

**‘Revitalising higher education in Africa through collaboration’**

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Thank you, chairperson. Good evening, everyone. Distinguished guests, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Stellenbosch University, the most beautiful campus in South Africa – and with all of you present, the powerhouse of higher education on the continent.

I say this in jest because as we all know higher education institutions do like to compete, to find ways to better one another, not necessarily to improve together. But at this interesting time in history, they are challenged to do more partnerships and collaboration.

Africa faces major human development challenges, and needs to develop capacity in institutions. Institutions of higher learning have a crucial role to play in this regard. Higher education may not be one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but there is no doubt that higher education is no longer seen as a luxury; it is essential to future national, social and economic development in Africa.

The problem is that although tertiary enrolment has risen faster in Africa than anywhere else – by some 66% since 1999 – the number of students entering higher education is still only 6% of the eligible age group.

But our challenge goes beyond the numbers. Quality matters most. Africa produces only 0,7% of the world’s scientific research, so clearly we are not doing enough to come up with home-grown solutions to the problems that we face.

It is also our own responsibility as universities to counter the idea that we are just ivory towers. We have to make ourselves relevant to society. It is this challenge that has inspired Stellenbosch University to develop its HOPE Project. By following a science-for-society approach, we are working hard to bring about tangible change within communities, our country, our continent, the world.

We have distilled from the MDGs five themes to guide our core activities of learning and teaching, research and community interaction. These themes are (1) the eradication of poverty and related conditions, and the promotion of (2) human dignity and health, (3)

democracy and human rights, (4) peace and security, as well as (5) a sustainable environment and a competitive industry.

Our faculties have developed 22 academic initiatives to direct their expertise towards achieving these goals. One of these initiatives is the Graduate School, which opened its doors in January 2010 with a first cohort of 31 fulltime doctoral students on scholarships, 22 of whom are from outside the borders of South Africa. To fast-track their PHD studies, they receive academic support and capacity building at our African Doctoral Academy.

It is crucial that African universities generate solutions for uniquely African challenges. By using our strengths and our partnerships with other African universities, we hope to both transform ourselves as an institution on our journey into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and help improve the lives of people across the continent.

In the spirit of working with others, Stellenbosch University last month became the first African university to sign the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities. The idea is that if you are serious about strengthening research on the continent, then all research findings must be open and freely available to all people, especially the poorest.

Taking into account the nature of tonight's event, allow me to briefly refer to our collaboration with Europe, on the one hand, and the rest of Africa, on the other. Stellenbosch University has agreements with 44 institutions in 12 European countries, and 122 active collaborative projects in 36 African countries. Involved are 132 African institutions and 363 African collaborators.

The interesting thing is, the more we cooperate with others, the more we discover how valuable collaborative networks are. It goes beyond inter-institutional and individual collaboration. And we are finding that our European partners are interested in joining collaborative arrangements because they represent a strong foundation on which to proceed.

On African University Day just over a week ago (12 November), a milestone was reached in this very building when six African universities signed a multilateral memorandum of understanding to establish PANGeA, which stands for the Partnership for Africa's Next Generation of Academics. The institutions involved are the universities of Botswana, Dar es Salaam, Makerere, Malawi, Nairobi and Stellenbosch.

We have joined forces to learn from each other, develop our capacity together, improve our doctoral programmes and coordinate research so that we can find solutions to the seemingly intractable problems that we face as a continent.

We are focusing on student exchange programmes, and are working towards eventually offering joint degrees. We would also like to link up to the Nyerere Programme for scholarships and academic mobility of students and faculty.

As I said when we signed the PANGeA agreement, this kind of collaboration reminds us of the World Cup song by R Kelly, in which he sings:

*I see the light at the end of the tunnel ...  
that's the sign of a victory*

To achieve victory, we need to take hands and work together. The people of Africa want to beat poverty and hunger and disease. They want to lift the trophy of good governance, democracy and human rights. And while governments have a certain role to play, it is our role as higher education institutions to underpin that with excellence in learning and teaching, relevant research and transformative civic engagement.

That is why such initiatives as the “Access to Success” project and the AAU and EUA white paper on university collaboration for development are so important. Equally crucial will be your deliberations the next few days. By the way, it will be important to ensure that the “Side Event” to the 3<sup>rd</sup> EU-Africa Summit is not just a “side show”. We need to thrust higher education into the mainstream of public debate and political decision making.

The slogan of Africa’s World Cup earlier this year was “Ke Nako” – “It is time”. Let us also say, it is time for revitalising higher education in Africa through collaboration.

I wish you well with your deliberations. Again, welcome here and enjoy the rest of the evening. Thank you.