

Africa Leads conference gala dinner,
Spier, Stellenbosch, 20 November 2012

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

Good evening, everyone. Allow me to acknowledge:

- Prof Michael Powell, Chairman of the Board of the Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative (GRLI);
- Prof Derick de Jongh, Director of the Albert Luthuli Centre for Responsible Leadership at the University of Pretoria;
- Mr Frik Landman, CEO of USB-ED;
- Prof John Powell, Director of the University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB);
- Delegates from universities, companies and social-sector institutions world-wide;
- Lastly, let me single out especially all the “Young Ambassadors” of responsible leadership from around the world at this Conference.

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, it is great to be here with you at this important event. To my mind, the title of this conference manages to succinctly capture, in just two words, the major issues for us who live on this great continent – “Africa Leads”. For few things are as important to us as the state of our home, and few things more pertinent than leadership. So, let us take those two words one by one.

What is the state of our home, Africa? Our continent is increasingly being identified as a success story. Analysts have noted that “a new wave of optimism” is sweeping across the continent, and that the international discourse has shifted “from Afro-pessimism to Afro-optimism”. On the economic front, African growth has accelerated by an average of nearly 6% since 2000, making it one of the world’s fastest growing regions. Politically, Africa is also making some progress. Of the continent’s 54 countries, 20 are now considered fully fledged electoral democracies, and only Somalia and Swaziland have not held competitive elections to date.

So far, so good. The other side of the balance sheet looks less rosy. Firstly, Africa scores poorly on the UNDP’ Human Development Index, which measures life expectancy, education and gross domestic product. Of the world’s 42 least-developed countries, 35 are African.

Secondly, it seems most African countries will not be meeting the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the target date of 2015. Good intentions have clearly not been translated into the required results.

Lastly, the people of our continent are far too often subjected to violent coups d’état, armed conflict and the brutal suppression of legitimate mass action in pursuit of civil liberties.

Now, does all this bad news not compel us to modify the statement “Africa Leads” to “Africa bleeds?” Don’t get me wrong – I am not saying we should get stuck on the negative aspects. But what we should also not do is to pretend that all is well and that we are not facing any challenges. We ignore the plight of the impoverished and the downtrodden and the marginalised on our continent at our own peril.

Now, if we say that we should acknowledge that there are indeed problems, it is my message tonight that it is up to us to stem the bleeding. Far too many of those in positions of leadership actually promote only their own interests. That is why we have such a problem with corruption – and its

variants, nepotism and favouritism and clientelism ... because too many “leaders” are not living up to the trust placed in them. “Leaders” are not fulfilling their responsibilities.

The net result is the crisis of leadership that we are currently experiencing. I say “currently experiencing”, but I actually think weak leadership has been a problem throughout history. As the Irish author Oscar Wilde said in 1890 already, “Nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing.”

That is why this gathering is so important. I am particularly excited at the prospect of a long-term structure for the development of Africa’s next generation of responsible leaders. It is going to be vital to ensure good coordination between the various efforts to promote responsible leadership in Africa.

At my own university, Stellenbosch, we are developing sustainable and long-term academic networks to boost Africa’s immense developmental potential over the coming decades. One could say this is what we are doing to stem the bleeding.

In 2010, we formed the Partnership for Africa's Next Generation of Academics (PANGeA) with the universities of Botswana, Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), Makerere (Uganda), Malawi and Nairobi (Kenya). Together, we are building strong doctoral programmes and scholarly communities through academic partnerships and joint research supervision on the African continent.

Another of our initiatives relevant to this discussion is the Security Institute for Governance and Leadership in Africa. SIGLA has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Africa Forum, which consists of Former African Heads of States and Government. We will now be able to tap into the wisdom of our continent’s respected elders for SIGLA’s Emerging Leaders Programme.

I want to mention one more example of what we are doing to prepare Africa’s next generation of leaders. One of our stated graduate outcomes is to produce a cadre of young people who can “take the lead in society as responsible and critical citizens in a democratic order.” An important vehicle that we are using for this purpose is our Institute for Student Leadership Development. It is named after Dr Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert, a former student, lecturer and eventually Chancellor of Stellenbosch, who had devoted his life to building democracy and non-racialism in SA. We have found that it no longer is enough for universities to just provide graduates with good academic qualification. We aim to develop well-rounded thought leaders who are committed to ploughing back into society.

The Van Zyl Slabbert Institute forms part of Stellenbosch University’s HOPE Project. Through this initiative we are using our research and teaching and community interaction to tackle major societal challenges. Making hope happen is a call to action to all young leaders.

By acting responsibly as a leader – in the interest of the impoverished and the downtrodden and the marginalised – you can give real substance to the idea that what Africa has to offer the world is Ubuntu – the notion that “a person is a person through other persons”.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen; and good luck with your long-term initiatives to ensure that Africa fulfils its potential to lead humanity to a better future.