

20th Mandeville Lecture, 9 June 2016

Speech by Rector Magnificus Professor Huibert Pols

Ladies and gentlemen,

In 1906 the government of the South African province of Transvaal required all Asian men to wear a special pass, a policy that soon led to strong protests. Leader of the protest movement was a young Indian lawyer who had arrived in South Africa a decade earlier. He organized peaceful manifestations in which the hated passes were burned. The name of that lawyer was Mahatma Gandhi. Perhaps you know the scene from the movie by Richard Attenborough dramatizing these events. In that scene, Gandhi was quoted as saying:

We do not seek conflict. We know the strength of the forces arrayed against us, know that because of them we can only use peaceful means -- but we are determined that justice will be done!

Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the Bernard Mandeville Foundation, I welcome you to the 20th Mandeville Lecture. During this ceremony, we will award an honorary doctorate to a woman whose life and work has been dominated by justice. A special welcome therefore to Dr Navi Pillay, we are very glad that you have accepted the invitation to receive this honorary doctorate and to deliver this year's Mandeville Lecture.

Mahatma Gandhi's successful strategy of nonviolent resistance and opposition of racist policies in South Africa is called *Satyagraha*, which means holding onto the truth, no matter what, a model which paved the way for South Africans like Nelson Mandela and Navi Pillay. They also shared his community spirit, his sense of righteousness and his understanding that the law can be changed if you persist. Today Erasmus University honours this bold human rights advocate for her lifelong fight against inequality, injustice and violence perpetrated against vulnerable groups, including women, anti-apartheid activists and political prisoners, like Mandela.

Like Gandhi, Navi Pillay has shown great personal courage - and like her illustrious fellow campaigner, she has never been afraid to speak her mind. Both broke new legal and historical ground: Gandhi was the first advocate for people of colour to be admitted to the Supreme Court in South Africa, Navi Pillay was the first woman of colour to establish her own law firm in the sixties, in a country ruled by the apartheid regime. Another remarkable similarity between the two is that they became embroiled in the same category of legal cases. They both had a position within the law, but simultaneously lobbied against it. Navi Pillay, in short, ladies and gentlemen, is a trailblazer for human rights law. Or, as she called herself while being UN High Commissioner, 'the voice of victims everywhere'.

For the first time, a formal honorary doctorate is being awarded on the occasion of the Mandeville Lecture. It is a token of appreciation for significant social achievements and it also shows the deep societal roots of this university, which was founded by Rotterdam-based entrepreneurs more than a century ago. Through our research and education, we too have and continue to contribute to society. That means reaching out to partners outside the walls of this university. For example, this Mandeville Lecture is the conclusion of Rotterdam Talent Week, which we have organized together with the city of Rotterdam.

In her lecture, Navi Pillay will address the challenges of the ongoing refugee crisis. Rotterdam, being a city of migration and diversity, is a very fitting location for this speech. Erasmus University is also one of the most diverse universities in the Netherlands. And for us, the message of refugees hits home. Just last October, more than 200 of them found shelter here on our campus – a great achievement by all concerned. I very much look forward to the speech of Dr Pillay and her views on these issues.

Now, I now would first like to invite dr Pillay to the stage, as well as prof Karin Arts and prof Kristin Henrard to deliver the laudatio.

Thank you.