Dear President Mandela,

The National Commission on Higher Education, while being honoured by its appointment, was deeply conscious of the formidable task of providing the government with policies to restructure fundamentally the higher education sector. Despite the daunting and challenging nature of the work, the Commission found the exercise exhilarating and rewarding. There is a recognition that this sector is a major resource for national development and contributes to the worldwide advancement of knowledge.

South Africa has the most developed and well-resourced system of education and training in Africa. Some of its higher education institutions, programmes and research compare with the best in the world. It is crucial for these strengths to be supported and preserved. Yet the legacy of apartheid has led to the fragmentation of higher education, to discriminatory policies and practices, inequitable allocation of resources and undemocratic governance structures. The consequences are restricted participation of black people, an unplanned and uncoordinated system with no clearly articulated national goals, and an inability to respond meaningfully to the economic and social needs of the majority.

Given the history of the apartheid ideology of exclusivity, the Commission, from its inception, worked through a consultative mode by involving all higher education stakeholders. The constitution of task groups and technical committees, consultative conferences, written submissions, site visits to the provinces and study trips to overseas countries were among the Commission’s key activities in compiling its report.

The transformed higher education system conceptualised by the Commission is consistent with the ideals of our constitution and the goals of the reconstruction and development programme. The Commission believes that this transformed higher education system will support the goals and aims of a number of recently released government policy positions on education and training, science and technology, stimulating economic growth, the labour market, employment equity, etc.

The proposed system is underpinned by the key principles of equity, democratisation, development, quality, academic freedom/institutional autonomy, effectiveness and efficiency. Its three central features are increased participation by a diverse range of constituencies, increased co-operation and more co-ordination between higher education and other social actors and institutions, and greater responsiveness to social and economic needs.
A single co-ordinated system, co-operative governance and goal-directed funding form the core of the transformation framework. In our proposals we are sensitive to the competition for scarce resources and the need to redress past inequalities. This has therefore to be achieved within a framework of affordability. Finally, we have prioritised the key proposals and indicated some broad strategies for transformation of the system.

We sincerely trust that our policy proposals will form a sound and lasting basis for transforming the higher education sector in our country.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr Jairam Reddy
Chairperson

*Prof. Nasima Badsha

*Mr Jon File

Dr Peliwe Lolwana

Prof. Reginald Ngcobo

Mr Bryan Phillips

Dr Rolf Stumpf

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*Mr Brian Figaji

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Dr Daniel Ncayiyana

Me Rahmat Omar

Prof. Hennie Rossouw

*See Appendix 10.7 for alternative views on some of the proposals
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His contribution to higher education policy in South Africa and to the
work of the Commission was considerable, and he will be missed dur-
ing the transformation process.
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