

**\*\*Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi's Speech:\*\***

Good morning everyone. Let me just remove the elephant from the room. You've all seen these very tall men who have come ahead of me and I think there's a need to turn this thing around because if I stand up here, I'll even be taller than all of them. Let's just turn around a little bit, thank you. So that's to just avoid the microphone hitting me at the middle of my nose, but I don't feel any less tall than anyone else.

Good morning everyone. I will acknowledge our Chancellor of VUT and say congratulations to you and I stand on all your acknowledgements of everyone present in the room who should be acknowledged. Our presiding officer, if I can call it that, has sort of warned me that I should try and stick within time. I'm not sure if anyone said anything strange about me to you, but I will abide. So, I cut out all the acknowledgements, but that doesn't diminish the role of either faculty or the leadership of the student body or anyone else for that matter.

Congratulations and welcome to this club of chancellors. I thought, listening to your input and also from a common road and journey that we followed, that probably I should bring another chancellor into the room. And that's someone who's a figure in history, in African history. I do so because one of your loves is also history, and you see yourself as a historian of sorts as well. And I thought, along with the illustrious figures that you had mentioned, I turn to Ahmed Baba who was one of the greatest African intellectuals of the 16th century. He was a prolific writer and Islamic scholar and his works included a number of opinions, including that on slavery, and a number of biographies of famous jurists. Timbuktu's Institute of Higher Learning and Islamic Research, which houses some 30,000 manuscripts and is one of Africa's most important collections of historical chronicles and scholarly texts, is named after Ahmed Baba. There is also a crater on the planet of Mercury named after him. He remains a national icon in Mali today and is recognized across the world. Some of his works, especially in mathematics, have been drawn on by some of the outstanding universities in France.

I cannot claim that as a Chancellor, I am quite of the ilk of Ahmed Baba, but I thought as we heard a reflection of your history and road that you followed and your question today of is there new freedom, I thought I should bring in a memory of a chancellor who represented the best in Africa, and we probably need to look at how we can draw back on that.

As I do so, I want to take you back, Chancellor, to "Nil Desperandum" - Never Despair. That was the motto of Musi High School in Pimville, Soweto, where you cut your teeth in education. If your brother, the Reverend Teboho Moleketi, was here today, which he probably is in some way, he would have reminded you of a saying by your uncles, I believe, who said, "If there's not a song written in your name, write your own song." I'm paraphrasing that. I think today, in terms of that journey that started out in Pimville, and Pimville is one of the oldest townships in the southwestern townships of Johannesburg, it's one that you can look at and think of even before 1948 because that township is more than 100 years old. You'd think of it in terms of grit, in terms of informal settlement that eventually transformed in some way into a township with four-roomed houses. From those very beginnings birthed a number of people who are associated

with our democracy and probably a new kind of freedom, including the likes of successful businesspeople like the Chancellor Mntambo, founder of Exxaro.

When he was reflecting on what this area is associated with and that it's not only about the fumes, I'm not going to go on and reflect on other fumes that may be there, but also just state that in line with that newfound and new forms of freedom, it's also his involvement not just as a founder but as a board member, present day, to look and work from a governance perspective, an oversight perspective in the development of strategy to say, "What does the future look like?" So, there's also striving for the future.

Let me just say about the other luminaries that came out of Pimville, and let me boast a little bit. So, I know you, but I also married someone who comes from that township, and in that reflect on the fact that that township, as I said earlier, bore politicians, musicians, sportspeople. I think the ones who are really recognized are sportsmen rather than women, so we need to look for the women who may not have been mentioned at the time. Academics, poets, and you can name so much more.

As I conclude on the township, I want us not to forget PUBS - the Pimville United Brothers. I see many nodding their heads when they think of PUBS. Maybe the alums of the township should see whether they can revive PUBS, and then we don't need to support Pirates any longer, and we go towards another one.

In essence, I conclude that part of my speech by quoting President Nelson Mandela, Madiba, when he said, "It is not beyond our power to create a world in which all children have access to a good education. Those who do not believe this have small imaginations." Close quote. I think this is precisely why I took you on this little journey, because those children who came through education didn't have small imaginations, neither did their parents. We want this center of learning to not be impeded by small imaginations, but actually birth the big ideas, the innovative ideas of what's required to transform our country.

I'm going to go to a second part, and don't worry, I'm going to try and stay within the time required. As I move on to that, I want to share with you - and we have the CEO of Exxaro in our midst today, Dr. Nombasa Tsengwa, who can attest to this. We went on our strategic planning session as Exxaro to the Eastern Cape last year. As we were traveling in a vehicle between venues, going out to one of the sites where Exxaro, through Synergy, has the wind turbines, we were given a lecture on terrestrial biomes in South Africa. I think some people in the car sort of felt a little bit awkward, thinking, "What exactly is biomes?" Fortunately, there's a thing called Google, and now you can even do it on others, and very quickly, we tried to join into the discussion about the eight biomes that are there in South Africa - the grassland, the savanna, and so on. I can go on, but you'll check the rest. One thing that the Chancellor, our fellow board member, always tries to remind us is around the importance of biodiversity. The issue is that when you travel across South Africa, the most remarkable change in biodiversity is what you see when you're ready to look.

So, even as I was driving on, I believe it's the R52 - is it the 51, the road we were coming on? R59. I sort of looked and thought, just in case the Chancellor asked me what biome did I cross, I thought, "Let me look and try and locate it," and I thought it was, it is the grassland, you know, the bit that's there, amongst others. Actually, the savanna, or, well, one of the two. I know that in Gauteng, it's either the grassland and or the savanna.

But I thought that I'd take this biome and actually say that as there may be eight as it relates to biodiversity, we could also equate it to our lives. In this instance, as we congratulate Chancellor Mntambo, we equate it to - let's call it biomes in terms of the different journeys of his own life. There are many to be said, but I think that's for another time.

I'd want to conclude today in the spirit of the biomes because it struck me as I was rereading and listening to the "I am an African" speech that it actually reflects and captures your love for being an African. Owing to a degree your being to the hills, the valleys, the mountains, and the glades, the rivers, the deserts, the trees, the flowers, the seeds, and the ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native land. Those were the words of President Thabo Mbeki, and I think it so captures the beauty of our country. As we consider this freedom, remember we owe it to all that, but above all, as this generation, we should defend the legacy of the future for the young and the other beautiful ones yet to be born.

Congratulations and welcome.

[Applause]

---

This is the isolated speech from the transcript. Let me know if you need any further assistance.