



UNIVERSIDADE
NOVA
DE LISBOA

CERIMÓNIA DE DOUTORAMENTO ***HONORIS CAUSA*** **DR. DENIS MUKWEGE**

DISCURSO DO REITOR

Prof. Doutor João Sàágua

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DOCTOR HONORIS CAUSA: DR. DENIS MUKWEGE

It is certainly a day to remember when a University, and an academic community, has the opportunity to properly express its gratitude and appreciation for the exceptional work of an extraordinary person.

A man that combines the noblest set of values with a unique amount of courage to fight sexual violence as a weapon of war, and whose impactful actions and endless efforts makes us believe that even in the most hopeless places there can be real life heroes.

A doctor who uses his hands to mend what others viciously destroyed.

An activist that, despite being constantly threatened, continuously sheds light on the atrocities committed in the Democratic Republic of Congo and other war-affected countries, and that is not afraid to speak up against the impunity of the crimes perpetrated, more often than not, by those in power.

Ladies and gentlemen, today we are here to honor the life and work of Dr. Denis Mukwege.

His outstanding commitment to the fight for human rights has saved many lives and given back the dignity to most of them.

Dr. Mukwege believes that victims have the potential to turn their suffering into power and become agents of positive change in society. However, in his view, first it is critical to provide sexual violence victims with the necessary physical and psychological rehabilitation. Then, comes the financial compensation for the atrocities committed to help them start

a new life with dignity. And, it goes without saying, it is crucial to ensure that the perpetrators of such abuses are brought to justice.

This inspirational and very hands-on approach to pain and trauma pursued for more than 20 years by Dr. Mukwege has given him wide recognition and respect within the international community and has granted him several prizes and awards across the globe, from which I will mention only last year's award of Nobel Peace Prize.

However, Dr. Mukwege's extraordinary actions have come with a price in his own personal life. The constant threats to his life and to those around him, have forced him to live secluded in his hospital, under the protection of the United Nations Peacekeepers, and with limited contact with the outside world.

A sacrifice that has kept him alive and has allowed him to carry on with his great mission, which begins in the operating room but does not end simply when the victims have enough strength to stand on their own. It is a long-lasting bond that goes beyond the medical practice and often includes the individual empowerment of the victim.

As a matter of fact, this kind of violence has an impact that goes beyond the traumatic effect on the victim: it is also an attack on the victim's family, their values and their dignity, and it easily demoralizes and destabilizes an entire community.

Sadly, this type of violence has never stopped taking place and it never will until governments and international institutions decide to take real actions to address the causes of such violence. As Dr. Mukwege said in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, *"it's not just perpetrators of violence who are responsible for their crimes; it is also those who choose to look the other way."*

During the last one hundred years, violence against women has been a shameful war strategy in many parts of world, and not just in Democratic Republic of Congo. In wars like the World War II, the Vietnam War, the Bosnian War, and in countries like Peru, Cambodia, Rwanda, Haiti, Liberia, and others, rape has often been used as a way to exert power and terrorize, to humiliate and dominate victims and their community. More recently still, extremist groups in Iraq use sexual slavery of women and young girls to raise funds to finance their Jihad.

These crimes against humanity must be stopped and definitely cannot remain unpunished. In fact, they make us wonder how humanity can still behave in such a savage, cruel and perverse way, and we may even question our faith in the goodness of individuals. Then, people like Dr. Mukwege come along and restore our hope in humanity.

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My final remark is, of course, about the great significance that this ceremony has for Nova University. But I will start by quoting Dr. Mukwege's own words: *"by the absence of the rule of law, the collapse of traditional values, and the reign of impunity, particularly for those in power. Rapes, massacres, torture, widespread insecurity and **a lack of education** create a spiral of unprecedented violence"*. (end of quotation)
Here the connection between lack of education and what should go with it - values and rule of law - with unreasonable violence is particular clear: without adequate education, violence finds a fertile terrain to irrupt.

NOVA University is a Portuguese public institution that aims to be a global and civic university and to have a significant positive impact on society.

Accordingly, we foster an education that promotes inclusion instead of segregation:

- an education that builds on the richness of diversity and freethinking, from the most varied cultural backgrounds and into the most diversified areas of knowledge;
- an education that is designed to raise successful professionals, but most of all citizens with a strong sense of democracy, justice and active solidarity, who can ultimately make a difference in this rapidly changing world.

The only battles that we, as a University, engage in are, then:

- the battle for knowledge creation and dissemination, and against ignorance and prejudice;
- the battle for mutual respect and the flourishing of humanistic values;
- the battle for a more developed and harmonious society; and
- the battle for a more prosperous, fairer and sustainable world.

These are all battles for peace and for a better world, and in these battles we are 'brothers in arms' with Dr. Mukwege; but he certainly is a role model for NOVA.

Ladies and Gentlemen, today we honor not just the doctor, but also the activist, the hero, the humanist. A man who fills our hearts with gratitude and makes us very proud; a man that inspires us with his work and his life.

An example for all of us, from now on, a distinctive member of the NOVA University academia and, I dare say, a dear member of NOVA University family.

Dear Dr. Mukwege, by accepting the Doctor Honoris Causa from our University let me stress that we praise, not only your exceptional actions against violence but also all the victims and all the women whose lives have been restored and who now stand beside you in the fight for peace and justice.

Today is a unique day for Nova University, and a very happy one.

Denis Mukwege, on behalf of NOVA University, thank you very much!

Carcavelos, 27th May, 2019