



16 June 2015

Statement on Youth Day

Today, on the 16th of June, we commemorate the events that took place in Soweto, so many years ago. We recognise the courage and determination of the students in standing up to the injustice to which they were subjected.

We also have the opportunity to reflect on the broader history of this country and set out a vision for the South Africa in which we want our children to be raised. As our democracy comes of age, we have not yet succeeded in countering the legacy of injustice and oppression brought about during the apartheid era. In 1976, thousands of students gathered to protest the manner in which English and in particular Afrikaans, was summarily forced down on them. This resulted in countless South Africans being denied fair access to a proper education – the legacy of which still leaves countless South Africans disenfranchised to this day.

On this public holiday, we need to be decisive in not perpetuating the injustices of the past. We all have the privilege to live and work in this land and we should all be given the opportunity to share in the spoils at the end of a hard day's work. We are all Africans and we have a responsibility towards Africa.

As we become young adults, we should also not neglect our responsibility towards the youth. We have to mentor, protect and inspire young minds. We have to ensure that once we have finished building and laying foundations, our successors can carry on where we have left off.

Stellenbosch University has to do its part in ensuring that language is no longer used as a tool of exclusion. It also has to actively reverse the notion of Afrikaans and English being the only languages in which an education can be acquired. This can be done by doubling efforts to develop other African languages within an academic environment and could ultimately contribute to a higher standard of mother tongue education for the youth of this country.

It is necessary for all South Africans, and in particular those who carry the future of this country in their hands, to acknowledge that the destinies of all citizens of this country are intertwined. Our wellbeing in South Africa and on this continent relies on the wellbeing of everyone around us. Our success as a country lies in our ability to address social inequality.

Today we remember the lives lost and the battle fought by the youth in the Soweto Uprising. Their legacy compels us to bring about the change that would give future generations greater access to education and social mobility.

