

**Symposium on the Advancement of African Languages,
hosted by the Stellenbosch University Language Centre, STIAS, 22 November 2012**

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

Goeie more, almal. Good morning. *Molweni.* Distinguished guests:

- Dr Blade Nzimande, Minister of Higher Education and Training;
- Prof Leon de Stadler, Director of the Stellenbosch University Language Centre;
- All the Symposium speakers and panellists;
- Colleagues from other universities – local and abroad;
- Deans and members of Management of my own university;

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen ...

FIRSTLY, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to this Symposium on the Advancement of African Languages.

In June this year, renowned Kenyan writer and academic Prof Ngugi wa Thiong'o spoke at the Sunday Times Literary Awards in Joburg. He delivered an impassioned plea for what he called "linguistic power-sharing" in Africa.

He said we find ourselves in the strange situation on our continent – long after independence – that most of our indigenous languages have been "marginalized to the point of official invisibility".

The colonial languages "English, French and Portuguese take pride of place in the body politic". And "the African middle class is running from their languages". This, Professor Wa Thiong'o said, amounted to "child abuse on a national scale", because "to deny a child, any child, their right to [their] mother tongue ... is nothing short of child abuse."

Ladies and gentlemen, Thiong'o's view might sound alarmist, but it helps us to look at the question from a different point of view ... that of the next generation and their human dignity and human rights and development needs. Seen this way, the advancement of African languages is an absolute necessity.

Of course, how to do it is another matter. And that is where the inputs and discussion at this Symposium should provide valuable guidance.

This brings me to the SECOND part of my input this morning – a few remarks about the host of the Symposium, the Language Centre of Stellenbosch University. The Centre is widely recognised on the continent and beyond as a body doing ground-breaking work.

At Stellenbosch, we view language not as a barrier but as an instrument of empowerment. And the Language Centre is helping us to forge ahead with the process of transformation – to become more diverse and integrated.

Minister, it might interest you to know that we are extending parallel-medium teaching to ensure greater accessibility. Having already been successful in some of our faculties, parallel medium will soon be introduced in one of our biggest faculties – Economic and Management Sciences. In other situations where classes might be too small for parallel streams, we plan to roll out simultaneous interpreting.

These are examples of the innovative language planning being done by the Stellenbosch University Language Centre, which was established ten years ago. It has shown tremendous growth and now serves 11 000 students, staff members and external clients each year.

Another growth area has been the establishment of different entities within the Centre, such as the Unit for isiXhosa. I want to highlight a sterling example of its work – developing isiXhosa terminology in an academic environment. Consider for example one of the 15 trilingual terminology guides produced by the Unit so far. It provides Economic and Management Sciences terminology in English, isiXhosa and Afrikaans – and there are also terminologies for Law, Psychology, Sociology, etc.

Dames en here, ek maak graag van hierdie geleentheid gebruik om die Taalsentrum en sy personeellede geluk te wens. Allow me to congratulate the Language Centre on its 10th anniversary. You helped us to move Stellenbosch from being an exclusive institution towards becoming a welcoming home to all; and you are helping us fulfil our responsibility to advance African languages within the multilingual context of our country ... which allows me to use my mother tongue as an African – at the highest level.

Dames en here, ons moet ons oor Afrikaans ontferm, maar ons kan dit nie in isolasie doen nie. Afrikaans kan slegs beskerm word as 'n taal tussen ander tale. Wat nodig is, is 'n soort linguistieke ubuntu, dit wil sê 'n taal is 'n taal deur ander tale, saam met ander tale.

We need an ubuntu of languages – an acknowledgement that a language is a language through other languages. How to live in a multilingual world – that is the linguistic challenge of the 21st century. Our global village must be a place where our diversity is celebrated in a multitude of languages. In this way, language becomes a bearer of hope.

Ladies and gentlemen, language planning in higher education is complex and demanding – but it is of the utmost importance that we get it right if we are serious about human development.

That is why we have now included language under the University's HOPE Project, through which we are following a science-for-society approach in tackling major challenges in our country and on our continent.

This shows that we are in it for the long haul. May the Language Centre and the initiative, “Language – a Bearer of Hope”, go from strength to strength.

Let me use this platform to invite all universities in South Africa to take hands and work together to promote an Ubuntu of languages in our country.

Speaking of the national context, let me now INTRODUCE MINISTER NZIMANDE.

He was named Emmanuel Bonginkosi at birth, but we all know him as “Blade”. In May 2009, when the administration of education in South Africa was split in two, Dr Nzimande became our first Minister of Higher Education and Training.

He is also General Secretary of the South African Communist Party (SACP) ... and a member of the ANC’s NEC and NWC.

Dr Nzimande holds a BA in Psychology, as well as a Masters and a PhD in Industrial Sociology from the University of Natal, now known as the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

He was Director of the Education Policy Unit at the University of Natal from 1990 to 1994. And, prior to that, he lectured in Industrial Psychology at the Universities of Zululand and Natal.

We also know the Minister as a strong supporter of African languages.

So, without further ado – apart from saying thank you, *dankie* and *Enkosi kakhulu* – I now call on Minister Nzimande to come and address us.