



## A MESSAGE FROM NELSON MANDELA TO THE YOUTH OF AMERICA

Young people of America, I greet you in the name of friendship, reconciliation and peace. Today, we stand at the dawn of a new century—a century in which it is possible for the first time to create a truly global society. The choices you, the next generation, make now will critically affect the quality of life and the aspirations of that global society.

Looking back on this past hundred years, it has been a century mixed with hope and despair. Hope because we have witnessed a growing worldwide outrage against racial discrimination; despair because we have also witnessed some of the most horrendous examples of man's inhumanity to man. In a world that has produced the wonders of satellite communication and laser surgery one third of humanity still suffers daily from poverty. Entire peoples have become victims of genocide and "ethnic cleansing."

But a time of crisis is not just a time for tears. It gives us an opportunity, indeed it throws down the challenge—to choose wisely or to choose rashly. You who are our youth, our pride and our future, face that challenge now. Do you choose the road to further violence and injustice or do you choose the path to a just and peaceful society?...

Since my release from prison, I have come to realize, as I hope you will too, that to face this challenge, a new vocabulary of life is required. You will need to empower, not to exploit each other; to respect, not to degrade each other; to deal with issues that touch both our continents, and not to avoid them. You will need, in short, to create a bridge and bond between the youth of Africa and the youth of America. Whilst the particulars of our histories may have been different, the heart of our struggle, from Selma to Soweto, has been the same...

During my visit to the United States, I found that many of you, both black and white, remain unfamiliar with the diverse peoples of our continent. Few realize the day-to-day realities young people face growing up in Africa. The destruction that apartheid once wrought on our youth is incalculable. The very essence of apartheid—divide and rule—has broken down the fabric of family life and has turned brother against brother and sister against sister.

In the United States, too, hatred, distrust and faction fighting are proving to be a deadly cancer in the growth of the nation, particularly the youth. Students arm themselves to go to school; gangs battle for supremacy in the streets, whilst drug dealers fan the flames. The gun has become the symbol of survival. But the gun only brings further violence and destruction. This may sound strange and ironic, coming from me, when I was part of the leadership which called for the armed struggle. It is precisely because I took part in that decision that I can appeal to you now, to say the time has come for the gun to be silenced, the hatred to be put behind us. Together we must work out a new solution, towards peace, towards reconciliation, and towards justice for all. It will not be easy.

During my lifetime, I have met thousands of young white men and women from both our continents who have risked their lives to end discrimination. I have fought against white domination and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together with equal opportunities in harmony and dignity. This is the challenge to us in ending apartheid in South Africa and this is the challenge to you in ending racism in the United States—to set an example to the whole world. But we cannot do this if we ourselves are divided, if we ourselves have hatred in our hearts, if we ourselves cannot talk to each other.

As the youth of America, you hold a very special place in the future of your country and the rest of the world, particularly the continent of Africa. ... Talk to each other, learn from each other, share with each other. Work together to give the scourge of racial hatred its final blow.

I wish you strength, peace, and success in everything you do. From Selma to Soweto, together we shall overcome!

Mayibuye i-Africa!

Amandla!

Nelson Mandela

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