

## SPEECH BY DAN PLATO

### UBUNTU DINNER

18 July

Today, in great Cities around the world, people are gathering just like us to honour a man who was a light to the world. Mandela belongs to all of humanity, but I want to talk for a bit about how important he is for us here, and now.

So far, Madiba has been unfortunate enough to have spent almost a third of his life here in Cape Town. He was locked up on our island. We like to think that when he stared across the water, this City represented freedom for him.

And our City did in some ways contain the most important political alternative to the horrors of apartheid. Although the coloured vote was lost in 1956, the Cape Liberal Tradition provided an enduring Parliamentary opposition to the Apartheid government, and is something we can be proud of.

But this is not to say that apartheid did any less damage to our City than it did to the rest of South Africa. The tragedy of separate, unequal development stays with us to this day, best represented by the vacant land just down the road here, which was once the vibrant, bustling District Six community.

My greatest hope is that like Mandela, our City can heal itself of the damages done to it by apartheid. For 27 years he was injured in his soul, but he overcame that pain and in doing so became a global symbol of reconciliation who will inspire humanity for many generations to come.

As a City, we bear great wounds: deep scars that divide and hurt our communities. Those scars produce violence and broken homes. They produce Tik addicts. They produce pregnant school-girls. They produce fathers who cannot support their families. They produce a loss of hope.

But we cannot let those scars stay with us forever. The stain of apartheid must be rooted out. We cannot let our dark history determine how we live today. It might seem like a miracle for communities that have been damaged the way ours have to rise up and reclaim their place in the world. But one man showed us how it can be done. One man made a miracle in his heart. And now we must do the same.

Mandela is an old man. Most of those who, like him, grew up in the 1920s and 1930s are dead, and of those that remain, many live in desperate poverty. They could never imagine the stature that is carried by this one particular old man. Because I believe that our society does not give old people the respect that they deserve.

I want to take a moment to honour our elders, the men and woman who bear the wisdom of history. In South Africa, we have very good reasons to be suspicious of history. But if we do not learn its lessons, we will repeat it. We cannot ignore what has happened to us. We must confront it, and be reconciled. Our old people can help us do that, and in particular, this one old man, our great hero, our example, our miracle. Madiba.