



Stellenbosch

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forward together
sonke siya phambili
saam vorentoe

Installation of the 15th Chancellor of Stellenbosch University

Kruiskerk, Stellenbosch, 18 May 2022, 17:00

Address by the Chancellor, Justice Edwin Cameron

1. Hello, everyone. What a heavily freighted, significant occasion this is. I thank the Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Wim de Villiers, for his generous words, and the Registrar, Dr Ronel Retief, and her team for putting this occasion together. Thank you to the choir and musicians, and to the imbongi [praise singer] for your wonderful message.
2. I want to single out a few people whom I want to welcome in particular – Dr Jan Heunis, President of the Convocation, a fellow legal scholar, as well as the Mayor of Stellenbosch [adv Gesie van Deventer] and the MP for Stellenbosch, Dr [Leon] Schreiber. Dr Heunis, your presence here does not hide our differences, but shows your commitment to the Institution and what it means for the Afrikaans language and for the future of our country.
3. I also thank the Council of the University, the Rector, Professor Wim de Villiers, and his executive team and the Electoral College, which he mentioned, for putting their faith and trust in me to perform this role.
4. It is not one that I ever thought of accepting. And yet I did. Why? Mostly for selfish reasons.
5. I have to confess that the past two and a half years have brought me exceptional joy:
6. Firstly, through being able to spend time with the people of Stellenbosch [University], to meet them and get to know them. The people on campus – black, white, gay, straight, and from urban and rural places across the country and the continent, Stellenbosch students with the drive and tenacity and purposefulness that give me a burst of hope for our troubled country.
7. In addition, the joy of being associated with the University that is so clearly on the way up – up in intellectual output, up in teaching skills, up in research and scholarly publications, up in international renown, up even (though this counts the least) in international rankings.
8. And joy also, particularly, in being able to preside over graduation ceremonies over the last two and a half years – where there is increasingly exuberance. Our ceremonies when I graduated here were pious occasions, presided over by men, but now people are stepping out in the aisles and they are expressing their joy at the young people who are crossing the stage.
9. When I took office in January 2020, Covid-19 was already insidiously spreading into our world – and three months later, it had seized the countries and the societies of the globe by their throats. We knew so little. Would this dreadful virus be our Armageddon?
10. Well, it was not, but our country has been inflicted grievous losses – 300 000 deaths that we know are attributable to Covid [measuring 'excess deaths'] – bereavement,

disablement and loss of jobs, businesses, the ability to feed families. These are heavy burdens.

11. So merely that we are here this afternoon, together, is something to celebrate with deep respect and solemnity and even joy.
12. A second reason I took this job is about Stellenbosch University itself. I studied here, I spent nearly five years on campus, I am a proud alumnus. And I think what Stellenbosch University represents, and what it aims to be, is important – important to South Africa and to our continent and to the world.
13. Recently, I was asked to say a few words at the inaugural meeting of the South African University Chancellors' Forum, at the University of Pretoria, where a number of Vice-Chancellors and Chancellors were present.
14. I asked the question: why care about universities? Why do we care about intellectual attainment? Why do we care about institutional excellence, about well-run, forward looking, nurturing tertiary institutions?
15. And I answered: for our own dignity. We do so for our own sense of self-worth as South Africans.
16. We entered our democracy with so much hope, with so much soaring aspiration. Twenty-eight years later, we are bruised, disheartened and battered: by the service-delivery failures, the disintegrating public institutions, the looting, corruption, ineptitude, and rank criminality of so much of our government.
17. Much of this (though not all of it) stems from the Zuma era – President Jacob Zuma's nine years, in which criminals within the very highest offices of our land conspired to steal our country from us, to rob our young people of their future, and to enrich themselves at the cost of our hopes and dreams.
18. To succeed in this, the criminal masterminds of state capture had to disrupt, dismantle and destroy the national crime intelligence, which they successfully did, to our terrible cost. Fifteen kilometres from here, in Khayelitsha, the destruction of crime intelligence and police leadership and police capacity leads to one of the highest murder rates – in Nyanga and Khayelitsha, one of the highest murder rates – in the world. As a consequence of the criminal leadership that sought to take away our state. Likewise the police and the National Prosecuting Authority.
19. And they had to weaken the resolve of Parliament and the governing party. They very nearly succeeded. In fact, we are still engaged in a gigantic effort – of which Stellenbosch is part – to save our country from looters and corruption and systemic and institutional disintegration.
20. The good news is that they did not succeed. Three main reasons. First, our fearless and independent media and civil society. Without our critical and scrutinising media and our vibrant civil society who exposed the Gupta Leaks, who took a stand against corruption, we would have been lost. They exposed grotesque malfeasance and pointed to a better way.
21. Second, the former Public Protector. I see that Professor Thuli Madonsela from our Law Faculty is here this afternoon. I ask her to stand up. Sorry to embarrass you. How astonishing ... a "pair of safe hands" appointed by Parliament, a woman, a black woman ... wow, did you surprise those who patronised you! With a whole series of extraordinarily courageous, articulate and biting practical reports. Like the 2014 *State of Capture Report*. Without that report our country might have been entirely lost.

22. I know that when Professor Thuli had to step down after her seven-year term, she had offers from the whole world – Harvard, Stanford, the Oxbridge universities, maybe even France and Germany and China. But who won out? Stellenbosch! She came to us.
23. Third, the judiciary. Here, I make no personal claim. I played a small part as a member of an 11-member bench. I pay credit to the pioneering judges led, often in the Gauteng Provincial Division, by Judge President Dunstan Mlambo, a person vilified precisely because of his independence and courage.
24. I pay credit to Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng, who in his judgment of 31 March 2016 on the *State of Capture Report* delivered a sermon to the nation, to Parliament, and to President Zuma on the elementary ethics of moral duty and honest service.¹
25. I pay credit to the many judges across the country, 240 of them, who have kept faith with the vision that we have promised our young people, including the tens of thousands of students on this campus; the future that we promised them.
26. All of this work set the path for Chief Justice Zondo's State Capture Commission of Inquiry. Our hope is that accountability manifests in swift follow-up by the National Prosecuting Authority.
27. And why is all of this important?
28. Because of our self-respect. Because we demand accountability. Because we as a country, as a nation, put dignity at the centre of our democratic project, at the centre of our Bill of Rights, it's pivotable foundational value. Not just individual dignity, not just group dignity, but our dignity as a people.
29. Our dignity demands that we should have capable institutions, that we should have hardworking public servants, that we should have functioning local authorities, Madam Mayor, and honest politicians and dedicated public servants. We respect ourselves; that's why we demand that.
30. Our dignity, our sense of self-worth tells us that we deserve all of this. And that is why we also deserve well-functioning tertiary institutions of true excellence, that will shape our future generation of leaders and trailblazers: like this university.
31. We as a country deserve outstanding teaching and dedicated learning and world-improving research. And conceptual breakthroughs in knowledge and knowledge systems and in human and artificial intelligence.
32. We deserve a University – to return to the Rector's theme – that is free of the disrespect and hatred and degradation that were manifested in the ghastly incident at Huis Marais on Sunday, when a white student, Theuns du Toit, urinated on the study materials of a black student, Babalo Ndwayana.
33. All these things are what our national sense of dignity and self-worth entitles us to object against, to claim better.
34. And I am honoured to be associated with the purposefulness expressed by the SRC this afternoon in a critical meeting between them and the Rector and me. I want to tell you about a painful moment in that meeting, when the SRC said with regret that they would not be here this afternoon. They said we cannot celebrate here this afternoon when there is so much pain on our campus.

¹ See further *Economic Freedom Fighters v Speaker of the National Assembly; Democratic Alliance v Speaker of the National Assembly* 2016 (3) SA 580 (CC).

35. And I respected their decision as a matter of deep principle. They took a stand which was difficult for them but which expressed their commitment – as we do in our different way this afternoon – to the young people on this campus. Our commitment to something better, our commitment to recognise what we have done wrong, what we have done insufficiently, and our determination to do better.
36. All of these are what our sense of dignity as people -- and as a people – claim.
37. In a recent BBC interview, there was a witty exchange, between Mr Roy Jenkins, a former socialist leader in the UK and a Chancellor of Oxford University, and his successor, Lord Chris Patten, a former Tory cabinet minister who was the last British Governor of Hong Kong, who negotiated an exit, which has been trashed by China.
38. Roy Jenkins said that to be chancellor of a university embodies "impotence assuaged by magnificence". Like many of the aphorisms of the English ruling elite, this is clever – but it is untrue.
39. First, there is very little magnificent about being Chancellor (unless you think this funny hat I am wearing is magnificent).
40. Second, the job is very far from impotent. One of my fellow chancellors, Dr Precious Moloji-Motsepe, of UCT, started the chancellor's forum to ask what can we practically do, something that is not going to replicate or intrude upon the domain of the executive. And we are finding ways to make meaningful contributions, each in our own sphere, through our role as chancellors.
41. The chancellor is anything but impotent. It has been a real thrill to become involved with many aspects of this university's teaching, research and knowledge-expanding energies, and to get to know some of its academic and student leaders.
42. In addition, the chancellor has power in trying to unlock the partnerships with private institutions and industrial and commercial corporations and foundations here and abroad that are absolutely essential if our tertiary institutions are to flourish.
43. So, while not magnificent, and neither impotent, this job brings enormous joy. It has bountiful energies attached to it and flowing through it.
44. It is my enormous privilege to be the recipient of that energy and to commit myself for the rest of my term to contributing to it.
45. Thank you.