Good Evening

I am delighted to be with you at this graduation and awards ceremony today. I am particularly humbled by the honour bestowed upon me to say something, and share this amazing day with you.

I am therefore deeply indebted to the organisers of this memorable event for the opportunity afforded me. No doubt, there exists an impressive pool of scholars here, who are able to make better contributions than I can. I hope you find something of interest in my modest address.

Let me start by congratulating the graduates. Indeed, your hard work has culminated in this momentous occasion. The graduation ceremony remains one of the most memorable events in anybody’s life. This comes at the end of a long journey of academic and social preparations.

This ceremony tells you that you are now prepared to begin your life to achieve your life purpose.

I also wish to congratulate the Cape Peninsula University of Technology for releasing into the labour market, the 501 graduates gathered here today.

I have also been reliably informed that this year CPUT will be graduating 7160 students 84 Masters and 12 Doctorates I note with gratification that these students have pursued programs in key areas central to the country’s economic development priorities and scarce and critical skills in line with the objectives of the National Skills strategy. This is a remarkable achievement as these are the cardinal drivers of our vision.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The mandate of universities remains that of teaching, development and research. However, innovation, and knowledge incubation centres are increasingly being viewed as critical links with end-users. This also provides opportunities for research application to solve societal problems through extension work and other outreach activities. To this end, the role of research cannot be overemphasised. I have to note that this University has established a division for Research, to encourage the production of academic and applied research in the
business sector. This is true for a university that is serious about breaking new ground and changing the business scene. And Cape Peninsula University of Technology is that university. I note as a response to the growing demand for human resource development in our country, the Cape Peninsula University of Technology is in the forefront of contributing to the pool of highly qualified learners which will address the scarce and critical skills challenges in the country and in particular, in the wholesale and retail sector. As one of its initiatives to partner and collaborate with universities to encourage academic and applied research production, the W&RSETA has established the Retail Chair of Retail in partnership with your university which it is funding to the tune of R14m.

Through its Retail Department, the university will provide the Sector with “a pool of national and international graduates that meets the sector’s demographic profile and developmental needs to develop their businesses including expansion into Africa”.

Vice-Chancellor, this is the way it should be. I say this because we in the W&RSETA have noted that in our noble efforts to create more opportunities for South Africans to access higher education, there will be greater demand for skills development in the retail sector. I wish to encourage you to continue on this path and increase your efforts in mainstreaming the education and skills development of young people in our country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me take this opportunity to underscore the need for each university to establish partnerships with the SETA to ensure a pool of suitably qualified and experienced entrants for the sector and improve skills levels of the current workforce in the sector. In addition, universities are expected to continuously try to benchmark with other universities not only within the region but also globally. This will definitely ensure the global competitiveness of our graduates.

Furthermore, in order to increase access to higher education and training institutions, the W&RSETA has been in the forefront of providing bursaries to poor and deserving students at institutions of higher learning in the country. Given the large number of students who require financial assistance in our country, the W&RSETA has offered 3457 students to the tune of R150m. and an additional 486 bursaries to employed learners in the wholesale and retail sector. I am very happy to report that approximately 940 students completed their studies last year.

There are very few universities including TVET colleges which offer Retail Qualifications in our country. In fact there are 6 including the new established Northern Cape University. I am also aware that many needy and deserving students are also enrolled in the Department of Retail at the CPUT, from national diploma level to Doctoral degree level. The W&RSETA has funded 153 students to the tune of R7.4m this year. This number excludes 170 students that have applied and been accepted for the new bursaries which will amount to R10 million during this year alone.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Turning again to the graduates, I am glad to be the one to remind you that you are because you took the opportunity to walk through life eager and open to self-improvement and that which is going to best help you evolve, because that is really why you chose to study, to evolve as human beings—to grow into more of yourselves, always moving to the next level of understanding, the next level of compassion and growth.
So it’s true. You may take several paths that end up on what might be a dead end for you at the moment. But this is what I also know for sure. You must trust in the words of my favourite Bible verse that say: “And know the lord will lead you to a rock that is higher than thou.” Every one of us has a calling. There is a reason why you are here. I know this for sure. And that reason is greater than any degree. It’s greater than any salary you will earn. And it’s greater than anything anybody can tell you that are you supposed to do. Your real job is to find out what the reason is and get about the business of doing it.

Your calling isn’t something that somebody can tell you about. It’s what you feel. It’s a part of your life force. It is the thing that drives you and energizes you. And nobody can tell you what that is. I’m convinced that by now You know it inside yourself.

And sometimes, sometimes you will find out that you are employed to doing the things you are not supposed to do. So don’t expect the perfect job that defines your life’s work or is aligned to your qualifications to come along next week. If that happens, take the blessing and run with it. But, if not, be grateful to be on the path where you eventually want to live. Abide in the space of gratitude, because this is what I know for sure. -that only through being grateful for how far you’ve come in your past can you leave room for more blessings to flow. Blessings flow in the space of gratitude. Everything in your life is happening to teach you more about yourself so even in a crisis, be grateful. When disappointed, be grateful. When things aren’t going the way you want them to, be grateful that you have sense enough to turn it around.

Today I look at you—the graduates—and I see that you have come away with something. You have emerged from your situations more resilient and knowing that you are empowered to pursue your dreams. And your resilience and spirit have given us more than we could ever give you, which leads me to the lesson I wish to share with you—the one about finding happiness—which we could talk about all day, but I know you have other important things to do. But this lesson will make no sense if I don’t explain it with reference to a poem that Gwendolyn Brooks wrote for her children called: “Speech to the Young : Speech to the Progress-Toward.” And she says at the end, “Live not for battles won. / Live not for the-end-of-the-song. / Live in the along.” By this she is saying: you have to live for the present. You have to be in the moment. Whatever has happened to you in your past has no power over this present moment, because life is now. But I think the she’s also saying: be a part of something. Don’t live for yourself alone. This is what I know for sure; in order to be truly happy, you have to stand for something larger than yourself, because life is a reciprocal exchange. To move forward you have to give back. Especially to our country which has contributed to your development. And to me, that is the greatest lesson of life. To be happy, you have to give something back. I know you know that, because that’s a lesson that is woven into the very fabric of humanity. It’s a lesson that your education has enhanced in you. You have channelled your energy into an act of growth and development. So give back to your community and your country!

I must remind you that, you have the opportunity to use your education to do good. I hope you strive for more than just the good feeling that service provides, because I know this for sure, that doing good actually makes you better. So, whatever field you choose, if you operate from the paradigm of service, I know your life will have more value and you will be happy. Use your job as a platform to serve others.

So, I know this—that whether you’re an actor, you offer your talent in the way that most inspires art. If you’re an anatomist, you look at your gift as knowledge and service to healing. Whether you are a cleaner, you embrace your job as you would your home. Whether you’ve been called, like many of you here today getting certificates and other accolades, if you choose to offer your skills and talent in service, when you choose the paradigm of service, looking at life through that paradigm, it turns everything you do from a job into a gift.
Know this, you have enriched yourselves in countless ways. There’s no better way to make your mark in the business world and to share that abundance with others. My constant prayer for you is that you allow yourselves to be used in service for the greater good.

So, I wish to end with one of my favourite quotes from Martin Luther King. Dr. King said, “Not everybody can be famous. But everybody can be great, because greatness is determined by service.” He said, “You don’t have to have a university degree to serve. You don’t have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You don’t have to know about Plato or Aristotle to serve. You don’t have to know Einstein’s theory of relativity to serve. You don’t have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace and a soul generated by love.”

So, I know all of you have the heart and the mind to go with it. And it’s up to you to decide, really, how you will now use those skills? You’ve got the certificate, so go out and get the lessons, because I know great things are sure to come.

May your service be the highlight of this day—your graduation day.

I thank you for listening to me.