



**Ripples of Hope:
Robert F. Kennedy's Historic 1966 Visit to South Africa
- its significance then ... and now**

**Dialogue on Development and Rights:
Dialogue 5**





Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centres of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.

R F Kennedy "Ripple of Hope speech. UCT South Africa 1966

Dialogue 5 of the Development and Rights Series took us back into history and forward into the future. Fifty years ago Kennedy's influential visit to South Africa reminded those involved in the struggle against apartheid that they were not alone; leaders and supporters in the outside world paid tribute to South African activists and linked their struggle to worldwide movements for freedom, equality and civil rights. Today, not only South Africans but also all citizens of the world continue to be challenged in striving towards equality and social justice in the interests of development and the entrenchment of human rights.

The Dialogue took place in front of a large audience which included many notable South Africans who lived the struggle, as well as a sizeable contingent of the Kennedy family. Active audience members shared proceedings beyond the venue through Twitter.



US Embassy SA @USEmbassySA · May 30
#Ripples2016 #DevDialogues To know we had friends outside of this prison was inspiring to South Africans - Fmr Pres Motlanthe.

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Bridge Project @BridgeProjectSA · May 30
@KerryKennedyRFK we have the same goal today as when my father visited in '66 and that's to learn #ripples2016 #devdialogues

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775 posts which included #ripples2016/#devdialogues
214 individual accounts tweeted using that hashtag
2 442 193 unique accounts were reached
7 400 959 impressions for the two accounts.
#ripples2016 also trended in South Africa during the event

'Speak truth to power'

Held in the Wits Theatre, an innovative feature of the Dialogue was the enactment of a series of monologues on human rights abuses throughout the globe. These were delivered by four actors from the Wits Drama for Life Theatre Company, who took on a number of different personas during the performance. The monologues were excerpts from Kerry Kennedy's book *Speak truth to power: human rights defenders who are changing our world*.



Drama for Life actors delivering monologues on the Wits stage

Kerry Kennedy, daughter of R F Kennedy and president of the Kennedy Centre for Justice and Human Rights, set the scene for the drama by describing the excerpts as a reminder that we need to continue to ‘... fight for rights on the ground for real people in real time’. She quoted a holocaust survivor’s vision - ‘My dream for the future is that your children won’t relive my past’ - as an inspiration for the curriculum linked to the book, which aims to educate and inform people about the experiences of those who face discrimination because of race, gender, beliefs or orientation.

Ranging across the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa in a variety of contexts, examples of human rights abuses and marginalisation covered female circumcision, child labour, domestic violence, homophobia, prison conditions, mental illness Each of the compelling and disturbing narratives was told through the voice of the victim, ending with the refrain ‘Speak truth to power’.

‘Speak truth to power’



Drama for Life @Drama_for_Life · May 30

Patrick Gaspard: The arts can be provocative drivers of change #DevDialogue
#Ripples2016 @BridgeProjectSA @USEmbassySA @KerryKennedyRFK

← ↻ 6 ❤️ 2 ...



Thembi Khumalo @tpm1404 · May 30

"We must globalise compassion...Speak Truth to Power" #DevDialogue
#Ripples2016

← ↻ 1 ❤️ 1 ...

The Dialogue Panelists



Patrick Gaspard, United States
Ambassador to South Africa



Kgalema Motlanthe, Former
President of South Africa

The dramatisation was followed by remarks and discussion from the four panelists, chaired by Tawana Kupe, Deputy Vice Chancellor of Wits University pictured below.



Kerry Kennedy, President of
the R F Kennedy Centre for
Justice and Human Rights



Gita Pather, Director of the
Wits Theatre

The battle for the future

In Kennedy's speech to the Wits students in 1966, he charts the battles which need to be fought by all those who value freedom and human rights.

This theme was picked up by Gita Pather, who spoke passionately about inequality as the key moral issue of our time. Her dissection of our current social ills ranged over the power of greed and corruption, and the ways in which poverty and economic inequality undermine the well-being of our democracy.

'What is the battle to which we are all summoned?
It is first a battle for the future
Justice is the second battle to which we are
summoned.
... the third aspect of our battle: to fight for
ourselves as individuals, and for the individuality of
all.'

R F Kennedy

Pather said that we need to change the course we are on: ‘Our battle for the future is a battle for decency, for good to prevail, less about money, more about people, less about preserving borders and more about acknowledging our common humanity.’ She went on to talk about the need for ‘true education’ as the ‘gift of reason’ which enables an engaged citizenry to resist blind subservience to authority, and gives us ‘... freedom to speak, to oppose, to question.’

Patrick Gaspard also looked to the future in his focus on human rights as a key driver for development. He referenced the South African constitution as a guideline for translating rights into reality, and noted that the United States can learn from SA as it still has a long way to go in its own human rights journey. Both countries, he said, have to address corruption, which ‘steals from the future’. Kennedy’s visit in 1966 was one of hope, and we must continue to hope for the betterment of all: ‘Hope is a passion for what is possible’.



Drama for Life @Drama_for_Life · May 30

Gita Pather: Our education needs to be more than just a system, it needs to transform the mind #Ripples2016 #DevDialogue @BridgeProjectSA



US Embassy SA @USEmbassySA · May 30

.@patrickgaspard: "The true impact of Robert Kennedy's 1966 visit appeared not just in SA, but also back home." #DevDialogues #Ripples2016



Addressing the youth

Kgalema Motlanthe reflected on the context in which Kennedy was addressing young students in 1966, and the varied strands within the movements that had led up to that moment. He reminded today’s youth that ‘... the road to peace and stability is strewn with suffering and pain’, and that they should guard against the four dangers of apathy recognised by Kennedy: ‘... the danger of futility, the danger of expediency, the danger of comfort and the danger of timidity.’ Youth must be radical in the sense that they react against stasis: ‘Let them push the envelope. We will only progress as a society, as a country if we innovate and strive for more freedoms. We must guard against transmitting our fears to our young people. Let them be. Tomorrow belongs to them.’

Kerry Kennedy also reflected on how ‘the burden of youth’ is to change the world. This is why youth need role models for moral courage, and why understanding the experiences of those who are victimised is so important. ‘It begins in school – kids are confronted with bullying and other forms of victimisation, and they have to decide whether to stand up to it or go along with it it’s like exercising a muscle...what muscle are we going to exercise? ...how are we going to impart this on to the next generation?’ One of the greatest challenges we face today is hate – and, she pointed out, ‘... there is no country on earth that is better known for overcoming hate than South Africa. I know

people are frustrated with what's happening today and disappointed that SA hasn't achieved more, but don't lose what you got. You know it better than anyone else. Show us how.'



Ambassador Gaspard @patrickgaspard · May 30
"Don't bury the headline. You've given the world an incredible model to overcome hate" @KerryKennedyRFK
#Ripples2016



Shared journeys

The parallels between aspects of the history of civil injustice in the United States and South Africa were touched on by all speakers, as was the acknowledgement that both countries still have a long journey towards achieving the ideal of a just society. We all need to embrace our individual responsibility to join our voices to the common voice of the people in order to move our nations forward – it is this responsibility that Kennedy called ‘the heaviest responsibility of all’ in his Wits speech.

‘This is the heaviest responsibility of all – a burden men have often refused by turning rule and ideology, belief and power, over to an all-powerful state. History is full of peoples who have discovered it is easier to fight than think, easier to have enemies and friends selected by authority than to make their own painful choices, easier to follow blindly than to lead, even if that leadership must be the private choice of a single man alone with a free and skeptical mind. But in the final telling it is that leadership, the impregnable skepticism of the free spirit, untouchable by guns or police, which feeds the whirlwind of change and hope and progress in every land and time.’

R F Kennedy