

Welcome by the Rector and Vice-Chancellor Prof. Russel Botman

Dr Peter Wallenberg and the Wallenberg family, Mr FW and Mrs Elita de Klerk, Deputy Minister Derek Hanekom, Prof Mzamo and Prof Zengie Mangaliso, Alderman Laretta Maree, Dr Edwin and Mrs Elsa Hertzog and members of Stellenbosch University Council, members of University management, distinguished guests ...

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you on behalf of Stellenbosch University, one of the co-hosts of this auspicious occasion.

In my inaugural address, I outlined my personal vision and that of Stellenbosch University to become a Centre of Hope for Africa. Tonight, in a very special way, we are witnessing an important step in the realization of this vision. Our continent is caught up in a process of accelerated change which is affecting all corners of the globe – bringing with it many challenges, but also many opportunities. How we react to these challenges and opportunities will determine to a large extent our future. One of these challenges is to stay at the cutting edge of new advances in thinking, in human insight and to stay abreast of discoveries as they unfold. The driving force behind the establishment of STIAS is to ensure that there are places in Africa where we are part of the process of generating new knowledge – rather than to be merely the consumers of the ideas of others and beneficiaries of breakthroughs which occur elsewhere.

In many ways we are ideally placed to fulfill this role. We are part of a unique ‘social laboratory’ where a remarkable peaceful social and political transformation took place and where we are still in the demanding process of deepening and strengthening this fragile democracy. We form the meeting point not only of ideas and influences from the North and the South, but also from the East and our own West - Latin America – and we are rooted in the rich and diverse heritage of Africa itself. When we promote an Afro-centric approach it is not to escape or deny global realities, but to add a unique perspective from our point of view and from our experience.

The ideal of a multi-cultural home which I cherish for the University comes to expression in STIAS in a special way. The Institute consciously and insistently promotes diversity – the diversity of ideas, the diversity of research traditions and research paradigms, the diversity of cultural contexts, the diversity of life worlds, the diversity of perspectives and of experiences. Very specifically, it promotes the interaction between different disciplines – it is one of the few institutes for advanced study

where the humanities and the natural sciences share an equal space. It is a 'multi-cultural research home' in the fullest sense of the word.

More-over, the cutting edge research which STIAS promotes is not undertaken for its own sake – it is directed to issues of the highest relevance for the country and the continent. STIAS is focused on real life problems and believes there is a creative tension between research of the highest level and issues which confront us on a daily basis. But there is a deeper dimension to this: If we are really serious about finding sustainable solutions for our challenges, we have to dig deeper. Often we witness the tendency to settle for instant and off-the-shelf solutions that may relieve the symptoms in the short term, but do not address the underlying roots of the problem. Advanced study in Africa is *not* a luxury, but a necessity if we really want to make a difference. We have to develop a long-term vision in this regard and invest in the intellectual capital of Africa. STIAS is well placed to contribute to a new generation of leaders in this regard.

STIAS is a profound expression of faith in the intellectual capacity of our country and continent.

There is a further dimension which has to do with the way in which Stellenbosch and STIAS see its future role. You find yourselves tonight on a very historic site. Mostertsdrift dates from 1679 and is one of the first farms given out by the then Cape Dutch Colony. It signals the start of a very specific history of privilege and exclusivity. We acknowledge this history, but it is our mission to turn it around to make Stellenbosch a place which belongs to everybody. A few weeks ago the University gave the Lückhoff School, a landmark of our recent painful past, back to the community to which it originally belonged as an act of reconciliation. In the same way, we would like to make Mostertsdrift a place that belongs to the entire country and the entire South African nation and the entire continent of Africa.

Mostertsdrift and STIAS can therefore be described as a kind of thinking space, as neutral territory, as an incubator of ideas and innovative solutions. We would like to invite other people, other universities, other countries to come and join us in this very beautiful place to help us to fulfil our core mission to discover and share new knowledge, to think about what is good for the country, what is good for science, what is good for intellectual life.

This beautiful Research Centre – made possible by generous grant of the Marianne and Marcus Wallenberg Foundation – is in itself a concrete expression of faith in the future of STIAS and the potential of our continent.

So we have a vision – a vision of putting this very beautiful place to work. Not in the sense of ownership, but in the sense of trusteeship. This has been given to us in trust and should be held in trust for others, to produce insights and discoveries that will make a difference to the world in which we live.

For this very reason, STIAS was always seen as a national resource and not as something belonging to one institution. From the beginning STIAS has in its governance structures representatives from other universities and academic institutions from South Africa, from Africa and from the wider international research community. After a period in which the concept of STIAS was tested in pilot form, we have now reached a new phase in its existence. A Section 21 Company was established earlier this year which means that STIAS is now an independent legal entity with its own Board of Directors – and I would like to welcome my fellow directors Mr Desmond Smith, Prof. Mzamo Mangaliso, President of the NRF, Prof. Dan Brändström, former director of the Swedish Bank Foundation, Prof. Laetitia van Dyk of our Business School, Prof. Christof Heyns of the University of Pretoria. This evening marks the start of a new beginning and I want to welcome you to celebrate this joyous occasion with us.