

**Annual Gala Dinner of the University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB)**  
**The Bay Hotel, Camps Bay, Cape Town, 30 March 2011**  
**‘Social responsibility and relevance in higher education’**  
**Professor Russel Botman, Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Stellenbosch University (SU)**

- Dr Mathews Phosa (eregas en hoofspreker)
- Mr Marius Furst (voorsitter van die USB Adviesraad),
- Mr Francois Groepe (HUB van Media24),
- Mr John Powel
- Senior members of the corporate and public sectors
- Colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen ...

Good evening, Goeie naand, almal. Molweni. My customary trilingual greeting is a bit like the tripartite alliance between the ANC, Cosatu and the SACP – everyone is equal, but some are more equal than others.

In the interest of all of us understanding each other, I will stick mainly to English. That might be better than sticking to quotas, because otherwise we will have to start analysing the demographics of this room, and before long, we might have to go meet in another province where there is not an oversupply of business types and academics.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is good to laugh about these things. It is better than crying, which would have been an understandable reaction to the recent flare-up in the big South African race debate. After all, 21 years since Nelson Mandela was released from jail, here we were a few weeks ago, at each other's throats again.

I must tell you, like many people, my initial response to racist remarks by some public figures was also one of anger, followed by a feeling of despondence. But the more I thought about it, it became clear to me that we must not allow ourselves to be side-tracked from our destiny as a nation.

We are a hotchpotch of different groups of people in this country, so figuring out a way of getting along and cooperating for the common good of all really is written in the stars for us. Having to build unity in our land is our calling.

But what is also clear as daylight, is that there is a force that is seemingly pushing us away from unity. And that is the call for justice – justice in the face of a massive wealth gap, justice for the poor, justice for the landless and for the dispossessed.

Now, historically, there has been a close correlation between race and class in South Africa. To simplify things, the haves tended to be white and the have-nots tended to be black.

But, we are not in the past anymore. We have black billionaires and white squatters. And we have an increasingly multi-coloured, multicultural middleclass.

And that's why it is wrong to try and fix what is wrong in the present by placing too much emphasis on the past. We have to be forward-thinking. We have to try and build the kind of society we want to become, not try and reengineer the past.

So, how does all of this fit in with the purpose of this gathering here tonight?

Let me tell you. Stellenbosch University comes from a past where we were part of an unjust system. Racial discrimination did not leave us unaffected – and neither, I am glad to say, did our country's transition to democracy pass us by.

We wrestled long and hard with this issue, and in the year 2000 Stellenbosch adopted a new "Strategic Framework for the Turn of the Century and Beyond", in which the University acknowledged its "contribution to the injustices of the past", but also – and this is the crucial part – committed itself to "appropriate redress and development initiatives".

Our "Strategic Framework" then linked "redress" to "the need for development and service in communities and areas previously and currently disadvantaged in the provision of services and infrastructure."

And that is where the HOPE Project comes from. It is essentially the practical realisation of the University's moral decision to break with the past and help build a better future for everyone.

We looked around us, and saw that the political liberation that came with the vote in 1994 did not bring freedom from hunger, disease, homelessness, exploitation, corruption, violence, pollution or unemployment. Our country's "walk to freedom" was indeed turning out to be "a long" one.

However, we realised that as one of Africa's leading universities, it was our duty to use our key strengths – our academic excellence and cutting-edge research – to be of service to society. So, we analysed the UN's Millennium Development Goals and our government's Medium-Term Strategic Framework, and distilled the five themes of the HOPE Project.

We are convinced that if we work to (1) eradicate poverty and related conditions, and promote (2) human dignity and health, (3) democracy and human rights, (4) peace and security; as well as (5) a sustainable environment and a competitive industry, then we will help change the world for the better.

Let me just clarify something. The HOPE Project does not mean Stellenbosch University has become a development agency or an NGO. But we think part of what it entails to be a good university is to be of relevance to society and not sit isolated in an ivory tower.

This is where our business school, the USB, fits in. It's Social Impact Initiative, that you will hear about more later on, is all about how to be a socially relevant business school. And its Future Fund is about leveraging resources to make available for bursaries and assistance to local charities.

Also within the ambit of the USB, are two other initiatives that form part of the HOPE Project. The first is the Unit for Corporate Governance in Africa. It believes that good governance is the key to achieving a brighter African future. It is focussing on research-based activities to explore the link between governance, democracy and sustainability. The Unit has found that by building healthy and stable institutions – both in the private and the public sector – democracy, human development and sustainability can be promoted.

And the second HOPE Project initiative of the USB is the African Centre for Dispute Settlement. There the view is that conflict in the workplace and elsewhere in society is a fact of life, but if managed properly these disputes can be prevented or settled early, before resulting in costly legal battles, bankrupt businesses or shattered relationships.

The HOPE Project is a university-wide initiative, ingrained in all three of our core functions as a university, which is research, teaching and learning, as well as community interaction. And every academic and student and support staff member can in promote its goals in their daily work.

Ladies and gentlemen, the writer Jerome Groopman states in his book, *The Anatomy of Hope*, that “[h]ope gives us the courage to confront our circumstances and the capacity to surmount them.”

That is what the HOPE Project tries to achieve, and the USB is a key component of our efforts to create a better future for South Africa and the rest of our continent.

Now, if we want to be of service to society and be a place of excellence, we must ensure that our activities are sustainable. This we cannot do without the help of our partners, networks and supporters. That is why fundraising initiatives are important.

Universities worldwide are under tremendous financial pressure as state subsidies decrease and the demands of access, relevance and excellence increase. We need support to fully realise our vision of helping create a South Africa and Africa free from poverty, where the human dignity of all people is protected, where our social and ecological systems are healthy, and where peace, security and democracy are safeguarded.

We want to be seen to have played a role in realising this vision. Thank you for supporting our efforts, because now is the right time for hope. Future generations deserve nothing less.

Thank you. *Baie dankie.*