

**The 6th Annual South African SKA Postgraduate Bursary Conference,
Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study, 21 November 2011**

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

Thank you, Kim [de Boer, SA SKA Project]. Good evening, everyone. *Goeienaand. Wamkelikile.*

Distinguished guests, in particular the VIPs:

- Mrs Naledi Pandor, the Minister of Science and Technology;
- Prof Nithaya Chetty of the National Research Foundation; and
- Prof Justin Jonas of the South African Square Kilometre Array (SKA) Project.

Also the five SKA Research Chairs:

- Prof Roy Maartens of UWC;
- Prof Claude Carignan of UCT;
- Prof Sergio Colafrancesco of WITS;
- Prof David Davidson of Stellenbosch ; and
- Dr Oleg Smirnov of Rhodes.

Let me also single out the International Conference Speakers:

- Prof Leon Koopmans of the Kapteyn Astronomical Institute in the Netherlands;
- Dr Benjamin Stappers of the University of Manchester;
- Dr Mark Thompson of the University of Hertfordshire;
- Dr Chiara Ferrari of the Côte d'Azur Observatory in France;
- Prof Hideyuki Kobayashi of the National Observatory of Japan;
- Prof Huub Rottgering of the Leiden Observatory in the Netherlands; and
- Dr Kristian Zarb Adami of Oxford University.

Colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen – and not forgetting the stars of this conference, all the postdoctoral fellows, doctoral candidates, master's degree students and undergraduates present here – welcome to Stellenbosch, and welcome to this, the 6th Annual South African SKA Postgraduate Bursary Conference.

This event has become a highlight on the science calendar because it showcases the excellence of our students so well – and this year promises to deliver on that score yet again.

The Conference has also established itself as a valuable meeting place for local and international researchers and students in astronomy, engineering, astrophysics,

mathematics, cosmology and the like, attracting participants from across South Africa and eight our partners on the continent – Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia and Zambia – and from other nations across the world.

I didn't see any Aussies on the programme ... which is probably for the best, because we would prefer avoiding diplomatic incidents at this event. I'm only joking.

As you know, we are in the final over of the process that will see either South Africa or that other place Down Under being selected as the site for hosting the world's largest radio telescope array.

Now, we are confident of our chances, but whatever happens, an important legacy of this project will be its human capital development programme, of which this Conference forms an important part.

The SKA Bursary Programme – which funds tertiary studies at various levels – is boosting the number of highly skilled scientists and engineers produced for our country and continent.

This is in line with sociologist Manuel Castells' depiction of the role of universities as that of an "engine of development".

At Stellenbosch, we have captured this idea in an initiative called the HOPE Project, which – in a nutshell – entails a science-for-society approach across the whole of the university.

We think that science should be excellent, science should be relevant and science should be informed by a diversity of people and ideas, and looking at the South African SKA Project, we seem to be on the same page.

Thank you to the Department of Science and Technology, the National Research Foundation and the South African SKA Project Office for this drive to establish Africa as a global hub of astronomy.

Now, with the Australian cricket team touring here at the moment, there is one player in Team South Africa that I would like to single out as our trump card – no, it's not Hashim Amla or AB de Villiers ... it's Naledi Pandor, our Minister of Science and Technology

Minister Pandor, thank you for going to bat for us with such skill and passion. May you stay on the pitch for a long time and lead us all to victory.

Welcome again, ladies and gentlemen, and enjoy the Conference.

Thank you.