



**Honorary Doctorate Degree Acceptance Remarks by Graça Machel
Leiden University --- February 8, 2021**

Professor Ton Liefwaard,

- Vice-Dean for Education
- Professor of Children's Rights
- UNICEF Chair in Children's Rights

I thank you so much for that kind introduction.

I also extend my gratitude to:

- the Faculty Board of Leiden Law School and
- the College of Deans of Leiden University for your gracious decision to confer an honorary doctoral degree upon me.

I humbly accept this recognition with deep gratefulness and my sincere appreciation. And as I am so warmly welcomed into the Leiden University family, I am compelled to couple my gratitude with a challenge to us today.

As we enter into a new year, we find ourselves at the cusp of a new beginning—not just to a calendar, academic year, or a commemorative season of the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action—but a novel beginning to the way we think about the human condition and an unprecedented manner in which we must operate to ensure our own collective survival.

Like an earthquake, COVID has shaken us to our core and left us the task to rebuild and reengineer our societies from its rubble. It has signalled the urgent need for us to lift the weight of the social ills that, for far too long, women and children have been shouldering, and to close the social inequities that have deepened to devastating depths.

I am so pleased to be a part of this convening today, as Leiden University is an internationally recognized research university and Leiden Law School has developed itself into an international knowledge centre of human rights. I know I am in good company when I say that the world needs its most brilliant minds to dedicate themselves to figuring out how we sustainably rebuild our world into a much more just and equitable one.

Right here at Leiden University, you are well positioned to lead a movement of stellar legal minds, social scientists, and research bodies to start anew in our challenging context and identify ways in which our economies, our schools, our health and food systems, as well our families and communities can recover from the devastation we are experiencing and emerge more resilient, vibrant and equal.



And so, I challenge you today to dedicate your expertise and all the resources at your disposal to mounting a response equal to the magnitude of our task. Do produce research and propose strategies of new systems and ways of being that will enable us to heal individually and collectively, and repair our brokenness. And as you do so, I encourage you to meaningfully put women and children at the heart of your scholarship. Their engagement is key to reversing the unhealthy power imbalances we have lived with for far too long, and essential to redesigning human relationships into one of mutual respect and equity for us all.

Please utilize your intellectual capital and build coalitions amongst your international networks of other centres of excellence—in both the Global North and the Global South-- to define for us the architecture of a society that we need to build so that we live together—healthy and safe -- as equals and fully embracing all our rich diversity.

Please accept my heartfelt gratitude once again for the tremendous honour of this honorary degree and look forward to walking hand in hand with you as we meet the many challenges that lay before us in rebuilding as a human family.

I thank you.