

“Making HOPE happen”
Celebration of the HOPE Project, 11 April 2012,
Conservatorium, Stellenbosch University (SU)
**Speech by Prof H Russel Botman,
Rector and Vice-Chancellor of SU**

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

Tonight is a great night. When I saw the show just now, I thought of inspiration – how a nation can be inspired, how a community can be inspired.

When we were planning to go public with the HOPE Project in 2010, we were worried about having to compete with the soccer World Cup. But then we realised it would actually be a great backdrop for what we wanted to achieve.

So we gave ourselves the time to watch the World Cup, and to listen to R Kelly, who sang the theme song, “Sign of a victory”, with these words:

*I see the light at the end of the tunnel ...
that's the sign of a victory*

That is how I feel tonight, and I hope all of you feel the same. We have seen the light of a victory over hunger and poverty; over bad governance and the violation of human rights and dignity; over violence and insecurity; over environmental destruction and economic stagnation.

Of course the tournament is still on – the first match is not even over yet – but we have scored significant goals in a short space of time, on the toughest terrain imaginable. So to all our strikers – well done!

We must never forget the inspiration of 2010. This is the significance of the song. When you are in a tunnel, you feel overwhelmed by the darkness. But if you look at the end of the tunnel, you can see light, and that is the sign of a victory.

Your Excellencies (representatives of foreign governments), Mr Conrad Sidego (Mayor of Stellenbosch), Dr Paul Cluver (outgoing Chairperson of the University Council), Mr George Steyn (our incoming Chairperson), Ms Anina Botha (Chairperson of the Students’ Representative Council), SU Council members, trustees, members of the SU management team, deans, colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen: You may recall that, at my inauguration exactly five years ago, on 11 April 2007, I told you that I wanted to generate discussion on campus about hope. I said that the University should fight hopelessness and false hope by channelling all its science and focussing it on the agenda for development of our country, our continent and the world.

That meant that we had to leave our ivory tower, think more widely and ask more demanding questions. We had to ask how science could be put right what had gone wrong in society.

I also said that, if we did that, it would make us strong, because in that way we would progress from success to significance. To go from success to significance is a very big step for any institution as big and difficult to change and to turn as the University.

We had to probe even deeper, asking ourselves how we could ensure that we would be relevant and that those who worked with us would find us credible. That was the most difficult part – to show our relevance and academic strength in a way that when people look at us they can see the integrity of science changing their world for the better.

I think we have fared well in this.

We have changed the conversation about SU. And we have done so by focussing our core functions – teaching and learning, research and community interaction. We have created for many people that light at the end of the tunnel. They know it is the sign of a victory.

We don't have to accept the conditions that we see. Beyond them there are the opportunities to seek new solutions to take us into the future and make a strong university even stronger.

And others think so too. Two weeks ago, the University won gold at the Prism Awards of the Public Relations Institute of South Africa. This on the strength of the more than 50 popular articles published by our academics last year – in a broad range of newspapers and magazines. Our thinkers have emerged as thought leaders in our country. And they are helping to keep Stellenbosch top of mind – for the right reasons.

I am proudly a Vice-Chancellor that leads the thought leaders of this country. It is thanks to the efforts of the people of this institution that we are now playing in a whole different league.

Last year, we broke into three global rankings in quick succession – the QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) and the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, and the Leiden Ranking. Overall we now occupy the second position in Africa, but we are the continent's Number One research university. The Department of Higher Education and Training has just confirmed that – like in the previous round – we achieved the highest weighted research output per fulltime-equivalent academic staff member of all universities in South Africa. We are the place where the best talent will want to be simply because we are focussing on our core functions in the right way.

SU has been building a vast network of international academic collaboration. We have agreements in place with around 200 foreign universities. In Africa, we have 122 active collaborative projects in 36 African countries. Involved are 132 African institutions and 363 African collaborators.

One of the first milestones of the HOPE Project in 2010 was the investment that was made in PANGeA, the Partnership for Africa's Next Generation of Academics. This network consists of the universities of Botswana, Dar es Salaam, Makerere, Malawi, Nairobi and Stellenbosch. We have joined forces to revitalise scholarship on our continent.

Ladies and gentlemen, in December last year, *The Economist* published a special report entitled, "Africa rising". The magazine said, "After decades of slow growth, Africa has a real chance to follow in the footsteps of Asia."

The subheading of the story was very interesting. Instead of "the dark continent", *The Economist* called Africa "the hopeful continent". How could they say that? After all, isn't Africa still a struggling, developing continent?

Yes, this is true. But what is also true, is that Africans themselves are doing something about it. From Addis Ababa to Cape Town, from Nairobi to Lagos, African governments and regional bodies and NGOs – and universities – are collaborating to tackle developmental challenges. As a Vice-President of the Association of African Universities, I am witness to this energy throughout our continent.

It is with pride that I can say that SU – through the HOPE Project – is a partner in this wave of change. We are contributing relevant knowledge from Africa to make this century the century of Africa. It is through collaboration with other leading African universities that we are solidifying our position as the African knowledge institution of choice.

Besides PANGeA, we have also entered into the TRECCAfrica consortium for Climate Change Adaptation with five other African universities, supported by the Open Society Foundation of Switzerland and the European Union.

And we form part of the Periperi U partnership of 10 selected universities in Africa, which is aimed at building sustainable capabilities in disaster risk mitigation. Substantial donor support for this is being provided by the US Agency for International Development.

All of this collaboration, and partnerships and networks are aimed at one thing – making hope happen for the billion people of our great continent. Africans are working together to find African solutions to African challenges – and Stellenbosch is playing its part as an African centre of excellence.

At the beginning of my first term I said that this was our *aspiration*. Now, at the start of my second term, Africa has become fully part of our new *identity*. And SU has become part of the DNA of higher education on our continent.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is how we make HOPE happen ... and none of this would have been possible without the backing of our supporters – SU's friends and partners and donors.

It is with great gratitude that I can announce tonight that since April 2007, the University has received nearly R2 billion in donations, allocations, research contracts and sponsorships. That undoubtedly makes the HOPE Project Africa's biggest higher education funding campaign ever.

That we have reached this goal in the prevailing climate of an economic downturn globally, and shrinking state subsidies for higher education worldwide, is remarkable. It speaks to the power of the idea of hope – that we can achieve the extraordinary by reaching beyond the ordinary. It shows that the human spirit is stronger than the worst enemy that can stand up against it.

So to all our supporters, thanks a billion – or make that two!

Thank you to the SU Council. They have taught me what investor confidence actually means. We sat through long and difficult discussions before Council decided to make a first investment. But once it had happened, investor confidence was generated in several places. I wish to thank our Chairperson, Dr Paul Cluver, for his support – and for that of his wife, Songvei, and their family.

Thank you also to Stellenbosch Trust, who had to face another kind of challenge. They had to help us build the capacity to deliver the necessary results. We have succeeded in putting together the very best team in the country – on the continent – in our Department of Institutional Advancement. I wish to thank the Trust, who has made this possible.

Thank you to the Stellenbosch University SA Foundation in the United Kingdom and the Friends of the University of Stellenbosch Foundation in the United States.

Thank you to the South African government. The investment of Council allowed us to go to the government and say we are not asking you for money, we will use your money to leverage other money. That changed the nature of the discussion.

Thank you to major international philanthropic foundations. And thank you to national corporate donors.

Thank you to all the individuals who have made donations. A record 14 people have given more than R1 million each; but in 2011 alone, we had 1 464 individual donors – a record too – which means every gift counts, whatever the amount.

Tonight one of our annual donors walked in with an envelope and her cheque. She's one of those ladies who says this must go to the University. On the envelope she wrote, give this to Prof Russel Botman and tell him it is for the HOPE Project, and that I will continue giving.

It is donations such as these, constant over a long period, that inspire our lecturers, researchers, students and support services staff.

A great thank-you to all who made bequests or promised bequests to the University.

And thank you to our alumni for their continued support. The best universities of the future will have the support of their alumni. We have worked hard to build relationships with our alumni and to keep them informed about what we really are doing, to avoid any misconceptions.

Alumni have supported us very well in one area in particular: They told us that they wanted us to spend their money on helping people who had been disadvantaged in life. Alumni tend to support a very important need, and that is to provide financially needy students with the same opportunities they had. The thinking is like this for many of them: When I started, my parents were poor; they couldn't afford to send me to university. I got in through a bursary, maybe through the Helpmekaar Fund or something like that. I remember that, and now I want to give back something. I want to help young people who find themselves in the same position that I was. Last year, 40% of our students received bursaries – and many of these funds came from our alumni.

I hope you understand that this is not only about money; this is about investing in the future. All of us have to pull together to build our community, our country, and leaders and entrepreneurs of the future. Words cannot fully express the importance of your investment. All I can say, to all our supporters, is: two billion thank-yous!

Ladies and gentlemen, as I said at the beginning, we may have scored significant goals so far, but the final whistle has not blown. The tournament is still on. As I look back at my first term, I am grateful for the support that has brought us to this point, but standing on the shoulders of giants also enables one to see the challenges that still await us.

In my next term, we are going to have to tackle the challenges of the 21st century head on – and the challenge of sustainability will require quantum leaps in our thinking.

I now ask representatives of our student body to join me on stage, because the future that we are talking about belongs to them. In the 21st century, serious efforts are needed worldwide to rectify the damage caused in the 20th century. Energy saving, water security and climate change will all have to enjoy the attention of our best academics and researchers.

The quantum challenge that we are facing also involves the further development of the University. In the 21st century students are not willing to continue living as before. They want to know from us: What are you doing for sustainability? What are you doing to bring down the electricity usage of the University?

They ask the questions for the future. They ask questions that matter for the hope of the next generation. They lay the quantum challenges before us.

Our buildings must become 21st-century learning environments, and more sustainable. We live in a small town where we are the major consumer of electricity. We need to make Stellenbosch a greener place. Our carbon footprint simply must be reduced. The number of vehicles must decrease; more people will have to move about on foot or on bicycles.

The people are so serious about it at the University that they have decided to auction off my parking space. So, my parking space will be unavailable to me for one month, and I shall have to do exactly what everyone else does who no longer park in the campus centre – use the shuttle service. And I shall have to learn to get on a bicycle, and to walk more. I will have to experience what we want to do in our own community; experience how best to manage it, and learn for it.

Hopefully in this way in future Stellenbosch will be known not only as the town with WiFi but also as the town where maroon is actually green.

Actually, a plan is brewing in my head: I want to ask the mayor whether we cannot have his parking space, too. We have a healthy working relationship with the mayor; we meet every month about these issues. We know that we have a responsibility to the town and its people, and we know that the people who have supported us will continue to do so because they believe in investing in a better future.

We will continue building very strong partnerships with companies in our town, our country and the world, companies that have made sustainability part of their own values and characters, part of their trademarks. Sustainability will become our trademark, and we will forge stronger bonds with others who have the same trademark.

We will make hope happen – that is our promise. This is the legacy that we want to leave for the future – and by helping us meet our new multibillion-rand quantum challenge, our friends and supporters can join us in leaving a legacy of hope.

Ladies and gentlemen, in closing, let me quote a line from the English poet Alfred Tennyson's "Ulysses".

It features a character often explored in literature since the great Greek epic poet of ancient times, Homer, created the Odyssey. In the 20th century the Irish author James Joyce wrote a novel called "Ulysses". But it is predated by Tennyson's "Ulysses".

In the final section of his epic poem, the irrepressible Ulysses calls on his sailors to undertake another great voyage, to "sail beyond the sunset" again. I will conclude with his call:

"Come, my friends, 'tis not too late to seek a newer world."

Thank you.