

**Military Academy Academic Opening.**  
**Joe Modise Hall, Saldanha, 30 January 2014, 18:30.**  
**Address by Stellenbosch University Rector and Vice-Chancellor Prof Russel Botman.**

Good day, everybody! Distinguished guests:

- Maj-Gen M Mabuza, General Officer: Training Command
- Brig-Gen LK Mbatha, Commandant: Military Academy
- Prof Sam Tshehla, Dean of our Faculty of Military Science
- Other ranks and colleagues
- Ladies and gentlemen ...

It's great to be here with you again, and to see all of you. A special word of welcome to our new students.

I want to do a few things today. I want to survey our broader context on the continent. And I want to address various constituencies: students, academic staff, and our partners in the military and government. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we will see as the world becomes smaller, people will become more dependent on each other.

To start with, let's look at trends and events on our continent. For the longest time, there was massive pessimism about Africa. Now, this is turning around. There has been strong economic growth the past decade. And there has been an encouraging move towards democracy. There is an expectation of Africa now. We must rise to the occasion.

But problems remain. Witness the many armed conflicts across Africa: From Mali to Nigeria, Somalia to South Sudan, the DRC to the Central African Republic, Egypt to Madagascar.

Millions of people have been affected. And as usual, the ones caught in the crossfire are the innocent and the vulnerable – women, children, the elderly, the disabled. Some of you would have been on deployment in one or more of these hotspots, so you know what I am talking about.

At the end of the day, the thing we need most in Africa – human development – is held back. So, there is no question that whenever armed conflict arises, it must be stopped.

That is why the African Union supports intervention. Peace-enforcement missions and peace-keeping missions are vital tools to restore law and order – provided they are legitimately sanctioned, properly constituted, and professionally executed.

The SANDF is a vital cog in Africa's peace-enforcement and peace-keeping machinery. And since these operations are aimed at getting our continent back on track, that's something we can be very proud of.

This Military Academy and Faculty can be considered *the* seat of learning on the African continent for Military Science – a science that actually not so much about making war as it is about understanding peace.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century – in the Information Age – the most potent weapon at your disposal is not the hardware, but the software called knowledge. Strategic security knowledge will win you the war or mission; knowledge of politics and diplomacy will help you succeed at peace negotiations; leadership knowledge will help you positively shape the destiny of a continent and its more than a billion people.

That is why you are here: to produce and transfer and gain this kind of knowledge. Soon, these efforts will be boosted when our Security Institute for Governance and Leadership in Africa (SIGLA) becomes fully integrated within this Faculty, as is the plan. SIGLA has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Forum for Former African Heads of State and Government – or Africa Forum for short. The patron of SIGLA is former President Joaquim Chissano, one of only three recipients of the Mo Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership since its inception in 2007. We are glad to be associated with his contribution.

Ladies and gentlemen, if you like the idea of a continent at peace with itself, a people on the march to progress and development, secure in the knowledge that their governments are working for them, and will respect their dignity and protect their rights, then you are the people who have an important responsibility.

Stellenbosch University supports the international development agenda. President Mandela said poverty is created by human beings, just like slavery and apartheid. And since we stopped the latter two, we can also stop the former. We are looking at different ways of doing this. We can play a role as a university. Stellenbosch University values its partners in this quest.

Stellenbosch University always strives for excellence. And I am sure you share our passion for being the best. We have taken note of the research output of this Faculty. Your scholarship has helped Stellenbosch achieve the distinction of being named SA's most research-productive university by the Department of Higher Education and Training. Thank you all for your research contribution.

We also excel in learning and teaching. You might not know this, but we recently got official confirmation that Stellenbosch is now the best university in the country in terms of undergraduate student success – 84,9% of our students pass their modules! That’s the best we’ve ever done!

We take in many 1<sup>st</sup>-generation students and other students from poor backgrounds, whose parents can’t afford for them to fail. That is why we must ensure that we continue our student success so that we don’t waste parents’ money, students’ opportunities, the government’s NSFAS funds.

Now, that’s the average across the whole University, but there is even higher performance in this Faculty. Last year your 3<sup>rd</sup>-year pass rate was above 90% – well done!

To all our new students here today, what this means for you is that the studies you are undertaking will not be a breeze. You are going to have to work very hard to make the country proud. But your studies will not disappoint you.

The output of this Faculty and Military Academy can only be as good as the partnerships sustaining it. And I am glad to say the partnership between the University, on the one hand, and the Department of Defence and the SANDF, on the other, is on a sound footing. We renewed our long-standing agreement in 2012. The JAB (Joint Advisory Board) is functioning properly. And from both sides we are working hard on removing any obstacles we come across.

We are also looking forward to stronger ties with the community of Saldanha. Stellenbosch University is breaking new ground in higher education in South Africa with the concept of “Rural Platforms”. We already have one in Worcester, with our Ukwanda Rural Clinical School taking the University to the people. We want to do the same here in Saldanha, and will this year be taking discussions in this regard further.

This is an exciting time for us. Last year, following extensive consultation, the University adopted a new vision. We think it will serve us and the country well. We would like all of you to make this vision your own. We want to be:

*“... inclusive, innovative and future-focused, a place of discovery and excellence, where both staff and students are thought leaders in advancing knowledge in the service of all our stakeholders.”*

Here at the start of the 2014 academic year, let us keep our eyes on this goal. I wish you all of the best. And I want to ensure you that you can count on our support. Thank you!