

Faculty of Military Science and Military Academy annual academic opening.

Joe Modise Hall, Saldanha, 29 January 2015, 17:15.

**Address by Prof Leopoldt van Huyssteen,
Acting Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Stellenbosch University**

Thank you, Brigadier-General Mbatha [Commandant: Military Academy]. Good day, everyone! Lieutenant-General Yengeni [Chief: Human Resources], Prof Van Harte [Chair: Defence Force Service Commission (DFSC)], Prof Tshehla [Dean: Faculty of Military Science], DFSC Members, Brigadier-General Sibango [Chief of Staff: Training Command], SDSP Members [Security & Defence Studies Programme], other ranks and colleagues, students and staff, ladies and gentlemen ... I am glad to be here, and to see all of you.

Some of you were present in Stellenbosch last week when we welcomed Maties for the 2015 academic year, and as usual the most enthusiastic section of the crowd came from Saldanha! Thank you for that. It's always a pleasure to see the passion and loyalty of military students.

ALL our students on ALL our campuses are Maties, and must be able to participate fully in activities of the University. I am standing firm on this because inclusivity is important to us. All our structures should take note of this.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, today is all about formally getting the academic year underway. There's a particular saying that is relevant to this context: "A good start is half the battle." This is applicable not only to the academic year ahead, but also to us as institutions: The University and the military.

I think we have indeed made a good start. In fact, we are well underway! Take, for instance, our Revised Memorandum of Agreement in 2012; and the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) flowing from it. Together we have laid a firm foundation of cooperation for mutual benefit.

And this has spinoffs beyond the University and the Military, extending to the country as a whole, and all who live in it. It is our vision as University to educate thought leaders for the future. In other words, responsible, professional young adults willing to help society prosper to the benefit of all. It is an honour for Stellenbosch University to contribute – through our Faculty and the Military Academy – to such important structures in our country as the Department of Defence (DoD), and the South African National Defence Force (SANDF).

And I know that we all place a high premium on excellence. From our side as University, this is reflected in the fact that we are now ranked among the top 2% of higher-education institutions in the world. And the high academic achievements here at Saldanha is part of this success story. Last year, 38 BMil degrees, 12 honours degrees and 2 master's degrees were awarded here – and I believe there are some PhDs in the pipeline too. Congratulations!

But, ladies and gentlemen, striving for academic success does not mean we live in an ivory tower with our heads in the clouds! No, we have our feet firmly on the ground ... at grassroots level. Community interaction is one of our three core activities as a university. Why? Because the pursuit of knowledge is not of much use if it does not improve people's lives.

So, this past September we concluded an agreement with the Saldanha Bay Municipality to be the "knowledge partner" of the local community. We said we would draw on the intellectual capital available to us – and that includes all of you. This Faculty of Military Science, this Military Academy houses an extensive store of unique knowledge that can be used to promote human development. The commanders, the academics and the instructors understand their role in developing the next generation of military leaders.

That's what it's all about in the end ... human development. Just as a university is there to develop human potential, so a defence force is all about people – those in the community it serves, as well those in its own ranks.

It is heartening to see the commitment towards human development shown by the Department of Defence and the SANDF. Those pursuing a professional career in the military can start here at Saldanha with a Bachelor's in Military Science, but also go much further – right up to Master's and Doctoral level. And now, for the first time, we have an intake of MPhil students as well – which opens the doors of learning so much wider.

Continuous innovation is very important. That's the only way to give effect to the ideal for every officer to have a degree. If we want to increase the uptake of postgraduate qualifications in this sector, we have to expand the offering. And we have to do so in ways relevant to needs in this sector.

We must provide the right academic stepping stones for talented people to take their skills to the next level. And for that we need various kinds of qualifications – at both the graduate and postgraduate levels. This is catered for by South Africa's Military Academy, Defence College and War College, as well as the Defence Academy mooted in the Defence Review. These would all be institutions located in different parts of the country – each fulfilling different need, but all contributing to the bigger goal of improving the quality of our military leadership.

The modern Defence Force of the future needs well-qualified officers in a variety of fields, not only Military Science, but also Engineering and Law, Intelligence and Artificial Intelligence, Cryptology and Geographic Information Systems, etc. Stellenbosch is well-placed to bring the full scope of academic excellence in a variety of fields to the table – in the interest of increasing capacity in this sector.

One example from my own field. We have a programme in our Faculty of AgriSciences that is aimed at enhancing economic opportunities in rural communities. It is called ASNAPP, which stands for Agribusiness in Sustainable Natural African Plant Products.

The programme is operational here in South Africa, but also in Ghana, Zambia, Senegal, Rwanda, Liberia, Angola, Malawi and Mozambique. It develops our continent's natural products and horticulture sectors by promoting income-generating activities in communities that had no income to speak of before.

One of the initiatives of ASNAPP is the Livingstone Project in Zambia. It benefits vulnerable community members, including the disabled, orphans and widows. International hotels in the tourist areas have now become the major buyer of the local farmers' produce. This meant that the Project recorded its first million US dollars in sales in 2010.

So, there is indeed reason to be optimistic that smallholder farming can become a sustainable economic activity across Africa. This could have a stabilising effect on communities, improving the security situation in the process.

Why am I telling this to a military audience? Because I know this audience is also an academic audience, and therefore revels in innovative, critical thought. This is the kind of thinking required to meet the peace and security challenges of our time. And I have no doubt that the ongoing partnership between Stellenbosch University and the Department of Defence, in particular the SA National Defence Force, will take us closer to the future we strive for.

Good luck with your learning and teaching and research and studies this year! May 2015's crop of papers and publications and degrees set a new record.

Finally, once again a world of appreciation to the DoD and the SANDF for allowing SU to provide support for the major tasks that you are responsible for.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen!