

[Afrikaanse weergawe: <http://bit.ly/HRBtoesprake>]

**Reunion of Matie student leaders who travelled to Lusaka in 1989 for talks with the ANC  
STIAS, 14 June 2014, 12:00**

**Remarks by Stellenbosch University Rector and Vice-Chancellor Prof H Russel Botman**

Thank you, Bev [Witten, Alumni Relations], and good afternoon, everyone. A hearty welcome to all of you.

Allow me to single out a few special guests:

- Adv Thuli Madonsela [the Public Protector]
- Dr Tito Mboweni [former Governor of the Reserve Bank]; and
- Mr Roelf Meyer [Chair of the Civil Society Initiative].

Thank you for joining us today.

Also welcome to members of the media as well as to all our colleagues and students. And, of course, to our guests of honour today, the ‘Lusaka Maties’ ... also known as ‘The Maties who caused all the trouble’. After all that happened, I am very happy to be able to say to you today: Welcome home!

At the time, you received fairly hostile treatment from the authorities. Since then, however, a lot of water has passed under the bridge, and I am heartened by your presence here today – not only to think back, but also to join us in thinking forward – about how we should be tackling the future together.

Also welcome to the two people who accompanied you on your journey at the time, Mr André Zaaiman and Mr Hennie Serfontein. Thank you for joining us today.

Now, it’s remarkable to think that the events we are here to commemorate happened so recently. Twenty five years is not a long time... yet when one considers the fracas around the trip by Matie student leaders to Lusaka in 1989, it’s very clear that we are discussing a completely different time.

South Africa was a very different country back then, and this University a very different place. It was against this background that your visit to the exiled ANC and others took place.

We know it generated a lot of controversy. The question is: Why? Why would a mighty government worry about something like this? Aren’t student leaders supposed to take an active interest in society? And had there not been many other ‘safaris’ to Lusaka and Dakar and Harare for talks with the ANC?

So, why the fuss around this visit? I think there were two reasons: Your youthfulness; and the fact that you were from this University.

As students, you represented the next generation. So, if the leaders of tomorrow were starting to think for themselves, the old order’s tight grip was clearly beginning to slip.

And as Maties, you represented a University that had been pivotal to the idea of Afrikaner Nationalism for the beginning. So, if critical voices at Stellenbosch were growing louder, it would become harder to keep everyone else ‘on song’.

That’s why my predecessor was so ‘averse’ to your ‘safari’ ... you shook this University – and the country – to its foundations.

We came across a lengthy memorandum by Prof Mike de Vries to the Ruitersweg, the youth wing of the Broederbond, in the archives. It is in his own handwriting and is dated 9 May 1989.

He describes 1989 as a personal “low point”. He writes: “SU is beginning to hurt. Idasa [the Institute for a Democratic South Africa] is arranging rallies, SPOG [an SRC committee called *Stellenbosse Politieke Ondersoek- en Gesprek Komitee*] is organising tours, Nusas [the National Union of South African Students] is demonstrating ...” and “the SRC is breaking their relationship of trust with me”.

“Quo Vadis, Stellenbosch?” he asks. “Where to from here, my university?”

And then, the interesting part – his plea for a return to what he calls “certain basic values of civilisation”. And what are these values? His list includes:

- “the Christian faith”;
- “healthy power relations”;
- “disciplined freedom”;
- “a sense of responsibility”;
- “diligence”; and
- “respect for the institution of marriage” as opposed to “free love”.

Now, there’s nothing wrong with these values per se. But I think what students were reacting to was a ‘disconnect’ between values and reality.

You had an establishment that said it “rejected racism”, an establishment that said it was in favour of an “inclusive solution to South Africa’s divisions”. But what was actually happening? The majority of the population were denied the vote and equal access to services and opportunities ... because of their skin colour.

That was what sparked outrage on campuses across the country – including here at Stellenbosch. And it was a moral outrage. You guys wanted to do your bit to help fix what was so obviously wrong with South Africa.

For that, we owe you a debt of gratitude – again, not because you spoke to the ANC per se, but because you took the lead in doing the right thing, despite the cost to yourselves.

You were young, but you showed us the way. What you ‘mere youngsters’ had managed to do clearly grieved the ‘elders’. Just listen to the following comment that appeared in Die Burger’s column ‘Dawie se pen’: “Amateurs should leave the political arena so that the experienced, professional men can deal with matters.”

The fact that eight of the 18 Lusaka Maties were women had certainly ruffled the feathers!

Now, your actions in 1989 were a turning point for this University, just as June 16 was a turning point for the country as a whole. Stellenbosch would never be the same after your trip to Lusaka. In fact, in many ways we are still riding the waves of change set in motion by your decision to stand up and speak out; your decision to be not only objects of the reality but subjects instead.

A quick footnote – Stellenbosch is often portrayed as having been the quintessential ‘cradle of apartheid’. But there were many critical voices here through the years – and we acknowledge them all. For example, in the Mike de Vries collection we also found a petition

that was drafted in support of everyone's "right to enter into talks with any person". And it was signed by 167 staff members across the University.

So, the pressure for change kept mounting, and eventually this old institution would catch up with its 'Young Turks'. In 1999, your alma mater finally acknowledged – and I quote – "its contributions to the injustices of the past".

This was contained an important SU policy document called "Strategic Framework for the Turn of the Century and Beyond". Broad and deep discussion had led to the University taking responsibility for the past – both its own actions and its contributions to the injustices perpetrated in this country.

This was an apology for apartheid, one that should be repeated from time to time. But the University didn't stop there. It also committed itself to "redress and development".

"Redress" referred specifically to access. In 1990, Stellenbosch had just 762 black students. Today, we have more than 9 000, or roughly a third of our student body. And by 2018 we will be even further along.

And regarding the commitment to "development", it laid the foundation for a science-for-society approach at Stellenbosch. As I said in my installation address in 2007: We had to move "from success to significance".

We started doing so with the University's HOPE Project. And now we have our own Vision 2030, which is for SU to become more inclusive, innovative and future focused.

Never again do we want to be a university only serving a section of the population. We are now a national asset. Stellenbosch is no longer owned by a section of the nation. We now belong to everyone – the world and the country ... and all its people. And you helped to facilitate that mind shift. Thank you! We are proud of you.

You showed true thought leadership, and left a valuable legacy for future generations: You chose to examine life critically, and to be active and engaged citizens. These are the attributes that we hope every Matie would have developed by the time they graduate.

The country certainly needs thought leaders for the future. Twenty years into our democracy, a lot has been achieved in our country, but many challenges remain ... both old and new. And the way to make a difference, is to think critically, engage with society, and act courageously ... as you did.

This applies equally to Stellenbosch University. We may find ourselves in a completely different era, but it in no way implies that there are no longer issues on campus. Take the question of symbols, for example.

Stellenbosch has long parted with DF Malan's 1913 idea of higher education for the Afrikaner people. But do our symbols reflect this change? What are we doing to make everyone feel at home ... to assure them that this place is theirs too? How do we get the walls and buildings and squares to speak to everyone?

These are the issues requiring critical thought. It is again time to cross borders – albeit metaphorically this time. It is time to bridge the divide through courageous conversations. I would like to hear your thoughts on all of this.

So, thanks for being here today, and I am looking forward to a good discussion.