

**Remarks by Advocate Vasu Gounden, Founder and
Executive Director, on the Occasion of the 30th
Anniversary of the African Centre for the
Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD),
Chief Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre,
Durban, South Africa, 13 November 2022**

Your Excellency, Nomusa Dube-Ncube, Premier of KwaZulu-Natal,

Your Excellency, Domitien Ndayizeye, Former President of the Republic of Burundi

Your Excellency, Joyce Banda, Former President of the Republic of Malawi

**Your Excellency, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Former Deputy President of the
Republic of South Africa**

**Your Excellency, Prof Eddy Maloka, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the African
Peer Review Mechanism**

Mama Graca Machel and the Trustees of ACCORD

Excellencies and esteemed guests...

It is today cliché to quote the Father of our Nation, Tata Nelson Mandela, but I think that this is a befitting occasion to remind us of what Tata Madiba said,

“I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can only rest for a moment, for with freedom come responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not ended.”

Excellencies and Esteemed Guests

Today is a moment for us to rest, to celebrate, to look back at our glorious past and to know that we too have made mistakes, we too have sometimes faltered but to know that in those missteps lays the lessons from which our wisdom rises.

Today, as I look over the vista, I see that despite all our best efforts, tomorrow is a higher mountain to climb...we cannot rest...we the people in this room...the Panel of Wise Elders, the Peace and Security Council (PSC), African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), Women, Youth, NGOs, we influence the decision makers on our continent... we shape what happens every day on our continent...and today we know that there is a higher mountain in front of us, a mountain with greater challenges and more dangerous pathways. We will need renewed energy, we will need to turn our anger about the present into our passion for the future, and we will need to innovate and produce new tools... this is ACCORD's complimentary framework for security, disaster management, and humanitarian protection...several years in the making and today battle ready to take on the colossal mountain that confronts us.

But today...is a time to celebrate...

I have been privileged and humbled to have been mentored by the best that humanity could offer and I have been privileged to have been allowed to mentor many young women and men who I am proud to say are today far larger in experience, expertise and stature than myself!

Many people ask me what has led to the success of ACCORD...and I say without hesitation...providence, people and passion!

Let me start with the most important people who shaped my life. I grew up under a Marxist father and a highly spiritual mother...they shaped my political and spiritual approach to life. As many of you know my father, who passed away last year at the age of 94, was a huge influence on my life...jailed for his beliefs and honoured with a State National Order and a Provincial State Funeral...he died with few possession but an abundance of integrity.

They say to be successful you must find the right life partner...my wife Vanessa...whom I met at University while I was already steeped in the political struggle of our country, has been my conscience throughout...a sounding board with a moral compass...and while I travelled the world she took care of our home and raised our children...I thank you Vanessa.

Excellencies...an idea is only an idea until somebody believes in it. While studying in Washington DC in late 1989 I shared the idea of ACCORD with some people...two people who believed in the idea and nurtured it and funded it were Dave Petersen from the National Endowment for Democracy, and the late Bill Drake from the National Institute for Dispute Resolution in Washington DC.

Back home in 1991 I carried out a series of multi-party consultations with key political leaders, including Musa Zondi of the IFP, then National Party Minister Kobie Coetzee, Blade Nzimande of the SACP, Patricia de Lille then with the PAC and many others. A key meeting was with my longstanding mentor, friend and comrade, former Deputy Minister Aziz Pahad...on hearing of the idea he took me to the then Head of the ANC's International Relations Department, Thabo Mbeki, who instinctively said... go to the five historically black universities and ask the Principals to be your Trustees. That started a lifelong bond with Professors Bengu, Gerwel, Nkuhlu, Manganyi and Reddy....and so ACCORD was born.

Since then I have been privileged to work with an amazing team, and some of them must be recognised today. Starting with the Trustees...Professor Reddy gave us our first office, Professor Nkuhlu, the first black chartered Accountant in SA and former economic Advisor to former President Mbeki, has overseen our finances together with Sias de Kock, another Chartered Accountant...all three are always on the other end of the telephone ready to assist...all of our Trustees, including Professor Bengu, the late Professor Jakes Gerwel, and the late Ambassador Billy Modise - diplomat par excellence...all of them have been nothing short of supportive...we work as a team with one vision but a clear separation of duties!

The Management of ACCORD, starting with... Karthi Govender...a lifelong trusted friend...a founding staff member of ACCORD who, while I went around the world growing ACCORD's network and reputation...he built ACCORD's infrastructure...more disciplined and attentive to detail than myself...I could not have built ACCORD without his contribution in those early years.

Our longstanding Deputy Director, Jerome Sachane, who sadly cannot be here today due to family commitments ...was a tower of strength...people always ask how did you survive for 28 years as a team...and I say simple...respect...he respected that I was his Executive Director and I respected that he was older than me...we met almost every day when we were not travelling at the coffee shop down the road for an hour...shared a sandwich and had a frank discussion on where we thought each other went wrong...priceless days.

We have returned clean audits every single year using only the four global accounting firms...that team is led by Sunitha and her two colleagues Jerushnee and Kavita...all three Accountants...run a very tight ship. Sunitha, a steady, trusted and prudent hand with deep institutional history has been there for 27 years...and has nurtured and leads a competent admin team.

Everybody knows Hayden Allen...over the years many around the world have asked me who this very efficient person is with such attention to detail...who started as an unpaid intern in 1994 and worked his way to being GM Corporate Affairs...nobody, least of all me, can imagine an ACCORD without Hayden. Highly organised and competent...he is the custodian of brand ACCORD.

Senzo Ngubane, GM Research, started his career with ACCORD, went as a researcher to our National Parliament, then to our Foreign Ministry and is now back at ACCORD for the last ten years...a twenty year association with ACCORD. Quiet, intellectually and politically razor sharp, full of integrity and passion...the quintessential cadre the ANC talks about...and we are proud he has stayed to deliver ACCORD into the top one hundred think tanks globally, and number one in Africa last year.

When you have to deliver multiple projects and manage large teams in a complex environment you need a friendly face and a firm hand, an attention to detail, and at the same time an eye for the bigger picture. Karishma arrived almost twenty years ago as a young programme officer and is now the GM of programmes...I sleep better knowing that the obligations we have to deliver on are in her safe and competent hands.

Pravina Makan-Lakha...left a job as CEO of Early Learning Centres in South Africa to join ACCORD as a Senior Programme Officer...rose to Head of Operations and is now the COO of ACCORD's Development Consulting arm. A skilled manager, great networker and negotiator, she is a passionate women's rights activist, Pravina is today a leading personality in the area of women, peace and security...making ACCORD proud on a global stage.

Excellencies, esteemed guests...in my experience to succeed you must know and acknowledge, at least to yourself, your strengths and weaknesses, and then surround yourself with people that compliment your strengths and weaknesses...and never be afraid to hire someone better than you...you cannot be an expert on everything.

And so if you will bear with me there are some others who need mentioning. Ambassador Welile Nhlapo...known as the encyclopedia of Africa...one of the most distinguished diplomats South Africa has produced, has worked with ACCORD from its inception while he was a government official and has now joined us as Senior Political Advisor...his continued contribution to ACCORD is invaluable.

He introduced me in 1995 to Cedric de Coning, who was at the SA Embassy when Ambassador Nhlapo, who was the first SA Ambassador in Addis...asked Cedric to receive me at the airport for a meeting with the OAU...on the drive into Addis I asked Cedric

what he was doing and he said he was coming home...back to Pretoria.. I asked him if he would join our peacekeeping division and he said "...are you sure you want to hire a white Afrikaaner male at this time"...and I said I do not have a problem and if anybody else does its their problem...I relate this because while we advocated strongly for black empowerment...Tata Madiba called on us to embrace our diversity and build a united nation out of a divided country...Cedric's has been with ACCORD since then and is today one of the leading thinkers on peace and security in Africa, and is shaping the policy debate globally and in Africa...imagine if we lost this Pan African thinker to our own bigotry!

In a similar vein...and I must pause here...so I don't get emotional...Late in 1993 our then Chair, Professor Jakes Gerwel called me and said Vasu I would like you to consider employing Emeritus Professor Jannie Malan...he will be a great addition to the team... Professor Malan retired from ACCORD last year...a unique individual, with a work ethic, discipline, integrity and intellect I have never, and probably will never, encounter in my life...his contribution to ACCORD, Africa and the field of conflict resolution is hard to measure, save to say Africa is richer to have given birth to this great soul! Thank you Tata Jannie

In Addis I met a young Said Djinnit in 1993 when I went to introduce ACCORD to the then Secretary General (SG) Dr Salim Ahmed Salim. First to the SG...there were five NGO leaders that dominated the peace and security discourse in the early days, Binta Diop of FAM, Hassan Ba of Synergy Africa, Ayo Adrinwale of the Africa Leadership Forum, Abdul Mohamed of the InterAfrica Group, and myself. The OAU was then still very State-centric...It was SG Salim Salim who nurtured and mentored us, and created the space for civil society and we must thank him. Said Djinnit went on to become the first Peace and Security Commissioner of the AU and today is an ACCORD Senior Political Advisor and El Ghassim Wane who was an intern at the OAU, and with whom we worked closely with all these years...is today SRSG for the Sahel.

Yvette Ngandu was seconded by ACCORD to the OAU from her initial deployment by the UN...made an enormous contribution to ACCORD even after she went to work with our close partner and my comrade, Professor Eddy Maloka...Today Evette is a ECCAS Commissioner ...and Binta is the AU Envoy on Women...what a journey!

I want to recognise the diversity of ACCORD and ACCORD's contribution to the field, to Africa and to the world. Here is a list of our alumni, all of whom started in junior positions in ACCORD and rose to great heights.

Kemi Ogunsanya	Adviser, Gender Section, Commonwealth, UK
Natacha Kunama	Crisis Prevention Advisor, UNDP, Mali
Zinurine Alghali	Chief, Policy Development Unit: - Peace Support Operations Division (PSOD), African Union Commission
Daniel Forti	Research Fellow at International Peace Institute's Brian Urquhart Center for Peace Operations, New York
Sithole Mbanga	CEO, South African Cities Network, South Africa
Lwazi Mboyi	Chief Executive Officer, Cross Border Road Transport Agency
Kitenge Fabrice Tunda	Mediation & Peacebuilding Officer, Directorate of Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Affairs, Southern African Development Community (SADC)
Paul Nantulya	Research Associate, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, USA
Bezawit Beyene Kefyalew	United Nations Development Programme, Ethiopia
Titi Pitso	Director ELEVARA Elections Services – election expert Africa
Sibusiswe Nkosi	Royal Norwegian Embassy, SA

Over the years we have built strong partnerships with the United States Government, who contributed a \$10 million endowment to ACCORD in 1997...Ambassador Brigety we thank your Government and we look forward to our continuing partnership. The Government of Norway has been a partner for 25 years and continues to support our work very generously...Ambassador Gjemund Saether we thank your Government. The People of Sweden, through their Government, have been a partner for over 20 years and we thank them through Ambassador Hakan Juholt. Since the arrival of Ambassador Fionnuala Gilseanwe have developed a growing partnership with the Government and People of Ireland. and Ambassador we thank you for your partnership. We have also had ongoing partnerships with the Governments of South Africa, United Kingdom, Canada, Netherlands, Finland, the European Union, and the United Nations.

At the beginning I said four people shaped my life and I spoke about three. The fourth person I met in 1995 at the OAU headquarters in Addis Ababa, Since then I have had the privilege to watch her, listen to her, read her writings and learn from her. Always elegantly

dressed, calm even in a storm, passionate about the causes she believes in, politically astute, with a sixth sense that only comes from years of experience. Don't second guess her or assume that she has not completely grasped the context and substance of your discussion...you do it at your own peril.

A liberation fighter, education minister, children and women rights advocate....a global speaker with an abundance of energy to travel across time zones that is hard to imagine. At ACCORD we have been very privileged to have been led by our mother, Mum Graca, who leads from the front. Very engaged in every Board meeting making sure that we stay true to our vision, yet responsive to the needs on the continent. Apart from her intellectual leadership, Mum Graca is a caring person who, despite her own challenges, takes time with a human touch. When my father died Mum Graca called every day to speak and console not only me but also my siblings, and when Senzo, our colleague Savannah and I contracted a serious bout of COVID-19 in South Sudan, Mum Graca called everyday to check on how we were doing...not just an intellectual giant, a respected rights advocate, and a global leader, but most of all a caring, compassionate human being... Excellencies, Esteemed Guests, it is my pleasure to call upon my mentor, our leader and the Chair of ACCORD's Board of Trustees, Mum Graca, to deliver her keynote address.