

# **A MULTICULTURAL UNIVERSITY WITH A PEDAGOGY OF HOPE FOR AFRICA**

**H Russel Botman**

**Speech on the occasion of his installation**

**11 April 2007**

I would like to start by thanking all of you for the confidence that you have shown in me through your direct or indirect support of my appointment as Rector and Vice-Chancellor of Stellenbosch University. I trust that I will receive the strength from Above to meet your exceedingly high, but justified, expectations.

I extend my special thanks to all the relevant representatives of the respective statutory bodies of the University, in particular Senate and Council, for the significant support that I have received from them. My wife, Beryl, and my children, Hayman, Lizelle, Ilse and Roxanne, deserve my heartfelt thanks for their consistent and unwavering support. Thank you to my family that is present here today, and particular my brother, Deon, and my sisters, Ethne, Phebe and Grace; and, in their absence, my late parents.

It is wonderful to have all of you, my friends and the friends of Stellenbosch University, present on this auspicious day in my life. Thank you for being here. You represent my memories of the past difficult years and my dreams for a new generation of young people who will know Apartheid only from hearsay.

It is my pleasure to be able to declare right at the outset that I am the proud Rector and Vice-Chancellor of Stellenbosch University. The HEQC quality audit report, which landed on my desk on 26 January 2007, reminds us that the University may justifiably be praised.

Indeed, as is evident from our many achievements and awards, we are one of the leading research universities in South Africa and Africa. These successes are driven by the excellence of our staff and their international expertise.

Our teaching programmes, both at undergraduate and postgraduate level, are synonymous with good quality. At the undergraduate level we continue to succeed in attracting 'the best of the best' to Stellenbosch (in terms of the matriculation results of first-year students). Our postgraduate programmes are in great demand, not only in South Africa, but also in other countries in Africa and abroad.

Stellenbosch has a proud history of community interaction. This entails a wide variety of community interaction initiatives that are run by enthusiastic staff and students.

We are blessed with dedicated and knowledgeable academic and support staff. Our regular performance assessments indicate that there is little evidence of 'dead wood' among our staff. This is illustrated by the sustained high-quality output of our staff in the fields of research, teaching and community interaction, as well as in the provision of professional support functions.

We indeed have reason to be proud of our contribution to the quality of life in this beautiful town and of its people.

However, we would not be honest if this is all we have to say about ourselves. In this regard the HEQC Audit Report is also correct: the University still faces many challenges. Stellenbosch University acknowledges that we were role players in the injustices of the past. Some of us protested, but maybe this was not enough. As far as we as institution are concerned: we know that we cannot apologise enough.

In the University's Strategic Framework for the Turn of the Century and Beyond, already accepted by the University community in 2000, there is a special section dealing with this matter. We also made the following commitment:

***Redress involves all aspects of the University; the University, however, sees its commitment to achieving equity and its commitment to a readiness to serve as major instruments in its efforts to redress its contribution to past injustices.***

***Equity is defined as follows: Equity, in terms (inter alia) of the bringing about of a corps of excellent students and academic and administrative staff members that is demographically more representative of South African society, must be fundamental to all our actions, including our redress of the inequalities of the past and our repositioning of the University for the future.***

***And further: The need for demographic broadening of the University calls for a sustained critical appraisal of its accessibility ... [and] in commitment to readiness to serve, the University acknowledges the need for development and service in communities and areas previously and currently disadvantaged in the provision of services and infrastructure.***

I wish to dedicate my term of office as Rector and Vice-Chancellor of Stellenbosch University to the realisation of this self-declared commitment by the people of our University. This institutional declaration will now become a pursuit.

Unfortunately, this commitment and pursuit also represent the complicated contrast in our University. The contradiction of our past versus the future that we wish to pursue is becoming our foremost dilemma. I referred earlier to the proven successes of this University. SU is known widely for its academic excellence in all our key functions. Our dilemma, as well as our challenge, is how to move from success to significance, given the changing socio-political milieu in which this University has to operate and within which it has to attain greater meaning for all our people. This is an incisive question about the central challenges facing SU for us to be able to say proudly that we wish to be a University of meaning and significance for South Africa and Africa. At the heart of this lie the dilemmas of **credibility, relevance, student success, people management and Afrocentricity**. We suffer from a lack of credibility, despite our excellence. We also do not display enough relevance, despite our ability to produce sought-after students for industry. We also do not radiate enough of a spirit of Afrocentric expertise, despite our strong international profile.

To face these dilemmas head-on, we need to understand the core of our own institutional strength and establish a new pedagogical framework – **A Pedagogy of Hope**.

The theme of a pedagogy of hope was coined by Paulo Freire, the world-famous pedagogue who achieved fame by publishing his famous theory in a book entitled “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”. This book was banned in South Africa during the Apartheid years. In those times, it was illegal to ask about the learning needs of people living under oppression. The book, which was published by Paulo Freire in 1994, contained the seeds of a new philosophy of education. He asked himself which pedagogical demands are placed on the curriculum by democracy. He developed his thoughts against the background of the situation in Brazil in particular. His answer was that the oppressed/poor/less privileged have a need for a pedagogy of hope. He accounted for this position in his book titled “Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed”. All of us are affected by democracy, but the pedagogical significance of the changes in 1994 still need to be considered properly for Higher Education.

The transformation of the University has thus far been driven by its **Vision 2012**. The Vision foresees that, by 2012, SU will be an institution of excellence; will make a scientific and technological contribution to Africa; will be a role player in the South African community; and promote both diversity and Afrikaans in a multilingual context. Our current vision served a good purpose in bringing us unwaveringly to where we currently are, and provides a sufficient platform to tackle the future with confidence. Living out our current vision therefore is essential, but not necessarily sufficient.

One possible question is whether it is not too general? – with the knowledge that I have co-ownership of this Vision. It could probably be argued that this question would also be applicable to other institutions of higher education in South Africa to varying degrees.

**It is my endeavour to gear up the University, using the existing vision as point of departure, to an institution in Africa that does not only want to be significantly ‘different’, on the basis of our past, but also wishes to be significantly ‘better’, as viewed against our commitment with regard to the future of the people of our country and the continent.**

Now you may want to know which instrument we are going to use to allow Vision 2012 to soar and to build an operational framework for a Pedagogy of Hope. More specifically; how do we wish to allow a **Pedagogy of Hope** to develop at Stellenbosch University?

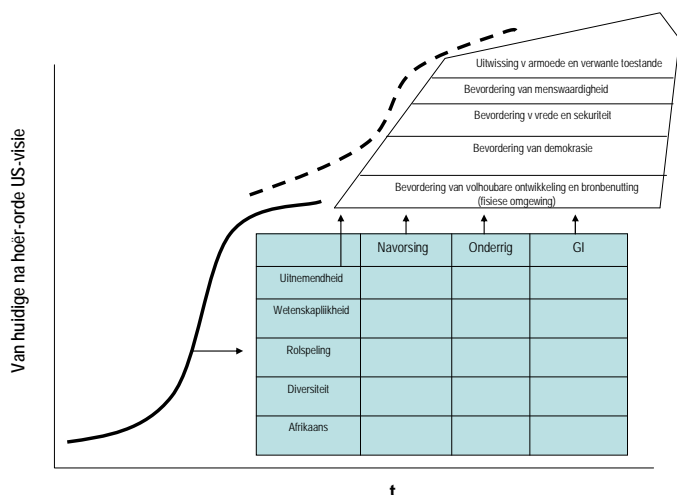
Minister Pandor, I have made a proposal to the Deans of our ten faculties, to the managers of the University, to the Council of the University, and to Senate, and it has been supported throughout.

In order to explain what we wish to do I need to take you back to the meeting of the Commonwealth Education Ministers. This meeting was held in December 2006 in Cape Town, more or less at the time that the Council of this University decided to appoint me as the Rector and Vice-Chancellor. It was said at that meeting that the renewal of the African University requires a closer connection to the international

development agenda and, more specifically, “that the Millennium Development Goals will only be achieved in Africa, and elsewhere in the world, if there are flourishing systems of tertiary education”. I hope it will make you proud of this University to know that we are going to take the Millennium Development Goals as our institutional focus areas and themes.

Vision 2012 therefore needs to be more focused and I aim to do so by gearing it up through the utilisation of a number of central themes. These themes are aligned directly with the well-known Millennium Goals. In this regard we will soon also be able to describe the University’s contribution to, for example, the eradication of pandemic poverty and related conditions; ensuring peace, security and stability on the African continent as essential preconditions for optimal development; the improvement of the physical and psychological circumstances of people in general; and the development of democracy (to mention but a few).

This University wants to link its excellence and expertise to the international development agenda. I will soon compile a task team to investigate the modalities and to develop a model for implementation. We hope that, by the next meeting of Ministers of Education in 2009, the Minister we will be able to offer the results of our work as evidence.



However, gearing up the University’s Vision requires concurrent and intense attention being paid to facets of our activities that are related to the questions of relevance and credibility that I asked earlier. One of the prerequisites that need to be satisfied is that we have to make this University a fully **multicultural place**: a home for everyone, a home where cultures meet. To achieve this, we need to make a credible effort to improve the racial profile of the University. We need to welcome more black people here, in their full diversity. In order to make them feel welcome, we need to make the institutional culture of the University inclusive and welcoming.

It is not only the institutional culture that should become more welcoming. It also has to happen to the social culture of the town. The multicultural nature of the University

should express the constitutional mandate of non-racism and therefore also applies to the town of Stellenbosch. The Executive Mayor, Alderman Lauretta Maree, and I are currently making proposals to our respective councils on the establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding that will create a framework within which to address an array of aspects that are related to the divisions in our town. In our effort to establish a value-driven institution and community, racism and discrimination are high on the list of unwelcome guests at the University and in the town.

Deleted: a

One of the most important projects completed by myself last year was the establishment of an office for students with special learning needs, such as the visually and hearing impaired. Our diversity objectives are not a numbers game, but the expression of a striving for human dignity for all, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or diversity of learning needs. We also need to work hard to assist the poor to gain access to our university. We can only feel satisfied that there is fair access when the daughter of the farm worker has the same future opportunities as the son of the farmer.

**I also wish to lead the University to increasingly becoming a multicultural home for all: where everyone will be welcomed and supported and where no one every again needs to fear: Stellenbosch, or Matieland, is not for our people and therefore I need to consider another university for further studies. I can accept the challenges of developing a multicultural university around a pedagogy of hope because I have a team of people at the University who share the key to the unlocking of our commitment to the future.**

In this regard I have already stated that the University is fortunate to have a dedicated, professional and highly knowledgeable staff. The reality at which we will have to work with greater dedication is that the diversity of our staff corps, particularly at the more senior levels, leaves much to be desired. For example, our senior academic staff level is still predominantly white and male. This is not a tenable position and also does not reflect the inclusiveness that the University should represent.

I aim to take concerted steps in this regard – including aspects such as strategic recruitment, scholarship and well-managed career and succession planning, as well as knowledge-transfer programmes.

**Our commitment to our people also includes our student corps, its equitable access to higher education and its associated student success. Improving the rate of participation of black people in higher education, in their full diversity, must be improved purposefully so as to sustainably support the economy and the country's human resource needs.**

We simply need to succeed in making the University more accessible and achievable for groups that currently need to overcome pertinent obstacles in this regard, particularly at the undergraduate level. We regard it as our duty to prepare prospective students for access to the University via interaction with schools – particularly by focusing on aspects such as the development of logical and critical thinking skills, which facilitate performance in mathematical, scientific and technological fields of study. In this regard we will have to enter into new, suitable partnerships with the Department of Education, develop existing partnerships at provincial level, and apply the University's unique technology platforms as a vehicle

with which to make existing and new initiatives accessible in the farthest reaches of the *platteland*.

At the level of prospective entry to the University, financial realities are a major hindrance. The University already makes a significant portion of its resources available to enhance access for prospective students from poor communities and will need to find even more resources for this purpose. The challenge of and claim to resources is so great, however, that we cannot achieve this without the active and real support of the various interested parties – I trust that you will also support me in this regard.

Access with success is the right of every student admitted to the University. Currently, though, successful study is spread unequally across our student community. The First-year Academy, which has been launched in this regard, is a systematic initiative to improve successful study. It is one of my personal, key focuses to make a contribution to the gearing up to which I referred earlier in this field in particular. As a University we wish to fundamentally improve access with success for our entire student community.

**To build a multicultural university with a pedagogy of hope on our continent requires the establishment of an Afrocentric approach to higher education.** The University should be a relevant and respected role player, both locally and globally. Yes, we need to further develop our footholds in the international arena (currently especially in Europe and the USA) – but we also need to develop our strategic partnerships and enter into new ones in Africa, Asia, South America and Australia. The University's South-South and particularly African relationships have to become the flagship in which European successes and intellectual capacity will sail further.

The expansion of our international footprint can therefore not take place at the expense of Africa and South Africa. Stellenbosch University is inseparably part of the realities of South Africa and Africa. Our future success depends on the success of South Africa and of Africa. Our local South African relevance and value addition in our country and Africa are a prerequisite for ensuring the future and sustainable success of this University.

Gearing up Stellenbosch's relevance and expanding its glocal (ie global and local) footprint are key strategic priorities for my self as Rector. In this regard, Stellenbosch is in the fortunate position that there are excellent programmes across the University that are busy with a wide range of initiatives that can be harnessed in this gearing-up process. The great challenge is to effect the necessary systemic interaction and synergies between all these initiatives; to eliminate unnecessary duplication; to ensure the purposeful allocation of resources; and, where necessary, to launch further initiatives. This will require high-level systemic leadership, which I view as one of my key tasks as Rector.

**Africa does not only contain elements of pain. It also has definitive elements of hope. The Pedagogy of Hope is the building programme with which the struggle against Afropessimism has to be carried out. The development agenda that we need to place on the table in collaboration with relevant partners must counter the despair of the poor and the illnesses that are so endemic to our country and the larger continent.**

This brings me to the languages of Africa. For a long time, and rightly so, Afrikaans was viewed as the language of the oppressor. Statistics and census figures indicate that the majority of people who speak Afrikaans in the Western Cape – where 60% of our market lives – are black people. Can this reality also be transformed into a positive and active Pedagogy of Hope? This is the challenge that we accept here. I believe that we have for too long emphasised the pain of Afrikaans. And this is understandable. But what about the hope of Afrikaans? Afrikaans is the hope for a better life for a very large number of people across our country. As a developed academic language it also represents hope for the development of all our other indigenous languages. Stellenbosch University therefore takes seriously the place and promotion of Afrikaans in a multilingual context. The ratification of a number of key points of departure by the University's Senate and Council places us on a positive path in the realisation of a rational and pragmatic solution to the language debate (*taaldebat*) at Stellenbosch. Among others, we state in these points of departure that the Language Policy should support the diversity objectives of the University, and that language and medium of instruction should serve the academic function of the University, and not vice versa.

Through our commitment to the development of Afrikaans in a multilingual context we undertake to increasingly also develop isiXhosa, the other indigenous language of our region, as an academic language. This programme is already under way, but it also requires that our University further accelerates and supports the expansion of Master's and Doctoral degrees in subject terminology in isiXhosa. A multidimensional language development programme for all our indigenous languages lies at the heart of a Pedagogy of Hope for our country.

But to return to Afrikaans. Afrikaans is not a condition of the University. It is one of its vision statements. We have decided to promote Afrikaans in a multilingual context and it is also our intention to broaden the racial profile of this University. And between these apparent fields of tension lie our challenges of hope for the future.

Esteemed guests, friends, colleagues and family – I am not here simply to do a job. I am here to answer a calling, because I do not really belong to myself. My highest loyalty is to the One who called me.

**In the pursuit of this great task, I am thoroughly aware of the immense leadership challenges by which I will be faced. However, I will tackle this challenge with enthusiasm and confidence because I know that I do not stand alone – both inside and outside the University I can depend on the genuine support of dedicated role players who are ready in word and deed to accept co-ownership of this task with me.**

The transformation of the University has been going through different phases. I take responsibility for the third phase. My two immediate predecessors, Profs Andreas van Wyk and Chris Brink, formulated the University's Strategic Framework and led the subsequent phase of self-examination respectively. But the University has now done enough navel gazing. The phase during which I take over the leadership will lead us to the implementation of self-renewal.

Consequently, this installation should serve as a signal to all the people of South Africa, but particularly to those who pursue the South African Hope, that Stellenbosch University wants to be and increasingly will become their knowledge partner. For

those who have lost hope, this installation should declare that the University wants to become a pedagogic instrument of hope for them – and particularly for them. This is the idea for which Stellenbosch wants to stand for from now on – a centre of Hope for Africa.

I thank you for your patience and look forward to your further active and consistent support in our pursuit of a Pedagogy of Hope for Africa.