

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY DR JOSHUA CASTELLINO, National University of Ireland, Galway, on 27 June 2003, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on MINISTER KADER ASMAL

A Sheánsailéar, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle:

It is with great pleasure that I introduce Minister Kader Asmal to you today. In many ways Minister Asmal is already well known in Irish circles. He taught law at Trinity College in Dublin for over twenty years, served as Dean of the Faculty of Arts (Humanities) there and is a leading scholar in his field. For these reasons alone he is already fully meritorious of this award today. But I would suggest that we look deeper into the work of Minister Asmal.

He is the epitome of the role that lawyers and legal academics can play in the process of social change. His tenure in Ireland was one where he, along with his wife Louise, contributed hugely to the great anti-apartheid awareness and consciousness that swelled to a mass civil sentiment and provided great succour to those living under the disgraceful Pretoria regime.

History will probably identify Minister Asmal along with Justice Sachs as the founding fathers of the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution. This is an honour bestowed on a select few: people who provide leadership and vision in the turbulent times at the birth or rebirth of a state.

The Constitution of a state is one of its most significant legal documents. It reflects the ethos of the state, the struggle for the rule of law and independence, and includes a vision for the future. South Africa's turbulent times and the long struggle for change is well documented. The scale of human rights violations and the fundamentally flawed principles that underpinned the previous regime are also well revealed.

Many sterling personalities were forged in the freedom struggle of that nation. Mobilising behind former President Mandela, a recent recipient of this very honour, was a team of highly motivated, skilled and committed individuals. Each of these played a significant role in the most famous struggle for independence in the world. Minister Asmal was in the vanguard of this movement.

Building a nation is vastly different from struggling for independence. Minister Asmal's legal experience has been invaluable in the rebuilding of the new state. Having gained strong qualifications in law he has been called to the Bar in England

and Ireland as well as in South Africa where he served as Advocate of the Supreme Court of South Africa.

Many would rest; content in their contribution. But while the weary settled down to enjoy the fruits of the struggle, Minister Asmal geared up for a very different battle: that of creating a rights-based architecture for his old nation but young state.

He stood for election on the ANC's national list, and became a Member of Parliament. In so doing he demonstrated his popularity and esteem among South Africans and the high regard of his fellow luminaries. Most of all, it revealed his own commitment to the transition from a racist regime to one based on universal suffrage.

As Minister of Education the work of Kader Asmal has come a full circle. It has been a long, arduous journey from when he first served as schoolteacher in apartheid South Africa in 1955. The journey has taken him to the UK where he received his undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications at the London School of Economics, and to King's Inn in London. He arrived in our midst in Ireland and honed his legal and pedagogic skills with a popular tenure at Trinity College Dublin. While here, his campaigning embedded the South African struggle in the Irish national psyche. But when called, he returned to put his diverse skills at the service of his fledgling state.

Minster Asmal, this is a gesture of our appreciation for your work. Your many roles have touched lives and contributed to immense progress. You have battled tremendous odds but have not compromised on your integrity and value systems. You are cherished in Ireland; and your many friends are here to toast you today. We know that despite your tremendous achievements your most significant contribution is perhaps still to come: that of building an educational system in South Africa that will enable a new generation of South Africans to deal with the tremendous wrongs perpetrated in their name and against the vast majority of them.

For some it seems the challenges never end: but looking back at your contribution so far, we cannot help believe that you are ideal for your new role. Towards that aim we here in Galway wish you the very best of luck, confident in your knowledge, integrity and commitment to social change and the promotion of human rights.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis, hunc meum filium quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo totique Academiae.