

**Toespraak deur prof H Russel Botman, rektor en visekanselier van die Universiteit Stellenbosch, by die bekendstelling van die US Waterinstituut, 22 Maart 2011**

*Dankie, voorsitter. Goeie naand, dames en here. Molweni. Good evening, everyone.*

- Ms Naledi Pandor, Minister of Science and Technology
- Ms Marjorie Pyoos, Acting DG of the Department of Science and Technology
- Prof Fred Otieno, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Durban University of Technology,
- and our colleagues from other universities
- Dr Rivka Kfir of the Water Research Commission
- Dr Thulani Dlamini of the CSIR
- Prof Hamanth Kasan of Rand Water
- Prof Eugene Cloete, Dean of our Faculty of Science and head of the Stellenbosch University Water Institute being launched tonight

Ladies and gentlemen, from my side I want to say to all of you, welcome in Stellenbosch – which the last time I checked was somewhat cloudy.

*Was die bietjie reën wat ons vanoggend kort voor sonsopkoms gehad het nie fantasties nie? Ek dink dit was nogal 'n goeie teken op die dag wat ons die Universiteit se Waterinstituut bekendstel, of hoe?*

Water is central to our existence. It covers 70% of our planet, and makes up 60% of our bodies. In fact, it could well be – as the American writer Tom Robbins once put it – that “[h]uman beings were invented by water as a device for transporting itself from one place to another”.

Life – as we know it – cannot exist without water ... which makes it all the more worrying that our water situation – locally, nationally, continentally and globally – is so critical.

You might have noticed some of the following figures in the SU Water Institute’s booklet, but I want to highlight them again because they say so much:

- The world’s population will reach 9 billion about 40 years from now, which will put even more pressure on our water sources

- *As mens in ag neem dat 145 liter water benodig word om 'n enkele blikkie koeldrank te maak; en 2 900 liter water om 'n katoen T-hemp te maak, dan is dit duidelik dat ons ernstig gaan moet besin oor ons leefwyse.*
- On the African continent, 300 million people don't have access to safe drinking water; and
- In our own country, 27% of households still don't have access to basic sanitation – which at least partly accounts for the fact that 16 000 people die in South Africa every year from diarrheal diseases.

I am painting what appears to be a grim picture, but if you ask the scientists in this room, they see opportunities for research. To them, a problem is no more than a statement temporarily lacking a solution.

This captures the spirit of the Stellenbosch University's HOPE Project. We are using our key strengths as an institution of higher learning – which are academic excellence and cutting-edge research – to address seemingly intractable problems in society.

*Hoekom bemoei ons ons hoegenaamd daarmee om van die wêreld 'n beter plek te help maak? Beteken die HOOP Projek ons het nou 'n welsynsorganisasie geword? Allermens. Dit gaan oor hoe mens die aard, plek en rol van 'n universiteit in die samelewing sien.*

*Die US se “bestaansdoel” is immers – en ek haal aan uit ons Strategiese Raamwerk – “om in verbondenheid aan die universitêre ideaal van uitmuntende wetenskapbeoefening 'n omgewing te skep en vol te hou waarbinne kennis ontdek kan word, gedeel kan word, en tot voordeel van die gemeenskap aangewend kan word”.*

This is exactly what the Stellenbosch University Water Institute aims to do – to practice science for society. And because water is so central to life on this planet, the Institute's activities touch on all five of the themes of the HOPE Project.

Let me briefly give you a few examples, which will also illustrate the fact that the SU Water Institute brings renowned experts together within a focused network.

The research of Prof Cloete and his colleagues who are helping to develop the by now famous “teabag” water filter is contributing to Theme 1, which is the “eradication of endemic poverty and related conditions”.

Theme 2 is the “promotion of human dignity and health”. Here the work of Dr Jo Barnes on combating waterborne diseases serves as an example.

“Promoting democracy and human rights” is the third theme. Prof Juanita Pienaar’s work on the legal framework within which South Africa’s water dispensation operates fits in here.

The fourth theme is “promoting peace and security”. The link between it and water is obvious, if you consider the 2001 warning by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan that “[f]ierce competition for fresh water may well become a source of conflict and wars in the future”.

Prof Johan Hatting’s research into the ethics of freshwater management helps to clarify our thinking about the equitable sharing of water as a vital natural resource.

Prof Dave Richardson’s focus on the impact of invasive species on South Africa’s water resources serves to illuminate the final theme of the HOPE Project, which is “promoting a sustainable environment and a competitive industry”.

I can go on and on highlighting the sterling work of our dedicated researchers, but instead I want to refer you to the SU Water Institute’s booklet and website for more information.

*Dames en here, die US Waterinstituut vergestalt dus die Universiteit se oogmerk om hoop in en vanuit Afrika te skep deur middel van uitnemende wetenskapsbeoefening in die hoër onderwys. Uitnemendheid en relevansie loop soos goue drade deur die US se geskiedenis, en dit is steeds die geval.*

My congratulations to everyone involved in establishing the SU Water Institute. And a big thank you to all our partners who have been collaborating with us on this initiative.

I want to single out a great supporter and friend of Stellenbosch University, Minister Naledi Pandor. As she will no doubt confirm when she takes the stage in a minute, she has been such a regular visitor here that she might as well get a permanent parking bay.

Madam Minister, thank you for your support – and we hope that you will think of us when in future you drink from the water jug we got you to remind you of the SU Water Institute.

*Dames en here, dankie weereens vir u teenwoordigheid, en geniet die res van die aand.*