

“Stellenbosch University: Forward!”

“Universiteit Stellenbosch: Vorentoe!”

**Communication to the Convocation
by the Rector and Vice-Chancellor**

**Mededelings aan die Konvokasie
deur die Rektor en Visekanselier**

**Prof Wim de Villiers
Coetzenburg, 2016/01/26, 19:00**

(English translation: <http://bit.ly/WdVspeeches>
Afrikaanse vertaling: <http://bit.ly/WdVtoesprake>
VIDEO: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfoPWT2pHZs>)

Thank you, Prof Viljoen, *baie dankie*. Evening, everyone. It's good to be here with all of you. *Goeienaand, dames en here. Belangrike sake is toegelig deur my medesprekers.* Lovelyn [Nwadeyi] and Breyten [Breytenbach] have raised important issues, some of which I will also be touching on. In reporting to Convocation, I want to do three things:

- Highlight our major successes;
- Address our main challenges; and
- Most importantly, outline the way forward.

Ek gaan dit nie noodwendig in hierdie volgorde doen nie, maar dis breedweg die areas wat ek wil dek.

Now, there are indeed important issues to address at our institution, but I am confident that we have solid foundations in place. (1) We are doing well in the pursuit of excellence, (2) we are making good progress towards becoming more inclusive, and (3) we are addressing societal challenges.

Let me briefly expand on these three areas:

(1) Wat betref uitnemendheid, is daar verlede maand bekendgemaak Stellenbosch het weer opgeskuif in die Times Higher Education-ranglys van universiteite in die BRICS-lande en ander ontluikende ekonomieë¹. Ons beklee nou die 11de plek uit 200 universiteite in 48 lande. Toegegee, ranglyste is nie die alfa en omega nie, maar dit is verblydend om gesaghebbende internasionale erkenning te kry.

You might also have seen a survey² late last year showing that Stellenbosch University graduates earn the highest average starting salaries of all South African universities. This confirms that our qualifications are held in high esteem by employers.

Gepaart van kwalifikasies, ons het in Desember meer as 5 000 grade en diplomas toegeken. Hiervan was 128 doktorsgrade, en saam met Maart vanjaar se getal sal ons na verwagting na aan 250 vir 2015 kom, wat 'n nuwe rekord sal wees. Hierop kan alumni trots wees.

(2) The second example of our solid foundations is the progress we are making towards becoming more inclusive by broadening access to our institution. From 2008 to 2015 our intake of black, coloured and Indian students increased from 31% to 38%. Our target for 2020 is 50% first-years from these groups. Already nearly 50% of our more than 10 000 postgraduate students are black, coloured or Indian.

Ons beskou diversiteit as 'n voorvereiste vir uitnemendheid, want blootstelling aan 'n groter verskeidenheid mense en idees verruim die denke en verryk ons uitsette. Hierdie punt is bevestig deur 'n Stellenbosch-alumnus, dr Japie van Zyl van NASA, aan wie ons in Desember 'n eredoktorsgraad

¹ <http://www.sun.ac.za/afrikaans/Lists/news/DispForm.aspx?ID=3173>

² <http://mybroadband.co.za/news/business/137322-graduates-from-these-south-african-universities-earn-the-highest-starting-salaries.html>

toegeken het. Hy het vertel hoe fantasties dit is om met 'n span wetenskaplikes en tegnisi uit 67 lande te werk, want – sê hy – “diversiteit is 'n sterk katalisator wat die beste in almal na vore bring.”

In pursuit of greater inclusivity, we last year allocated an additional R70 million to diversify our staff body, especially at senior academic level. Stellenbosch University is on a journey of becoming ever more non-racial and multilingual – a national asset proudly serving the South African and global society as a whole.

(3) The third area is that we are contributing to a better future for all by making a positive impact on society. A striking example is the successful application by our Legal Aid Clinic last year to have garnishee orders obtained by micro-lenders against farmworkers, cleaners and security guards set aside. This has national implications for low-income earners.

Ladies and gentlemen, this institution – your University – aims to grow these strengths (excellence, inclusivity, social impact) as we tackle the challenges that face our sector head on. Higher education is undergoing rapid change, and all universities are having to innovate and adapt to new circumstances, or else we will stagnate.

John F Kennedy said, “Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or the present are certain to miss the future.”

Student finances, and thus the financial sustainability of the University, is set to still be an issue this year. The central idea emerging from the protests of 2015 is affordable higher education for all. We support this national call – and free, subsidised studies for academically deserving students who struggle financially – but for the moment, all universities still rely on student fees. We welcome the allocation of significant additional funds by the state, as well as the appointment of a Presidential Commission of Inquiry, and look forward to satisfactory outcomes.

Our language policy gets a lot of attention. Some fear that our use of Afrikaans may exclude those who prefer to study in English, others fear our use of English is putting Afrikaans at a disadvantage. I want to tell you the University is committed to multilingualism without any exclusion. Language should never be an obstacle to any student. That is why we are expanding parallel-medium tuition (separate Afrikaans and English classes for the same module).

Deur Engels as onderrigtaal te gebruik, sorg ons dat ons toeganklik is vir meer mense. Maar daar is steeds 'n groot behoefte aan en vraag na Afrikaans, daarom duur ons aanbod daarin voort.

Dit is ook belangrik om te let op taal-demografiese neigings. Ons het nou meer as 30 000 studente. Verlede jaar het ons die eerste keer ooit in totaal meer Engelse as Afrikaanse studente gehad op Stellenbosch. Dit is 'n tendens wat sekerlik gaan voortduur.

Now, in terms of our challenges, various interest groups have different positions on a variety of issues – that’s a given. The important thing is that we should keep on talking and listening to each other in the search for common ground. That is the principle behind the idea of the open discussion – of die “oop gesprek” wat deur wyle prof Johan Degenaar voorgestaan is. Universities are places of ideas, around which there should be contestation in the search for answers.

Everyone has a right to lawful and peaceful protest under the Constitution. But there should not be any disruption, and everyone’s rights should be respected. We condemn all acts of violence and intimidation. We have a responsibility to protect our institution and all its people, property and activities.

Stellenbosch University is a national asset providing a crucial service to the country as a whole. That is why we strive to provide an inclusive, welcoming home to all. Everyone is entitled to be treated with respect and dignity – regardless of colour, belief, gender or sexual orientation.

Dit is egter nie al ons studente en personele se belewenis nie. So hartseer soos dit my ook al maak, moet ek toegee dat daar lede van ons Universiteitsgemeenskap is wat onaangename

ervarings het. Met die “Luister”-video verlede jaar het ek gesê ek gaan nie die onverdigbare verdedig nie: diskriminasie en marginalisering – of dit nou bewustelik of onbewustelik is – bly verkeerd.

Die Universiteit tree wel doelgerig teen vergrype op, maar wat dikwels aangeroeer word, strek veel verder as individuele gevalle. Dit spreek tot strukturele kwessies, ons institusionele kultuur, of almal voel hulle hoort hier, dat dit ook hulle plek is.

Wat hierop inspeel, is dat Maties eens beskou is as ’n “volksuniversiteit”. Hierdie idee was duidelik te eng. Dit was ’n uitsluitende blik na binne, in plaas van ’n inklusiewe uitreik na buite.

We need to understand that times have changed. We need to think and act inclusively. Stellenbosch cannot and will not be an island. In fact, the successes that we have achieved can be directly traced back to us opening up, becoming part of the broader context – nationally and globally.

Our inclusion in the global rankings of the world’s top universities is no accident. It comes after years of sustained investment in research excellence and building international networks.

Uit eie ondervinding kan ek bevestig Stellenbosch is nou ’n veel beter Universiteit en Mediese Skool as toe ek in 1983 MB,ChB afgestudeer het. En die redes is duidelik: groter diversiteit, beter navorsing, meer internasionalisering.

Stellenbosch University now has almost 150 partner institutions in 44 countries across six continents, with agreements signed at departmental, faculty and institutional level. Just more than 15% of our total student population are international students – from more than 100 countries.

We should continue along this path – to be locally relevant and globally competitive. Now is not the time for squabbling and navel gazing.

What we need to avoid at all costs, is the danger of polarisation. As different sides demonise one another, it becomes increasingly difficult to find common ground and compromise. We need to reach out to each other in the search for communalities, rather than retreating into “us” and “them” camps.

We realise our journey is incomplete and imperfect, but we remain steadfast in our determination to go forward. Because that is the only way to create a community of “social justice and equal opportunities” for all – as our University mission states very clearly.

Yes, we are facing challenges at the moment, but there also are many exciting opportunities. We need to fix what is wrong and celebrate what is right. I was in the United States recently when Martin Luther King Jr Day was commemorated, and I was again struck by this quote of his: “The time is always right to do what is right”.

Wat is die idee waarvoor die Universiteit Stellenbosch vandag staan? Inklusiwiteit, innovasie en toekomsgerigtheid. This is what Stellenbosch stands for: to be inclusive, innovative and future focused. Let us go forward together.

Thank you. *Baie dankie.*