it is also important to realise that our position makes us ideally suited to conduct diplomacy. Our knowledge- and fact-based academic practice can be a crucial factor for international relations. 'Equal partnerships' with African governments, societies and businesses is the narrative that we hear a lot these days. However, in political reality we don't always see this reflected. The recent summit in Paris on the global financial system showed quite clearly the urgent need to reconfigure decades-old institutions.

This brings me to my final point, which is mainly an appeal to the Members of the Dutch Parliament. The awareness of the importance of international cooperation seems to be lost in current political discussions. If we are to believe the media, and some politicians, it is mainly about the 'unbridled' flow of international students who want to follow education in the Netherlands and thus cause pressure on

the housing market. Yes, international student intake is part of internationalisation. And yes, we have a nation-wide housing problem. Without closing my eyes to the difficulties, I still think that the media paints an overly negative image. A large group of young, smart people from all over the world, including from Africa, find our higher education so attractive that they leave their familiar surroundings and settle in our country, temporarily or otherwise. Among non-English speaking countries, we are one of the most attractive study destinations in the world. That is something to be proud of. We are apparently doing something really well at the Dutch universities. Moreover, with the large and structural shortages in the Dutch labour market, our appeal is good news for the Netherlands as a whole.

Universities are the institutions that keep the dialogue going. Universities are needed because they provide the world with data, analysis and perspectives, and contribute to mutual understanding and insight about each other.

So in this spirit, I welcome you once again Your Excellency, and would like to give you the floor.

Thank you.