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Rector's speech Vice-Chancellors Awards 2007
2 August 2007, Johannesburg

Dr Edwin Hertzog, Chair of Stellenbosch University Council, respected members of University management and our Board of Trustees present here tonight, valued allies and partners of Stellenbosch University ...

It gives my great pleasure to address you at an occasion such as this where we give recognition to our partners in business and industry whose continued support is instrumental in the success of the University across the spectrum of our core activities of teaching and learning, research and community interaction.

I have said this from various platforms since I have taken up the position of rector and vice-chancellor of Stellenbosch University, but I think it is appropriate to repeat it here tonight: SU is one of the leading research universities in the country and the various achievements and awards of the last few years, attest to that. We have excellent staff with sought-after international expertise and we have a proud history of student based community interaction. None of these achievements, however, would be possible without our external knowledge partners – our donors and supporters in business and industry.

Stellenbosch University received a record amount of R116 million in donations in 2006. This is indicative of the University's growing prestige among donors and the excellent work done by academics and other members of staff to realise our mission for the future as embodied in our Vision 2012 statement. It expresses our commitment to an outward role within South Africa, Africa and globally.

This vision statement is a crucial compass for us on our journey into the future. But 2012 is but five years away. It is therefore imperative that we extend our future perspective, our horizons if you wish, to well beyond that date. When I hear Telkom's pay-off line 'touch tomorrow', it puts a smile on my face, because as a University that is what our core activities entail – dealing with the future challenges of our country, and for the biggest part we work with the Youth. As a visiting professor so aptly described our task: "By educating the youth we are not only touching, but shaping the future".

But what are the immediate and longer term challenges for Stellenbosch University? And what is our role and contribution on the continent of Africa and globally?

One of the key challenges facing our university is to become an institution of meaning and relevance to all our people. We have encapsulated it in the motto: From success to Significance. This challenge of relevance and meaningfulness manifest itself on various levels or dimensions of the University. Let's look at image and perceptions for instance. I do not have to dwell on the perceptions of the past, but we all know that many of these perceptions still persist today and that they are fuelled by a perceived image of the university as not truly committed to the new South Africa and the national issues and challenges of our country. When the Council on Higher Education recommend in their Audit report, by way of an example, that Stellenbosch University should develop a strategy to change its staff equity profile, that is what is snapped up and savoured in the public mind and it overshadows the research and academic excellence of our institution.

Fact is that we have grabbed the bull by the horns, in a manner of speaking. At my request, Council of the University has made R30 million available to management to effectively deal with this matter. With this money I have introduced a New Legacy programme aimed at increasing senior black academic staff at our university in a manner that will not only address the equity profile but will indeed lay the foundation for a new generation of highly skilled black academics and researchers at Stellenbosch University. This New Legacy programme is a cornerstone of our succession planning and capacity building strategy for the future.

So, does this mean getting rid of whites on a grand scale in order to appoint black academics? For goodness sake, no! I do not want to bore you with the details and intricacies of our strategy, but suffice it so say that I have extended the careers of current academics, predominantly white, from 60 to age 65 with a dual purpose: to optimally reap the benefits of their expertise at the peak of their careers to the benefit of all our people, and to make them responsible and accountable for the building and nurturing of a new generation black academics and researchers at our University. I have conveyed this message to the staff of the University last week and to date I have only had enthusiasm from all quarters within the University for this initiative. I trust that this step will also give credence to our commitment of enhancing a multicultural environment and institutional culture based on non-racialism.

I'm sure that by now that you have done your calculations as to how far we can stretch R30 million to achieve this one critical challenge. We can do the number crunching in any which way, but we will arrive at the same conclusion -- an initiative like this needs to be sustainable. The initial amount however, paves the way to meaningful transformation at levels within the University that we dare not leave to chance or fate. We owe it to ourselves and our country. But still, this remains an enormous challenge that will require extensive support from within as well as from outside the University.

And while we are on the topic of equity and transformation challenges, let me share a thought or two with you regarding this matter. We are serious about transformation and we are hard at work to re-align the university with the current context and particular challenges of its varied stakeholders in the region and nationally. However, I have no intention to extend or prolong this issue longer than is absolutely necessary to achieve the required results for both staff and students.

I have already dealt with a key element on the staffing side. As regards the student body, we are currently in discussions with the Department of Education to finalise our enrolment plans for the foreseeable future with the emphasis on how to gear ourselves to deliver the graduates that our growing economy so desperately require. It stands to reason that we will see a shift in focus to the science, engineering and technological fields. These changes bring along new challenges in terms of infrastructure, equipment and appropriate levels of staffing. And while government acknowledges the need for extra funding for relevant capital expenditure and other related facets, all indications are that we will have to find innovative ways to generate the bulk of the funding and resources ourselves in order to deliver on this national calling.

These are daunting challenges, but ones that we will not shy away from. We will tackle it with the same unwavering spirit of academic excellence and scientific scholarship that established us as one of the top universities in the country and that has enabled us to be the proud home of 3 Centres of Excellence and 5 Research chairs – all focused on intensive research of national relevance and importance. And that is over and above the

dedicated research that we are doing in conjunction with and on behalf of many of our partners in industry.

Let me now turn to Stellenbosch University and the continent. We have aligned ourselves with the international development agenda and, specifically, the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. We will focus the University's expertise on, for example, the eradication of pandemic poverty and related conditions; ensuring peace, security and stability on the African continent as essential preconditions for optimal social and economic development; the improvement of the physical and psychological circumstances of people in general; and the development and enhancement of democracy.

This is no empty endeavour or philosophy. Over the last few years Stellenbosch University has already achieved a few milestones in its programmes focusing on material issues of our continent. To mention a few:

- We have won a major contract to build a low-orbiting earth observation satellite to monitor patterns of ecological and socio-economic change in Africa;
- Stellenbosch University built an international partnership for Agribusiness in Sustainable Natural African Plant Products (ASNAPP);
- We have launched the first Institute of Advanced Studies in Africa, and we are putting up a new building for this purpose with the aid of a major philanthropic grant from the Swedish Wallenberg Foundation; and
- SU is the legal guardian of the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS) in conjunction with the University of Cape Town;

We are expanding these initiatives into significant partnerships with renowned universities and institutes in Africa, pooling our expertise in an effort to deliver more effectively on the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations.

These initiatives form the backbone of my vision of Stellenbosch University as an institution of Hope from Africa, and for Africa.

I hope that by now I have dispelled any notion that Stellenbosch University stands aloof to the challenges of a new and better South Africa for all, or that we turn a blind eye to the problems of our continent. We will not compromise in our endeavour to take Stellenbosch University to new heights on every score and to make the institution significantly different and significantly better in our quest to deliver on our pedagogy of hope glocally. (Note well, I use the term glocally ..)

Enough said about the broader picture in which we want to be seen as a University on the move ...

I think it is prudent to also say a few words regarding tonight's awards:

Collectively, those of you being honoured this year, gave more than R100 million to the University. This has enabled us to:

- Grant bursaries to talented young people for whom university studies would have been out of reach
- Enrich our country's culture in the arts, sport and music
- Assist people to perform in spite of their disabilities or poverty
- Improve our offering in teaching by establishing new programmes, for example in Mandarin
- Strengthening our research programmes

The awards are unique works of art. Ruda will tell the story of the creation of these art works. In our choices we aimed to promote young and upcoming artists, from Stellenbosch but also from deep rural northern KwaZulu-Natal. We hope that each artwork will become a topic of discussion in your home or office, and that it will keep Stellenbosch University top of mind at all times. But above all, that it will remind you of our heart-felt gratitude and appreciation.

In conclusion: Building a great university requires more than money. It requires time, collective effort of great minds, innovation and imagination and behind that all, we require committed friends and partners that understand our challenges and share our vision.

We undoubtedly will always need further investment to ensure that we attract the best people to our staff, the best young talent in our students, have the best infrastructure, and create the best networks. We will not be able to do it alone – we will continue to build partnerships such as those that we have with you, our donors, nationally and internationally.

With your substantial investment in SU you have shown us your trust. Thank you. We will, in turn, continue to show, as “your knowledge partner” that we can deliver.

I thank you for your attention.