

Address by Vice-Chancellor and Principal Professor Calie Pistorius

TuksAlumni Centenary Laureate Ball, University of Pretoria
15 November 2008, Rembrandt Hall

Ladies and gentlemen

As the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Pretoria, it is my distinct pleasure to welcome you all to the Centenary Alumni Laureate Ball.

Allow me to extend a special welcome to:

- His Excellency Mr A Villa, Ambassador of Cuba
- His Excellency Mr Mohammed Yahia, Ambassador of the Republic of Saharawi
- Other members of the Diplomatic Corps

The Chairperson of the University of Pretoria Council:

- Mrs Futi Mtoba (who will also receive one of the awards tonight)

The Chairperson of the TuksAlumni Board and Deputy Chair of the University's Council:

- Dr Piet Botha. Dr Piet Botha has been the chair of the Alumni Association for a very long time, during which he has really contributed significantly not only to the Alumni Association, but also to the University. He shall be stepping down from the Board of the Alumni Association soon, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr Botha profoundly for his dedicated service and exceptional loyalty to the University while serving on the Alumni Board and particularly as its chair. Can I ask that we give a big hand for Dr Piet Botha

A special word of welcome also to the other members of the University Council and also the Alumni Board present here tonight

Members of the University Executive

- Congratulations to our master of ceremonies, Professor Sibusiso Vil-Nkomo on his birthday today

Deans, Deputy Deans, Heads of academic departments and Directors of support departments

Members of the Student Representative Council

Representatives of Government departments

- Deputy Governor of the SA Reserve Bank, Dr Renosi Mokate

The Chair of the Council on Higher Education (CHE)

- Professor Chabani Manganyi (who will receive one of the awards tonight)

The CEO of the CHE

- Dr Cheryl de la Rey

Representatives from Educational Institutions:

- Prof Duma Malaza, CEO, Higher Education South Africa

Donors and other friends of the University

Tuks Alumni

Other dignitaries that we may not be aware of

Staff and students of the University

Representatives of the media

And then the most important guests of the evening, the eleven recipients of the Tuks Alumni Laureate Awards

- Dr Liesbeth Botha
- Professor Chabani Manganyi
- Mr Ben Schoeman (not present tonight)
- Mr Kennedy Bungane
- Ms Anati Canca
- Dr Cival Mills
- Ms Futhi Mtoba
- Mr Roland Röhrs
- Ms Elizabeth Steijn
- Dr Andries Terblanche (not present tonight)
- Mr Alec Wapnick

Ladies and gentlemen you are all very welcome !

Ladies and gentlemen, I would also like to acknowledge and thank all of the people who have worked so hard to make this night possible. Professor Schalk Claasen has been the project manager for our entire Centenary Celebration project, which includes the function tonight. I think the centenary celebration was a great success and certainly worthy of celebrating the University of Pretoria's first hundred years. Schalk, the University owes you a great debt of gratitude, thank you very much.

Thank you very much, also to other people in the Centenary Office, Alumni Office as well as the Department of Corporate Communication and Marketing for their contribution tonight. After I have spoken, they will screen the University's latest television advertisement, which you may already have seen on air. Thank you also to the caterers and specifically also to the Police Band.

Address

This year, 2008, the University of Pretoria celebrates its centenary. It is appropriate that we reflect back on the past hundred years, take stock of where we are now, but most importantly also consider the University's vision for the future.

The year 1908 when the University was established, was an interesting period in our history. It was a period between the end of the Anglo-Boer War in 1902 and the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910. At its establishment in 1908, the University of Pretoria (or the Transvaal University Kollege as it was then known) was located in the Transvaal, which was at that time a sort of self-governing British Colony. General Smuts was the Minister of Education. He had the vision and desire to establish a system of universities, one of which was to be located in the capital, Pretoria. The advice from his advisory council, was not encouraging. He then duly replaced the committee with another, and in the process established what is now the University of Pretoria.

The keystone of the Main Building (now known as the Old Arts Building) was laid in August 1910. At that time the country had just become a Union (in May 1910). The new Governor General, the Viscount Gladstone, officiated at the ceremony. It was, however, the words of General Smuts, then the Minister of Defence of the Union, that were very profound and of great relevance today. He said, "Maybe the day will come when this Transvaal University College will be for our country what Oxford is for England. Maybe the grass needs to grow for a hundred years before this happens, but a great start has been made".

Let me now take you to 2001, when the former Minister of Education, Professor Asmal announced a very comprehensive restructuring of the higher education landscape. All the universities and technikons (as the universities of technology were known at the time) had the opportunity to rethink their visions and missions – what sort of institutions they wanted to be. The University of Pretoria grasped the opportunity to do so.

In developing the new vision and positioning of the University, we stood back and considered what the country expected of its leading universities. We were convinced, as we are now, that in order for the country to achieve its national aspirations and goals, it must have at least a number of really world class universities.

A number of factors led us to believe that not only should the University of Pretoria aspire to be one of South Africa's world class universities, but that we in fact have a duty and responsibility to ensure that it happens.

The great universities in the world are research universities (where the teaching and learning must necessarily also be of a very high standard). The University of Pretoria has, for the last decade, produced more research outputs annually than any other institution of higher learning in the country (as recorded by the Department of Education). The University is flooded with applications every year, including a significant proportion of those with more than six distinctions. The University is very stable financially. Over the hundred years of its existence, it has produced more than 150,000 alumni, who have made major contributions in the country and abroad – as the winners of tonight's Alumni Laureate Awards demonstrate.

It was clear to us the University of Pretoria should be positioned as one of South Africa's world class universities, and be a research university. It remains committed to a path of transformation, to become a university where all South Africans are welcome. All South Africans should have the opportunity to study at

this wonderful university. It should be the intellectual home for the rich diversity of South African academic talent. It should be a university where South Africa's leaders of tomorrow are trained. A university that emphasizes local relevance and local impact, but recognises that the other side of the coin is global competitiveness. It remains a university that cannot compromise its passion for excellence and high academic standards.

As the University enters its second century, there are many opportunities for us to grasp in our strive towards achieving this vision, in South Africa as well as abroad. At the same time there are also significant challenges, not only for this university but indeed for the entire higher education sector.

Given the global recognition of the importance of higher education for any nation, it is essential that South Africa maintains a vibrant, responsive but also a competitive higher education sector. In my view, the higher education sector in this country, like those of other countries, must necessarily be differentiated, where different institutions each having their own niches, strengths and focus areas. In diversity lies strength.

I remain convinced that in order for this country to reach its aspirational goals, it is necessary that we have at least a couple of really world class universities. It is necessary that this be acknowledged and that those universities that have the ability to achieve this, be supported to do so. Such a thrust need certainly not be at variance with other initiatives to build capacity or do redress at other institutions where these may be needed. But we shall do the country a disservice if we neglect to actively build and promote our world class universities and their strive for excellence at the same time.

There are serious changes unfolding in the South African political landscape even as I speak, a number of which will impact very directly on higher education and hence also on this University.

The Polokwane Declaration calls for "free education" up to undergraduate level, the creation of a ministry of higher education, possible reopening of teacher training colleges and a review of institutional mergers and incorporations. The incoming administration is very likely to demand more say on institutional matters such as affordability of and access to higher education.

Funding of universities is always a contentious issue in any country, and this one is certainly no exception. There is always more that can be done, and subsequently there are less resources with which to do it. In the troubled economic times that we live in now, this is especially true. This university has always worked with its finances in a prudent manner and invested it wisely – hence the financial stability that we have here. However, in an environment where there is a bleak economic outlook, we too are facing significant financial challenges.

Costs (including inflation) are increasing at a higher rate than that with which the revenues (including the block grants from the state) are growing. Not only must we keep our other major source of revenue – tuition fees – realistic, but the Minister has in fact indicated that she intends to regulate fee increases in the future. Very often people forget that when tuition fees rise, financial aid to needy

students also rises. Next year, the students of this University will have access to more than R400m in financial aid.

Next year will be the first year that we take in new students with the National Senior Certificate – the new matric. Nobody is quite sure what to expect, but we, together with other institutions, remain concerned about the general quality of the primary and secondary school education, and the levels of preparedness with which school leavers enter university.

The imperative for institutions of higher learning, including this one, to transform remains high, and for good reason. We must develop and promote institutional cultures that promote good governance, produce productive citizens and emphasize inclusivity. This University places a very high premium on a sound underlying value framework, where, in addition to the academic values that one would expect from an institution such as this one, there is an emphasis on respect for human dignity, diversity and tolerance.

Social evils such as crime, racism and sexual harassment are prevalent in the society, and hence we should not be surprised if, from time to time, they spill onto the campuses. However, this University's position on this must be clear: It abhors these social evils and they cannot and will not be tolerated on this campus. The University's institutional culture must be clear to anyone who enters the campus - it must be evident in everything we say and do, in policy and in spirit. Hopefully, when students are exposed to this culture during the time they spend with us, they will also have embraced these values and go forth spreading this word.

As part of our policy of inclusiveness, the University of Pretoria has a multilingual language policy, where we teach in Afrikaans and English. You may know that the language policy is currently under review. I would like to state tonight that it is my personal view that, and also the policy view that I shall take when the time comes, that this must remain so. We must continue to teach in both Afrikaans and English. The details of how this will manifest in practice need to be determined, but we must continue with both Afrikaans and English as languages of tuition.

One of the greatest challenges facing universities in our time, and particularly this one, is the danger of politicizing of the university.

This is an institution of higher learning where the leaders of tomorrow must be educated, research must be done to find solutions for tomorrow's problems and efforts must be made to lift up the communities with which we interact. The country, the staff and students and the alumni have high expectations of this university. It is expected of this University to "go beyond". Not only must we produce outputs (be they graduates or research outputs, for example) but we must produce more encompassing outcomes of greater and broader scale and scope. We must contribute to the economic growth and competitiveness of the country and the region, we must contribute towards building a better quality of life for our citizens, we must contribute towards weaving a stronger and better social fabric. In short, we must provide intellectual leadership. In that regard, the University must not only be a trustee of the future, but a dedicated and committed trustee of a better and high quality future.

As leaders of tomorrow, it is therefore essential for our students to learn about many other things in addition to those pertaining to their specific field of study. They must learn about other cultures, races and religions, and how they can live in harmony. They must learn social and life skills. They must also learn about the history, dynamics and politics of the country. It is necessary for them to debate and think about these issues, particularly in an international context.

In my view, it will, however, be a dangerous and sorry day for this University, when the University itself becomes politicized, to such an extent that the Council, Executive, Senate or any other organ of the University (including the SRC and other student governance structures and the also the Alumni Association) are dominated by any specific political group or party. In order for this University to achieve the greatness for which it is destined, in order for the University to remain inclusive so that all South Africans are welcome, it is necessary that the University and its organs remain apolitical. The driver must be academic excellence, rather than bowing to any political party's dogma. Intellectual leadership necessarily includes a discourse on the politics of the day, but politicizing the University's governance and management structures is a different matter and should be avoided.

We as alumni have a very important role in this regard. As alumni, it is our duty to ensure that the University's reputation, stature and good name are protected and enhanced. One of the reasons for this is that the regard in which all our qualifications are held – irrespective of when you obtained the qualification – depends to a very large degree on the reputation and stature of the University today.

The Alumni of the University has formed themselves into an Alumni Association, with the express purpose of doing exactly this – supporting the University, its vision, mission and strategic initiatives, and protecting and enhancing its reputation, stature and good name. The University is delighted with the initiative of the Alumni to organize themselves into an association with the aims noted above. It should be noted, however that the Alumni Association is not controlled by the University. The alumni elect the members of the Association's Board. In fact, on 26 November there will be another election for a number of members of the TuksAlumni Board.

I would like to emphasize again that the University's alumni are very important to the University, and that the University makes an effort to reach out and stay in touch with its alumni. It is for this reason that the University has a dedicated Alumni Office, staffed by University appointed personnel.

It also my opinion that in a democratic country anybody should be able to voice their opinions. The same goes for the University. If anyone, including alumni, are dissatisfied with the University in any way– or with me for that matter – they are perfectly happy to say so (and many do).

However, according to its constitution, the Alumni Association exists to support the University. It is my view that those whose actions and words will harm or destroy the University, bring it into disrepute or force specific political doctrines on the University, should rather find another forum to do so. The Alumni Association, as per its constitution, does not accommodate this. Should people who have

these aims in mind be elected to the board of the Alumni Association, it will bring unnecessary tension between the University and the Alumni Association, which will certainly not be in the interest of University or the alumni at large.

I would like to appeal to the alumni present here tonight, and in fact to alumni everywhere, to remain actively involved with the University. Please attend the alumni meeting on 26 November and elect alumni members to the Alumni Board who subscribe to the board's stated objectives of supporting the University and protecting its good name. If you cannot attend the meeting, you can also fill in a proxy form to transfer your vote to an alumnus who will be attending. If you don't know anyone who will attend, I may just note that it has not escaped my attention that the Chairperson of the Alumni Association, Dr Piet Botha (who will be stepping down from that role at the meeting) will be there and that it is possible to transfer your vote via proxy to him. Later this evening a number of students will be distributing proxy forms and collect them. You can also hand the forms in at the door when you leave. The alumni of the University are all eligible to vote. I really appeal to you to transfer your vote via the proxy if you cannot attend the meeting.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we sit here tonight we are the Centenary Generation of the University. We are privileged to be part of a great University, particularly in this year when the University celebrates its centenary – a hundred years in the service of knowledge. As we look back over the past century, we must certainly acknowledge and claim our great achievements and moments of glory, for there were many. The University has, however, also had its moments of lack of wisdom and its share of errors of judgment. Hence, at the same time, we must also acknowledge and take responsibility for our mistakes, particularly where they may have caused unjust harm and suffering to people.

As we reflect on General Smuts' words, spoken at the laying of the keystone of the Old Arts Building in 1910, I think we are justified in acknowledging that, a hundred years later, this University has become one of South Africa's prominent universities with an international reputation for excellence. A good start had indeed been made on that day.

It is now our responsibility to ensure that when the University community celebrates its next centenary in the year 2108, the decisions we make in these times, will lead them to also say then, that a great start was made again at the start of the University's second century. I have always thought that one of the marks of leadership, is that you leave the place a better one than you found it.

This University has always risen to occasion. As alumni we can all be very proud of our alma mater, the University of Pretoria, not only for its great achievements of the past, but also for the even greater achievements that it is bound to make in the future.

Thank you for listening and thank you for supporting the University. It is really very highly appreciated.