

XVIth World Economic History Congress
Stellenbosch, South Africa, 9–13 July 2012

Welcoming Reception, Moyo's at Spier, 6 pm, 9 July 2012

**Remarks by Prof H Russel Botman,
Rector and Vice-Chancellor of Stellenbosch University, and
a Vice-President of the Association of African Universities**

Good evening, everyone. Distinguished guests:

- Prof Jan-Luiten van Zanden (President of the International Economic History Association, the IEHA)
- Prof Grietjie Verhoef (Vice-President and President Elect of the IEHA)
- Professor Johann de Villiers (Stellenbosch University's Dean of Economic and Management Sciences)
- Professor Andrie Schoombee (Chair of Stellenbosch University's Department of Economics)
- Dr Sophia du Plessis (of our Department of Economics; she is also the President of the Economic History Society of Southern Africa; and was Chair of the Local Organising Committee of this Congress)
- Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen ...

The theme of this Congress makes me think that we are on the right track. By exploring "The roots of development", you are clearly linking economics to society. This is important, because I think that the single biggest global challenge is the need for human development and economic development is crucial for human development. We don't have to look far for evidence. In our own country, South Africa, half the population live under the international 'poverty line' of 2 US dollars a day.

My main point is that knowledge can be used as a tool to reduce poverty. Education is crucial to break the cycle of poverty. Universities have a vital role to play in this regard. Higher education generates, transfers and applies the knowledge required for development to take place. This is even more important in the Information Age with its knowledge-based economy.

This realisation has caused the World Bank to change its policies on higher education in developing countries. Whereas previous policy focused on primary and secondary education it is now accepted that the lack of investment in higher education was poorly conceived.

A university is not just there for itself and its immediate community. A university is a national, regional, continental and world asset. And to realise the full potential of higher education on our continent, we need critical knowledge partnerships for development. In cooperation with our partners, Stellenbosch University is developing sustainable networks that will contribute relevant knowledge for Africa's immense developmental potential in the decades to come.

SU has agreements in place with around 200 foreign universities. In Africa, we have 149 active projects in 37 countries. This is in line with Stellenbosch University's HOPE Project, which is a campus-wide effort to use our key strengths to tackle major societal challenges. I invite you all to join us in building strong knowledge coalitions for the sake of economic AND human development.

Thank you.