

International Flag Day Speech – Thabang Mnculwane

SRC Societies Liaison and International Students Officer, NWU Potchefstroom Campus

Good morning, Molweni, Dumelang, Bonjour, Jambo, Hallo, and a warm welcome to NWU International Flag Day 2025!

My name is Thabang Mnculwane, and I have the honour of serving as your SRC Societies Liaison and International Students Officer here at the Potchefstroom Campus.

But beyond my title, I stand before you today as someone who has walked the path of international student life. In 2019, I myself was an international student, and soon, I will be embarking again on that journey through an exchange program abroad. So when I speak to you today, I do so not only from this podium—but from lived experience, shared humanity, and deep understanding.

Today, we come together to celebrate more than flags. We celebrate diversity, identity, and unity. The NWU International Flag Day is not just a calendar event—it is a reminder that we are a global university, rooted in Africa but reaching out to the world. It is an intentional reflection of NWU's internationalisation strategy—one that aligns with our pursuit of excellence, our global rankings, and our deep commitment to inclusive education.

This is our visual and symbolic declaration: that every student no matter where they come from belongs here.

Being an international student is beautiful but it's also hard.

It means trying to explain your food in English. It means struggling to register for modules while converting your transcripts from a different system. It means using Google Translate to try and understand a joke—and then still laughing, just to fit in.

It means living in a new country where you're not always sure if you're welcomed, or just tolerated.

Sometimes, it means surviving xenophobic undertones—being called names, being looked at differently. It means missing home, missing your grandmother's food, missing your language, your mosque, your church, your rhythm.

And yet, you wake up, and you rise. You learn. You adapt. You teach others. You become a cultural ambassador—without even meaning to. That's the strength of the international student.

And this is why we say “Home away from home’ because it’s not just a slogan. It’s a need. It’s the hope that while your passport may say you’re foreign, your presence says you belong.

As SRC, my role is not just to plan events. It is to protect that sense of belonging. It is to ensure that no international student gets left behind whether in residences, academics, or legal support. My goal is to redefine integration so that international students are not “included” like guests, but embedded as equals in the full student experience.

And I want to say this from the heart: As student leaders, we are not perfect. We make mistakes. We fall short sometimes. But what makes us proud is that we listen. We reflect. And above all, we work hard to improve. Because every concern raised, every suggestion shared, matters. And that is how we grow—not just as a student leadership, but as a university community.

North-West University has committed itself to growing as a globally competitive institution. Our partnerships with universities across the world, our participation in academic exchange programs, and our drive to welcome international staff and students all form part of this bigger picture.

But strategies alone are not enough.

We must also create a culture of internationalisation. That culture starts here on campus, in lecture halls, in dining rooms, and in residence passages. It starts with you and me.

Now I know what you’re thinking. “This speech was starting to feel like a UN General Assembly!” So let me pause and say this:

If you’ve never eaten Nigerian jollof rice, please do. But be warned it comes with heat and national pride. If you’ve never danced to Congolese rumba, your legs have not lived. And if you haven’t been invited to a South African braai... shame, we must fix that today!

To all international students: We see you. We honour you. We welcome you.

To all local students: Thank you for opening your hearts and your spaces.

To everyone: Let us make NWU not just a place of academic excellence, but a place of human excellence where nobody has to choose between being themselves and fitting in.

Let us walk together not just today under the beauty of our flags but every day under the banner of respect, unity, and hope.

Let's continue to build a university where your name is not mispronounced, your heritage is not misunderstood, and your dreams are not too far from home.

Thank you. Kea leboga. Ngiyabonga. Merci. Gracias. Dankie. Obrigado. Shukran. Asante sana.

Happy NWU International Flag Day