

[FINAL DRAFT: Embargoed until delivery; Subject to change; Compare against delivery] [10 MIN]

**Third Annual BRICS Network University Conference
5-7 July 2018, Stellenbosch University (SU), South Africa**

Theme: “Unlocking BRICS Universities’ Partnerships: Postgraduate Opportunities and Challenges”

SESSION 1: OPENING PLENARY

09:00, Thu 5 July, Van der Sterr Building, SU

**Welcoming Remarks by Prof Hester Klopper,
Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Strategy and Internationalisation, SU**

Good morning, everyone, and a warm welcome to all of you on this beautiful winter’s morning. My role this morning is to extend a word of welcome on behalf of Stellenbosch University (SU) to all delegates, which I do with pleasure. I will also attempt to provide some context to our discussions the next two days.

Firstly, welcome in the town of Stellenbosch in the Cape Winelands District of the Western Cape Province in South Africa, one of the five member states of BRICS, along with Brazil, Russia, India and China. I am sure you will agree, this is a stunning setting for this important Conference. Stellenbosch has many historic buildings, cafes, art galleries and shops in town, and rolling vineyards and many wine farms all around us, so please enjoy the local hospitality when you get a chance.

Stellenbosch is also well known as a university town, so it is an appropriate venue for the BRICS Network University Conference, which we are co-hosting with South Africa’s Department of Higher Education and Training.

We are honoured to be joined at this Conference by:

- the Minister for Higher Education and Training, Dr Naledi Pandor. Welcome, Minister, and thank you – also to the Department – for making this Conference possible.

Welcome also to:

- Senior representatives of BRICS member countries;
- Members of the BRICS Network University (NU) International Governing Board;
- Coordinators and researchers of the BRICS Network University (NU) International Thematic Groups; and
- Senior representatives of the BRICS NU member universities, including heads of institutions – Vice-Chancellors, Presidents and Directors.
- Welcome to each and every one of the 158 delegates at this Conference – drawn mainly from BRICS member countries;
- The delegates represent 36 universities and 11 other higher education institutions;
- And we also have senior officials of other relevant bodies here, such as Universities South Africa, the Council on Higher Education and the South African BRICS Think Tank.

It’s great to have all of you on our campus. Please feel at home, you are most welcome.

[SU CENTENARY]

The history of higher education in this town goes back to 1866, and at Stellenbosch University, we are this year commemorating our Centenary, having developed out of Victoria College in 1918.

In our Centenary year, we are celebrating the many successes and achievements at Stellenbosch University the past 100 years. But simultaneously, we acknowledge the unfortunate contributions of our University towards the injustices of the past. For this we have deep regret. We apologise unreservedly to the communities and individuals who were excluded from the historical privileges that Stellenbosch University enjoyed. And we also honour the critical voices in our own ranks at the time who would not be silenced despite being ostracised.

Today, in responsibility towards the present and future generations, Stellenbosch University commits itself unconditionally to the ideal of an inclusive world-class university *in* and *for* Africa.

[THE IMPORTANCE OF RELEVANCE]

It is clear to us that as a university rooted in AFRICA, we need to bear fruit for the people of our continent. Stellenbosch University has more than 400 active collaborative projects with more than 600 partners in 42 African countries.

But universities also have to look beyond their own regions. And for universities in the BRICS countries, this grouping provides a most useful mechanism to engage globally with issues and challenges facing us jointly and individually.

As universities it is our role is to turn these challenges into research problems and academic programmes so that we can help find solutions to make the world a better place and produce human capital to advance society.

[RESEARCH FOCUS]

We have just adopted a new Strategic Framework to guide Stellenbosch University going forward, and one of our core strategic themes is to conduct “Research for impact”. Our focus is on interdisciplinary research that benefits society on a national, continental and global scale.

We have many touch points with the priority research themes of the BRICS Network University [which will form the mainstay of discussions at this Conference, namely Energy; Computer Science and Information Security; Ecology and Climate Change; Water Resources and Pollution Treatment; Economics; and BRICS Studies]. I am glad to say that many of our 7 centres of excellence and 45 research chairs focus on areas that would be of relevance to BRICS NU members.

Last year, we instituted a BRICS Collaboration Grant to provide funding for hosting researchers, to visit for research purposes, but also to undertake exploratory visits. This year, 10 awards have been made, specifically in Physics, Chemistry and Polymer Science, Earth Science, Botany and Zoology, Process Engineering, Psychology, Social Work and Theology. So, we encourage our researchers to engage with universities in our fellow BRICS countries.

[INTERNATIONALISATION]

This is part of the broader internationalisation of higher education. Global mobility is growing for students and academics. This creates more global partnerships with greater impact, and broadens university access for both students and academics.

We see this trend in action at Stellenbosch University. Looking at our last complete set of enrolment figures, those from 2017, we see that 13,4% of our students are international (compared with the national average of 7%). Our international students come from all over the world – from more than 100 countries. But the majority of them come from other African countries – 58% to be precise.

And nearly half of our international students, 47%, are postgrads – which compares well with the overall figure for the University as a whole of 33% postgraduate students.

At the institutional level, we have more than 300 agreements with universities throughout the world -- on six continents. So, internationalisation has become a top priority for Stellenbosch University.

Minister Pandor, we wholeheartedly welcome the Draft Policy Framework for the Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa published by the government last year.

We think that it provides an appropriate context and feasible framework for approaching the internationalisation of higher education in South Africa.

Particularly relevant for this Conference is the emphasis in the Draft Policy Framework on internationalisation within the ambit of not only South Africa's interests, but also the interests of SADC states, and the rest of the African continent, and – importantly – the global South and emerging economies, as well as the world beyond.

We also like the fact that broad parameters are set and clear guidelines provided for institutions to embark on their own policy and strategy development in line with the Draft Policy Framework.

For instance, with regard to joint degrees offered in collaboration with international institutions, the framework broadly confirms Stellenbosch University's existing approach towards joint and double degrees, which we started conferring a few years ago with a growing number of partner institutions.

[CONCLUSION]

Colleagues, looking at the programme, the stage is set for meaningful engagement here at the third annual BRICS Network University Conference. We shall be building on the foundation laid at the first two conferences, Russia 2016 and China 2017, and work towards the next conference in 2019.

But for now, it is still 2018, the year of the Nelson Mandela Centenary, and Stellenbosch University is honoured to share a birth year with our former President. Madiba of course played a leading role in South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994. And two years later, he received an honorary doctorate from Stellenbosch University. In his commendation on that occasion, we see that President Mandela was being honoured for being "a symbol of empowerment through learning";

We still share the conviction held by former President Nelson Mandela that "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." May that motto guide us at this Conference. Thank you.