

IACCP 2012 Congress
Stellenbosch University (SU), South Africa, 17–21 July 2012

Opening Ceremony, Endler Hall, Conservatoire, 6 pm, 17 July 2012

**Welcoming Remarks by Prof H Russel Botman,
Rector and Vice-Chancellor of Stellenbosch University, and
a Vice-President of the Association of African Universities**

Good evening, everyone. Distinguished guests:

- Prof Kwok Leung, President of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP), and members of his Executive Committee
- The “conference organisers”, Prof Deon Meiring of the University of Pretoria and Prof Leon Jackson of North-West University
- The “scientific chair”, Prof Fons van de Vijver of Tilburg University
- Member of the “local organising committee”, Prof Johan Malan, who is the Chair of Industrial Psychology at Stellenbosch University
- Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen ...

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this gathering in this country and town of ours. Stellenbosch University is proud to be associated with this, the 21st International Congress of the IACCP.

Gathered here are delegates from all over the world, using the opportunity to meet and exchange important ideas. The framework for your discussions will be the theme, “Nurturing Diversity for Sustainable Development”.

In South Africa we have been confronted with the challenge of diversity for a long time. One response has been to emphasise our separateness; another response has been to emphasise our unity. The one response was born out of fear; the other was enabled by courage.

Today, South Africa is not trapped in apartheid anymore; but neither has the vision of a harmonious “Rainbow Nation” been fully realized. In reality, we are continually in flux between the two extremes of despair and hope.

This process has also been playing itself out at this University. Like many institutions, there was a time when the response here to South Africa’s diversity was denial. But then, an important policy document was adopted – our *Strategic Framework for the Turn of the Century and Beyond*. In it, the University acknowledged “its contribution to the injustices of the past” and committed itself to “appropriate redress and development initiatives”.

One of the injustices that we have been trying to rectify is the legacy of the racially based admission policies of the past. We have been working at improving our staff and student diversity. Our goal has been to give the same opportunities for success to both the daughter of the farm worker and the son of the farmer. I am happy to say that we are making progress, but we still have some way to go.

The key when it comes to diversity is human dignity. Apartheid damaged the dignity of both black and white people.

Let me now turn to the second aspect of our *Strategic Framework* – “redress and development”. This has since been fleshed out into an initiative called the HOPE Project.

We decided to use our strengths – academic excellence and cutting-edge research – to be of service to society. We looked at local and international development agenda’s, such as the Millennium Development Goals, and distilled five themes:

These are to:

- Eradicate poverty and related conditions;
- Improve human dignity and health;
- Consolidate democracy and human rights;
- Promote peace and security; and
- Balance a sustainable environment with a competitive industry.

These themes are pursued in each of the University’s three core functions_ learning and teaching, research and community interaction. And they find practical expression in numerous initiatives to make a tangible difference to people’s lives – to provide hope.

It is fitting for an educational institution contributing to the public good to have a pedagogy of hope. By using hope as a guiding concept, we are led to ask critical questions about reality, to look at problems in a scientific manner, and to use science to make a difference. In this way hope becomes a radical, transforming concept. To create hope becomes the reason why we exist.

We cannot shy away from the complex challenges associated with a multicultural and unequal society. We have to tackle them head-on. I therefore commend the IACCP for doing the same, as exemplified by your emphasis on “Nurturing Diversity”.

I want to conclude with a quotation from a man who turns 94 tomorrow, Nelson Mandela. He stands for human dignity. In his inaugural address as South Africa’s first democratically elected president on 10 May 1994, he said:

We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity – a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world.

May the fact that this vision has not been fully realized yet not discourage us, but inspire us to do more.

Congratulations to the organisers for staging this event. I wish you all of the best for the rest of your Congress. When you look back on it, may you say that your Stellenbosch Congress was the best ever! Thank you.