



## Mandela Washington Fellowship Summit

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Leadership for the Future: Resilience and Inclusion

### Building As We Climb: Social Justice Breakout Transcript

#### Speakers

- Samantha Sibanda, 2019 Fellowship Alumna, Zimbabwe
- Nancy Hopkins, Director of Programs, The Presidential Precinct
- Nisha Anand, CEO, Dream Corps
- Abbey Wemimo, Co-Founder, Esusu
- Ambassador Rama Yade, Director of the Africa Center, Atlantic Council
- Thokozile Eulanda Nhlumayo, 2021 Mandela Washington Fellow, South Africa
- Jean Claude Mbonigaba, 2021 Mandela Washington Fellow, Rwanda

#### Session Transcript

**Samantha Sibanda:** My name is Samantha Sibanda, and I'm a Mandela Washington Fellow of 2019. I was at the University of Delaware. I come from Zimbabwe and I'm a disability rights advocate in my country. If I had to share one thing that I learned about the Fellowship, it's that, as a leader, you don't need to have strength in everything, because I remember we took a survey on the "CliftonStrengths". So this really helped me to find out what exactly I'm good at, and if I'm to incorporate other people into my leadership experience, what really should I look for in other people. So I found out about my CliftonStrengths, and I found out how to lead from my strengths. So I accepted that I've got a lot of weaknesses and to incorporate team members who are stronger. So I have really expanded my involvement with people with disabilities. People with disabilities are good leaders. And all they need is a chance to participate in whatever projects that we're doing, not as recipients of charity, but also as leaders really setting the pace, setting up the policies of the organization.

**Nancy Hopkins:** Welcome, everyone to today's session on "Building As We Climb: Leading For Social Justice". We have such a great discussion planned for you and are really looking forward to your questions and your comments. I'm Nancy Hopkins. I'm Director of Programs at the Presidential Precinct here in Charlottesville, Virginia, and we have been a proud Host Institute of the Mandela Washington Fellowship since 2014. We participate in the Leadership and Civic Engagement Track, and I'll be serving as our moderator for the session.

I'd like to extend my special congratulations to all the 2021 Mandela Washington Fellows. You have shown such tremendous leadership and focus during this exciting and intense Fellowship, and the



Summit is really a culmination and a celebration of you. And we cannot wait to see where this leadership journey takes you, and I'd also like to offer my warm greetings to other friends, colleagues, and honored guests who have joined us today. And we are so glad that you are here. I'd also like to welcome our three distinguished panelists here to our virtual stage and get this conversation started: Nisha Anand, the Chief Executive Officer of Dream Corps; Abbey Wemimo, the Co-Founder of Esusu; and Ambassador Rama Yade, Africa Director at the Atlantic Council.

So today, we are going to talk about social justice, which, at its core, means the need for societies to prioritize equal access to economic, political, and social rights, and opportunities. And we all know that issues like race, class, gender, geography, disability, sexual orientation, and other issues are interconnected and overlapping, so we need to consider all of these factors when we talk about rights and opportunities. Powerful social justice movements are intersectional and address the full range of ways the discrimination, oppression, and disadvantage play out in our societies.

Now, the intersectional nature of social justice was really brought to the fore in the global arena in Spring 2020 when the Black Lives Matter movement brought global awareness and attention to the challenges that Black Americans continue to endure here in the United States and it sparked solidarity protests all around the world, including on the continent where people marched and highlighted social justice challenges in their own country context. It really created space to challenge the status quo and to look at the issue of intersectionality and, most importantly, to offer a vision and concrete solutions for change. And I know that many Mandela Washington Fellowship Host Institutes really leaned into this issue, in one way or another, during this year's programming and engaged Fellows around it. So I think this is a great way to continue the conversation.

So let me quickly go over the format for the session: Our panelists will briefly introduce themselves, and then we'll get into some questions. And our panelists will share their views on how a focus on social justice can lead to long-term positive change, then we'll take a few questions from you, our audience. And then close with some brief reflections. So let's turn to each of our panelists to introduce themselves. Nisha, why don't you go first?

**Nisha Anand:** Hi, everyone. Congratulations on the Fellowship, my name is Nisha Anand, and I'm the CEO of Dream Corps. You might hear my giant dog in the background groaning because he just decided it was time to groan. I live in Berkeley, California. I was raised in Atlanta, Georgia. I'm gonna have to yell at him. We'll turn to someone else. I'll get him to settle down.

**Nancy Hopkins:** Thank you, Nisha. Abbey, why don't we turn to you?

**Abbey Wemimo:** Hi, everyone. I'm incredibly delighted to be speaking today, and congratulations on such a great accomplishment. It's such a select group of folks and should be delighted to be part of such an exceptional cohort. My name is Abbey Wemimo, one of the co-founders at Esusu, and just a quick background: Esusu is a company that, essentially, works with low-to-medium income people to

help them establish financial identity and help them build credit scores. The real impetus for me starting Esusu was just due to my mother and I immigrating from Lagos, Nigeria to Minneapolis, Minnesota and we didn't have a credit score. And [we] walked into one of the largest financial institutions to borrow money, were turned away, and went to borrow money at over 400% interest rate from a payday loan lender. In addition to that, my mother pawned my father's wedding ring and a bunch of other jewelry, and that's how we got started in the United States. So I was really inspired by that experience to start the company to essentially make sure, regardless of where anyone comes from, the color of their skin doesn't necessarily determine where they end up in the wealthiest nation the world has ever seen. And we work now with two million rental units in the United States, with over \$2 billion in gross lease volume and it's been a wonderful period of growth. It's such a delight to be here and excited to engage in this thought provoking conversation.

**Nancy Hopkins:** Welcome, Abbey. Back to you, Nisha.

**Nisha Anand:** Thank you sorry about that. As I said, I'm the CEO of Dream Corps. I'm out here in California, so it's quite early. And my dog has just woken up, so I run a social justice national nonprofit called the Dream Corps. We work on criminal justice, climate, and tech equity, bringing more diversity to the tech sector. And we say that we're "closing prison doors and opening doors of opportunity" and, in my lifetime, I've been able to be an outside agitator protesting and working on a variety of causes. I was a young activist, a student activist, in high school and in college. And I've also been working on legislation in DC. So I've seen all different ways for social change to happen. And what I know and why I'm glad to be here is that civil rights and social justice have to include everybody for it to work. Thank you!

**Nancy Hopkins:** Thank you, Nisha. I'll turn the mic over to Ambassador Yade, and Ambassador Yade, since we're among friends, I'm going to call you Rama, if that's okay.

**Ambassador Rama Yade:** Okay, thank you, Nancy. Hi, everyone. Very happy to take part in this tremendous panel. Congratulations for the Mandela [Washington] Fellowship. You choose to focus on social justice today, and it is a very good idea. I am the Director of the Atlantic Council's Africa Center and Senior Fellow for the Europe Center as well. I am also a teacher of African Affairs at the Mohammed Six Polytechnic University in Morocco and at Sciences Po in Paris. Prior to joining the council, I was a consultant for the World Bank advising the institution's on education, youth, human capital, and disability issues in Africa. And my main experience was, over a decade, I have been working for the French government as a Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Human Rights and Deputy Minister for Sports, and then Ambassador to UNESCO for France. I'm very happy to be here because during my whole career I have prioritized human rights, of course women's rights, young people's rights, handicapped persons' rights. I have focused all my action on discriminations so, really, I'm happy to be here. And the Council is an important think tank in Washington, DC that is focused on foreign policy and how we can do the right thing, according to me, how we can do to

improve policies, policy-making decisions on human rights, and that is very important to me. So that's why I'm so happy to be here today. Thank you!

**Nancy Hopkins:** Great, thank you for those introductions and for giving us some insight into the social justice focus and lens through which you tackle your work, and also a little bit about your personal story, your “why”. So we also really appreciated hearing about that. I wanted to follow up with the question about intersectionality and why this is important in the concept of social justice and, specifically, would love your insights on how you take an intersectional approach in your day-to-day work, how do we move this from a concept to a day-to-day practice, something we wake up everyday and do. Abbey, maybe you want to address this one first, and then we'll go over to our other two colleagues.

**Abbey Wemimo:** Yeah, I think it is quintessential, so this concept has been a day-to-day practice. One of the ways I essentially go about this in my life, I had experience in the private sector working in investment banking, in mergers and acquisition, but what we need to understand is that the status quo isn't sustainable. And a lot of the things we're trying to do are inextricably tied together. What fundamentally ties us together predominantly in the world today is capitalism, right. But one of the ways I wake up, and I can speak to my own experience every day, is challenging that status quo and creating something which I call “justice capitalism”. It's this concept that we should create a system that's fair, equal, right, and equitable to everyone. In my mind, that's one of the ways I wake up every day in the morning saying, “Look, the status quo is not sustainable.” How can I have my lens of justice to make sure that happens and that permeates through to the work we do at Esusu by keeping folks in their homes, especially during these dire times when millions of households are on the brink of eviction.

So as you go about your life, the biggest thing is just all about connecting the dots. That's what I consider as important. And if you connect the dots and just don't, sort of, bifurcate certain issues, you can actually see the interconnectedness in terms of what's going on and that's usually a good starting point.

**Nancy Hopkins:** Great, thank you for those insights. How about you, Nisha or Ambassador Yade? \

**Nisha Anand:** Sure, I think I understood it from a young age. I think we're all intersectional people. My parents immigrated here from India, I grew up in The South in the United States which was in the 70s and 80s, very segregated. And as an immigrant who didn't fit into any community, it always, everything I did was intersectional. When I started fighting for social justice and when I started learning about history when we fight for freedom, if we don't include everybody then somebody is left behind. And I've seen that happen over and over again.

The history of civil rights in this country, women fighting for the right to vote while still it was impossible for black folks to own homes and vote, like all of these pieces of legislation, would leave people out. And those who are left out and left behind stay left out and left behind. So for me, it has to include everybody. And I've been in the rooms when folks are talking about climate legislation, for instance, and they're thinking about maybe we should tax carbon pollution, great, and where should this tax money go? Back to, oh, well, the corporations who might be saving, or to other corporations who aren't. And if you're not in the room to say, "Wait a minute, what about the communities who have borne the brunt of the pollution for decades? Should we maybe reinvest in those communities who've been hurt, who cannot breathe, who have asthma, who have no transportation to get to them from work? Maybe they should be in the room calling for the solutions as well."

So without thinking inclusively and understanding the intersection of race and gender and the economics and the economics of the country and where you live, you will leave people out. It's not truly freedom without everybody. I think I've said that before, maybe that's the theme for me today.

**Nancy Hopkins:** It's a good one, thank you. Ambassador Yade, you did mention women and also people with disabilities, a special focus of yours. I would love to hear any thoughts you have about how an intersectional approach can help us ensure rights and access and opportunities for those two groups.

**Ambassador Rama Yade:** Yes, that was what I was mentioning was about my past action for the World Bank. Now my job is about the African continent. And the African continent is the place where we have so many discriminations, so many challenges, so many problems that I think we can talk about all the discriminations when we speak about African nations, countries, or people. So what I'm trying to do in the Council, in the Atlantic Council, is to develop many kinds of actions. I have an action on security. I have an action on peace and security, on governance, through a pillar dedicated to that problem. For example, The Sahel, what I'm trying to do is to make the decision that the policy makers understand that the option cannot just be military, it's important to work on the populations. It's important to work on social and economic development because in The Sahel area, we have so many people, young people, who can join the terrorist networks or they can take the way of exile. It cannot be a choice. We have to work on other options, different options like employment, for example, we have to work on climate change because there are so many problems between communities because of the climate change. We have to work on culture because, the terrorists, they destroy the cultural sites.

So you have so many options to work on, when you try to struggle against discriminations, terrorism, that it's important to work on young people, on women, on people who work the lands. All these aspects of my work should be important, and that's why I try to see beyond the military action, and I try to work on the people. And all kinds of people that are in the Sahel. On other issues, for example, economic issues, I have a pillar dedicated to the markets to the African markets. And here, I'm not

only working on business matters, or development matters, investment, or entrepreneurship. I'm working on green growth: How to put how to make this growth green and inclusive. That is important because you can have victims of development in these emerging markets, so it's important when you work on green transition to take into consideration the inclusive side of entrepreneurship of business, etc. So on culture, for example, I have a pillar dedicated to culture and creative industries. Here, I know that when we talk about fashion, arts, films, gaming, or even sports, it's important to be inclusive.

So I have a focus on women, and in Côte d'Ivoire, for example, women take charge of 80% of creative industries. That means a lot, so we can use culture and creative industries to be more inclusive for women in Côte d'Ivoire. So that's the way I see diplomacy and foreign policy. Foreign policy should be, usually, it is still something for men; Foreign policy it's about war; it's about leadership; but no, foreign policy can be inclusive. And I try to give you a few examples through peace and security, through markets and creative industries.

**Nancy Hopkins:** Great, thank you for those vivid examples of both intersectionality and inclusion, so very vivid and clear the way you laid it out. I want to build on what you were just saying and talk about democracy for a moment because strengthening democratic governance is a critical objective of the Mandela Washington Fellowship in an area where Fellows and U.S. citizens are encouraged to engage in deep dialogue and collaborate. I would love to hear your thoughts on why promoting equity and justice is important for democracy. What is the relationship among these three concepts: equity, justice, and democracy? Does one of them come first? What's the order of business here? Maybe, Nisha, you can lead us off. And I would love to hear from our other two colleagues.

**Nisha Anand:** The order of business is interesting. I haven't thought of it in that way. What comes first, I would, for true democracy, should be able to guarantee equity and justice. When it's true, when it's true democracy, the idea is that everyone has a voice, everyone can advocate for themselves, everybody can have a say in the future we're creating, so I would think that democracy comes first. And it's scary there might be freedom, justice, and equity for some people under other rules, but in this country, I'm really worried about democracy. And 1998, I traveled to Thailand. I was part of the Free Coalition as an international human rights activist working on the issues in Myanmar, which we called Burma at that time. And we entered the country in 1998. It was the 10-year anniversary of the uprising of '88, which happened on August 8th, [19]88, it was 8-8-8-8. And that was when the military dictatorship cracked down on student activists, and about 10,000 people were murdered and started a large migration to the refugee areas all around Myanmar. And as international activists, we were from eight different countries. There were eighteen of us. We went in on that 10-year anniversary and handed out small leaflets that said very simply, "We are your friends from around the world. We support your hopes for human rights and democracy." That's all it said, and as in many military dictatorships, and definitely in Myanmar, it was illegal to have a leaflet that said that, to have the words "democracy" written anywhere in the country. There were no books that had that word, the

newspapers. We were staying in a hotel and it was cut out. Anything that talked about the outside world. All 18 of us were arrested, sentenced to five years in jail for this action. Luckily, we had our diplomats from eight different countries putting pressure. We were an international news story at that time, and they did deport us. And I'm very thankful for the American democracy at that point where it was actually a Republican congressman who flew over to the country to release me. And what you'll find out about me, as we talk more, is that I am on the left. I am a Democrat, and that's when I also understood that there are a few things that unite all of us. And in this country, that fight for human rights and democracy united all of us. In fact, that's why we went out and got involved in wars, and I'm sure the Ambassador can talk more about this. This idea of democracy and to watch that slowly erode in our country where I can have conversations with parents that are on the same baseball team as my son. The parents sitting on the sidelines, where they now are questioning: Is democracy actually a right? Do we need democracy for all? Maybe some people shouldn't vote. It's terrifying because that was the promise of this country. That was the promise when my parents immigrated here. That's what I grew up with in my liberal arts education and studying politics in Washington, DC was that this model of government was not perfect, but we were striving to make it more perfect every single generation. So I'm still committed to that, and I'm worried without it we will see less equity, less justice. We will see the freedoms that we have fought so hard for and the civil rights that we're still working on fighting for. A road, I'm terrified, I witnessed what it looked like in Myanmar. I know a lot of you have witnessed it around the world, and in the U.S. I think it is of utmost importance. We will not get the other stuff if democracy is gone.

**Nancy Hopkins:** Thank you, Nisha for sharing that story from a different region and helping us think about the inter relationship among these concepts. Abbey, do you have anything to add about where social justice and equity sit with the concept of a democracy, a thriving democracy?

**Abbey Wemimo:** Yeah, I think social justice and thriving democracy are inextricably tied together. I think a quote that usually resonates with me is Brian Stevenson's quote that talks about the true measure of our characters, how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused/incarcerated, and the condemned. When we think about democracy and justice, at least for my lens and the work I do, yeah if you think about there are 45 million people in the United States that do not even have a credit score. And the average debt in this country is \$92,000. We live in a society whereby the Gini coefficient, that's the inequality gap, is so wide. And we struggle every time to get people involved and contribute to greater society. Forty-five million people without a financial identity, average there's 92,000 [dollars], if you multiply that, that's over \$4.1 trillion in capital we can unlock in the marketplace. That's not only good for the American economy, it's not only good for the global economy, right, but it's necessary or forced to start creating equality so people can essentially have a voice, the political force to have a sustained democracy.

We can't have a situation whereby many people are being left behind. We can have a situation whereby we have a bourgeois system whereby the rich continue to get richer, the middle class is

completely eroded, and then the poor continue to suffer. Especially, one of the greatest economic and health crises we've seen in a decade, in a century, so for me, I think these issues are inextricably tied together. And if we go down memory lane, in particular, in the matter of justice, especially to the African-American community, where folks were fundamentally left out from participating. The biggest driver of wealth, which is home ownership, but the Federal Government was not going to back mortgage insurance for African-Americans communities.

If you think about the struggles of the Jim Crow era, and recently, sequel to the 2008 Financial Crisis, a lot of these things led to the many uprisings, not only in the United States where we've seen the pendulum move from left to right, but essentially, spilled over. I mean, the global economy, so I'm always really fascinated by the role of finance, particularly on what it does to democracy. But this conversation of inequality and then is inextricably tied, as we think about the future of our democracies. I think like Nisha said, all we all want, be Democrats, Republicans, or wherever you are in the world we, all we want is to tuck our kids in late at night and make sure they have a better life than we ever had, right. That's what binds us together, ultimately, is greater than things that divide us. But it is necessary for us to stop putting lipstick on a pig and address the real issues, not the symptoms, because what we are dealing with is a larger disease.

**Nancy Hopkins:** Yeah, thank you for that call to action on root causes, really really important. We have about fifteen minutes left, and I would like to take a question from one of our Mandela Washington Fellows. And I believe this Fellow has submitted this question via video. So I'll ask my colleagues who are running tech to play that question for us and look forward to hearing it.

**Thokozile Eulanda Nhlumayo:** My name is Thokozile Nhlumayo from south Africa. I'm in the Public Management track under Wayne State University. The COVID-19 pandemic has unearthed severe social and economic differences between rich and poor countries. This results in more poverty and further destabilizes the already fragile livelihoods of millions of poor people in developing countries. Are you not worried that this may result in conflict and pose a threat to the economic and political global stability? How do we ensure that we bridge this economic gap created by COVID-19. Thank you.

**Nancy Hopkins:** Maybe AbbEy and Ambassador Yade, would you like to weigh in on this question? And I know we have another one as well so I would love to hear your thoughts on this one first.

**Abbey Wemimo:** Absolutely, happy to take a shot at this. We've seen, like I said earlier, COVID has created the greatest economic and health crisis of our lifetime. The world has essentially come to a halt with this virus, but I'm always of the opinion that after a storm, a rainbow always emerges, at least most of the time. So this is an opportunity for us to rethink the systemic inequality that has plagued the status quo in our society, at large, not only in the United States, but globally, right. I'm from Lagos, Nigeria. A lot of things that structurally we can leverage to essentially rebase our economic activity. So on a go-forward basis, what I am advocating for and I've been unapologetic

about it, it's essentially a rethink of the new “Marshall Plan” on the African continent, because I saw the question came from South Africa.

When we think about development on the African continent, it's been mostly relegated to aid. We need to rethink big ideas, big investment opportunities, addressing things like public debt, which has been crippling, particularly, a lot of countries in sub-Saharan Africa. So these are some of the things we need to think about as a reset. How do we invest in education? How do we invest in health care? How do we invest income inequality, which continues to be a huge issue on the continent. So my approach is we need to have a Marshall Plan, even bigger, to have that reset, not only in sub-saharan Africa, but I think globally this pandemic gives us a huge opportunity to push that reset button and then start addressing some of the structural issues. And if we don't take advantage of this opportunity there will be another pandemic, maybe not in our lifetime, but given our climate change and different events happening, we're probably going to have catastrophic events we need to deal with. But as a society, we need to stop dealing with the symptoms of the issues, rather, focus on the root causes. So if we're interested in making drastic change and taking on this opportunity, which COVID essentially wreaked havoc on our global economy, we have that once in a lifetime chance where we can all bring people together in the United States.

You've seen those trends: over \$2 trillion allocated to each citizen, and we are talking about things like “universal basic income” before that folks will essentially laugh. So as a society, we just need to rethink the status quo, invest more in things like education, health care, innovative technologies, and then rethink debt, particularly in sub-saharan Africa, and that way we're going to build in a solid foundation and hopefully we'll stop this approach of building a mansion on a sinking sand.

**Nancy Hopkins:** Thank you for that. Ambassador Yade, Rama, do you have anything to add to that?

**Ambassador Rama Yade:** Yeah, I totally agree with what Abbey just said. I can be happier to hear that in my job as a Director of the Atlantic Council Africa Center. What I'm trying to do is to make people understand that, despite COVID-19, the African nations and people are very resilient, and resilience is the other word of this meeting with social justice. And African people, they know everything about resilience. They have been always struggling to survive, and even during this pandemic period, everyone has been surprised in the international community by the way they faced that tremendous challenge. And even, at some point, the continent has been spared by the huge consequences of the COVID-19. That means a lot and that gives strength. Why? Not because Africa is a shining example, not because Africa is a young continent, the way to say things like this is to let people think that Africa is not responsible when it works. And it's insulting. The reality is that African people and nations did a lot to struggle against COVID-19: they closed the borders very early, and people made masks every day. And even when I was in Paris, I had to ask my parents from Senegal to send me masks from there because in Paris we could not find them. So people have struggled a lot to face that tremendous challenge, and that is something important.

And as people need to work, they cannot live in a lockdown system. So they had to find a way to survive as well, economically speaking. And for the long term, what I advocate is we have to work, like Abbey said, to work on trust for this continent. And we cannot do everything under the roof of aid and assistance. It's insulting as well. People have the means and the ways to go through all this. So this continent is the new frontier, it is the home of the world's most dynamic economies, before the pandemic. It is the continent that is working on building the world's largest free trade area. It is the oldest continent, the youngest population, and soon, the largest population: 25% of humanity will be African in 20 years. That's a lot and that's why it's so strategic to change the way we look at this African continent.

**Nancy Hopkins:** Thank you powerful words about opportunity and resilience. Let's hear another question from a 2021 Fellow.

**Jean Claude Mbonigaba:** Hello, my name is Jean Claude. I'm from Rwanda. I'm a Mandela Washington Fellow 2021. I'm placed at Appalachian State University in North Carolina. I'm on the track for Civic Engagement. I have one question I want to ask which is related to persons with disabilities because I'm working with persons with disabilities in Rwanda. What is the main approach the U.S. Government used for supporting persons with disabilities (unintelligible) in support they need for home care? I want to know if there's any support for (unintelligible)?

**Nancy Hopkins:** It is a question about intersectionality: people with disabilities and support for them here in the United States. I don't know, Ambassador, Nisha, thoughts about this?

**Ambassador Rama Yade:** Nisha, go ahead since I just spoke.

**Nisha Anand:** Sure, in the U.S., nothing has, in terms of civil rights and human rights, nothing has been given without struggle from the outside, agitation from the outside and humanization of the issue. And people with disabilities, they're still, as you've seen Jean Claude, a lot of rights that are still not extended to people with disabilities in this country. But it has been a long hard journey, we have to, one, usually say the formula here in the U.S. is humanization, agitation, and then legislation. And legislation has been very important in securing rights for people with disabilities, and laws started being passed, things like architectural building codes to make buildings more accessible for people in wheelchairs, and then there were, of course, different regulations for people who couldn't hear with closed captioning on TVs, and sign language at events, and things like this were legislated. It wasn't just that everyone decided it was time to include people, and we know that with the Civil Rights Movement for Black Americans, and Women's Rights Movement, and all of these movements, LGBTQ in this country, as well.

It has been fought and it has been legislated. There is still a lot more to do. Look at the 1990 Americans With Disability Act as being a pretty sweeping piece of legislation that started pushing this issue, but of course, in local areas the discrimination is still there. Mental health is one of the final things, I think,

we are not good at in terms of people with disabilities. Right now, mental health crises are usually dealt with by police and prison; that doesn't make any kind of sense. And so I look at legislation and us having to move forward with how we respond to people in mental health crises, as well as people with physical disabilities. And I have to thank the people who've been leading this fight for a long time, the folks on the outside and organizations that have done this, and then I hope to add to it and be supportive because I do think that we all are interconnected. And we have to fight for everybody's rights. That's my quick answer: we've done a lot and there's still a lot more to do.

**Nancy Hopkins:** Thank you. I actually wrote that down on my piece of paper: humanization, legislation, agitation. Thank you for that. So part of my job also is to serve as timekeeper for this event, and I see we've got just a couple minutes left to wrap up this incredibly rich discussion. But perhaps we can close out by asking each of our three panelists in turn to offer up maybe 30 seconds to one minute of any final reflections that they have for our Mandela Washington Fellows. Rama, Ambassador Yade, perhaps we could go to you first, and then Abbey and Nisha. If you could please unmute yourself, Ambassador Yade.

**Ambassador Rama Yade:** Sorry, Nancy. Thank you, yeah, to our Fellows, I would just finish by reminding us the powerful words of Margaret Mead who said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." So the best thing I can say is: cheers and decide on your future. You are the next generation. The world does not belong to us anymore. It is yours, so it's up to you!

**Abbey Wemimo:** Yeah, my parting words, it's going to be really rooted, I think it will be a disservice if you don't quote Mandela. Yeah, so one of my favorite Mandela quotes is: "A winner is a dreamer who never gives up." As you go through your life, you've been selected in such an elite group. The three things you should always keep in mind: Number one is fall forward. As you're thinking about audacious ideas, as you're looking to rise above the status quo and not accept mediocrity as the order of the day, it is a quintessential for you not to just be satisfied and say hey the world is structured the way it is and there's nothing I can do. Know you have a voice; do not accept the status quo and don't live your life like you have something to fall back on. Because the current way our world is going with maddening inequality, the status quo is not sustainable or building a mansion on sinking sand. So, challenge the status quo, challenge the new generation, and fall forward. Number two is hard work always pays off. there's a lot of things we do, but that ability to persevere and come back every time; sometimes you'll be shut down.

During my career, having raised over \$14 million running a venture start up. Before that I was told "no" by over 300 investors, time after time. Do not let anyone tell you "no", provided what you're building, what you stand for, is the just and right thing that paves the permanent bridge to equality for everyone. Continue to persevere. Do not give up. And the last thing I would say to you as you navigate

this complexity of life is just be inquisitive and see the good in others. This ability of having compassionate inquiry and having moral courage is very, very important.

As you navigate life, you're going to meet people that are fundamentally different than you are, and that's okay. Your ideas will be different, but it's this ability to come together and say what binds us together is greater than what separates us. And understanding the facts that were part of a larger global village. And selfishly, in the true meaning of this issue, if you want to go fast you go alone. But if you really want to have long, lasting change and go far, we fundamentally have to go together. So talk to people that are fundamentally different from you and that's how we have lasting impact. So those are my parting words. Good luck on navigating the complexities of life. That's the true genius of what we are all trying to figure out, and I'm very, very confident that the best is yet to come.

**Nisha Anand:** I would underline, and highlight, and double star everything that has just been said. I think, when I look at injustice and the history of injustice here in this country and around the world, divide and conquer has always been the strategy. And the opposite of that is coming together. And so Abbey, I really appreciate those words. We cannot, ourselves, be further divided. So every solution that you have, in your dreams, every idea that you're pursuing, make sure it brings us closer together. It unites us and does not tear us apart. I do think that a parting lesson from the pandemic is that we are all interconnected.

We depend on each other: Without the essential workforce and without the frontline workers a lot of us would not have survived. That was a lesson that was brought home finally in this country that's very isolated, in a lot of ways, from the rest of the world. We started to understand our interdependence, so our solutions must honor that and bring us closer together. And that's the dream; I hope that I get to live in the future that you are all creating and dreaming of, and that we find each other, and find ways for all of us to be included in that future. I appreciate being invited here and I wish I could see all of the Fellows in person. Good luck!

**Nancy Hopkins:** Thank you. And thank you so much to our three wonderful panelists, Ambassador Rama Yade, Nisha Anand, and Abbey Wemimo, for being with us today. And for generously sharing your ideas and your perspectives. The work you are doing is incredibly impactful and interesting. And we wish you every success. And thanks to all of our Mandela Washington Fellows and honored guests who joined us today. Thank you for your engaged participation and for your commitment to advancing social justice, whatever you do, wherever you are. And best wishes for the rest of the Summit!