

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen; students, staff, visitors, and esteemed guests.

This morning I have the honour of welcoming each and every one of you to the Fourth Annual UWC Africa Week. This week is a crucial element when considering what this school is all about.

Built out of the oppression and racial discrimination found under the apartheid regime in South Africa, Waterford Kamhlaba was founded as a refuge for all those who did not want to conform to the strict regulations of the South African government; it was founded as a safe haven for those who knew that race was no more significant than a simple measure of the amount of melanin in a person's skin; it was founded so that the apartheid government could finally see that this is the way of the future.

In front of me today I see students of all races, cultures, ethnic backgrounds, and nationalities; students of different sexualities, religious beliefs, and socio-economic backgrounds. This is the beauty of UWC, and the beauty which UWC Africa Week 2018 strives to explore; to enhance; to celebrate.

On the 16th of June, 1976, the high-school students of Soweto, a township in southern Johannesburg, led a massive uprising against the racist apartheid regime, and now, 42 years later, on the eve of the anniversary of this uprising, we the African Youth have the opportunity to discover ourselves as agents of change.

We must unleash our potential and join the struggle against global discrimination and oppression, as we proudly celebrate the beauty of being African, appreciate the billions of people living here, and wonder at this continent, which we have the privilege of calling "home."

Each year, the Africa Week Lead Team, consisting of eight IB students, encourages the school to come up with an appropriate theme for that year, which provides us with an avenue through which we can explore all the nuances of the African diaspora. This year, we have chosen the theme to be “Africa Unbound.”

When you try to work out what “Africa Unbound” means, it may not be so obvious... “Unbound” seems to suggest a never-ending entity, so you may think of things like uncapped Wifi, bottomless coke, or Trevor Noah’s jokes. However, as you probably expected, the theme is more serious than that.

The theme seeks to allow Africa to fulfil her potential. It aims to let Africa thrive without the negative impact of global connotations. It attempts to portray Africa as an independent continent, free at last from our troubling past.

Africa is a power that has been contained; a force that has been resisted; a lion that has been chained. UWC Africa Week 2018 hopes to let Africa break out of its constraints, break through the resistance, and break free of its chains.

We are the richest motherland, and should rightfully be the most powerful continent in the world, but this is not the case. Africa remains a continent plagued by poverty, malnutrition, war, and corruption. Why is this?

After the Berlin Conference in 1884, the major European powers set out to colonise the vast majority of countries in Africa. This parasitic relationship prompted Europe to become the economic, political, and military powerhouse of the world, while leaving Africa in ever-increasing levels of hardship and perpetual cycles of poverty.

When Britain and the other European nations released their hold on their colonial empires, the world thought that colonialism was over. The reality is that African people, governments, and economies, remain bound and enslaved by international aid, donor support, and increasing debt.

Unbind Africa from these shackles and what do you get?

Imagine an Africa without poverty; without war; without corruption; where our rich cultures and traditions are not dismissed as a display of our supposedly uncivilised nature; where our diverse people do not regard one another with mistrust and enmity; where our flaws do not define us.

In the words of Donald Kaberuka, a Rwandan economist and the former president of the African Development Bank, “Africa wants to grow itself out of poverty.” “Africa Unbound” challenges Africans to transform Africa. Is this an unrealistic dream? A naïve wish? A fruitless effort?

Maybe. Maybe not. But who knows; it’s worth a try. Now let’s go realise the pride in being African.

Thank you.