

## **Address at the SAP SA's SAPILA Conference Banquet**

Sun City, 30 September 2002

Master of Ceremonies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would like to thank the organizers of this event, SAP South Africa, members of the Thabo Mbeki Crossroads Education Fund and other sponsors and partners for giving us the opportunity to interact with representatives and leaders of the business community.

I am told that this year we mark the tenth anniversary of SAP South Africa. I would therefore like to extend my congratulations to SAP. I trust that the leaders of SAP with us here will be able to enjoy themselves with their partners and clients with a view to celebrating even more successful decades while making whatever contribution you can, in the development of our country.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the many companies and individuals who have supported the Thabo Mbeki Crossroads Education Fund since its inception. We appreciate the fact that you have offered generous contributions and support to ensure that the Fund succeeds in its work of assisting students, especially those in our society who have no resources to pursue their chosen careers.

Clearly, the partnership that the Crossroads Education Fund has with business organisations, many of which are represented here tonight, has enabled the Fund to address, even though in a humble way, one of the challenges facing our country - which is the issue of the scarcity of skills in areas such as commerce, science and technology, engineering, information and communication technology and other related fields.

This you have done, not only as donors, but also as active participants in the operations of the Fund. In so doing, you have demonstrated how our business community can marshal its will and resources to promote the development of our people.

As you may be aware, the Crossroads Education Fund was established in 1996 by people who lived in, worked with and represented the residents of Crossroads, a poor township outside Cape Town that fought many difficult and costly battles merely to exist.

>From supporting some fifty students in 1996, the Fund has since supported 250 students at institutions such as University of Western Cape, the Peninsula and Cape Technikon and the University of Cape Town, up to early 2000.

Between 1999 and 2000, the work of the Fund took on a national character when it began to support students at the University of Witwatersrand, the Wits, Pretoria and Port Elizabeth Technikon, and University of Durban Westville.

As Patron of the Fund, I am happy to express my heartfelt appreciation of the work undertaken by the Trustees and the support they have received from many individuals and corporations. Much of the work was undertaken in an environment of limited resources and insufficient capacity at the operational level of the Fund.

I am happy that the Fund has since late 2001, begun laying the foundations for a more sustainable operating environment and has focused on developing a much clearer plan of action and activity for the future.

We have been informed that some of the most prominent and leading suppliers and consumers of information technology products and services are here with us tonight.

It is important that this important and strategic leadership of our society finds a way to make more contribution in a practical and visible manner towards the imparting of information and communication technology skills to our communities, so as to ensure that we have a rich pool of skilled people who will enhance the country's capacity and competitiveness in this important area.

In this way, you will be, at the same time, expanding the ICT market as more and more South Africans become consumers of your products. I am sure, we will agree that this makes perfect business sense.

Further, given the central and strategic nature of this sector to the economy, we have evolved a process of regular government and business consultation on ICT matters. This is important because we have to address, on a regular basis, issues of mutual concern at policy, implementation and application levels.

Accordingly, we have formed two structures to facilitate discussion and common action in the area of ICT as part of our quest to develop a modern economy and society. These are the Presidential National Commission on Information Society and Development as well as the Presidential International Advisory Council on Information Society and Development.

The latter structure includes the major global leaders in the area of information and communication technology. We are privileged to have Dr Hasso Plattner as a member of this International Council.

The International Advisory Council on Information Society and Development met recently in George to discuss, among other things, economic growth and competitiveness, research and development and the implementation of an E-government programme.

At this meeting, the International Advisory Council agreed with the government's strategies, which draw on earlier discussions with the Council. We therefore agreed to go further to discuss concrete programmes and projects for implementation.

Three key focus areas were identified. These are:

- Health and telemedicine,
- Small, medium and micro enterprise growth and development; and,
- Education.

It was agreed that we would also focus on E-government as an overarching and cross-cutting element common to all three areas and because E-government is a necessity for the efficient and effective operation of government.

I mention the decision at our last meeting with the International Council because I believe that, as South Africans, we have the opportunity to contribute to a speedy and effective impact of these important programmes.

In this regard, we agreed with the International Council that from now onwards, we should integrate the work of the National and International Councils. Accordingly, in future the Councils will be able to sit together to address the common agenda.

I am certain that this will help us the more effectively to impact on the identified area of health especially to improve the lives of our people in the remote areas of our country, demonstrating that modern technology provides us with a tool to fight and defeat disease and underdevelopment.

Also, I am sure you will agree with me that the growth and development of small, medium and micro enterprises can and must benefit from the available technology so that we are able to expand access to technology to the wider community of our business people to encourage business growth and improve the level of competitiveness even among the smaller corporations.

Clearly, one of the critical and important elements of the challenges of modern technology is in the area of education. In this context, the following elements are urgent:

- Ensuring Infrastructure and the IT architecture, including related basic infrastructure such as electricity and telecommunication;
- Teacher development in Information and Communication Technologies;
- Increasing access to education through distance learning;
- Curriculum development, including integrating ICT education in our school system;
- The establishment of the Advanced Institute of ICT;
- Establishing information and communication technology centres in schools that could help communities and small businesses.

I must also mention the fact that ICT has also been identified in the New Partnership for Africa's Development, NEPAD, as one of the priorities on which our continent and its global partners must focus. I have no doubt that the work we are doing and will do in this country, supported by the National and International Advisory Councils, will also be of enormous benefit to Africa as a whole.

As I have said, all these are the challenges that directly face all of us who are gathered here tonight. My appeal to this business leadership of our country, is to find appropriate ways to advance this important sector of our society and build partnerships with both government - at national, provincial and local levels - as well as specific communities.

One of the practical ways may be to adopt specific areas or sectors and work on ICT programmes together with local stakeholders - in the form of schools, local authorities or community structures - and put in place practical and achievable short, medium and long term objectives; but always informed by the understanding that visible results will not necessarily be achieved over-night.

At the national level, as we are certainly aware that the effective use of ICT in any country impacts strongly on the productivity and competitiveness of that economy as well as the ability of government to deliver on its social goals. This is the reason that we see the development of ICT in education as an important and necessary priority for us as well.

In this regard, experience from other countries, whatever their stage of development, shows that factors that accompany the successful application of ICT in schools are networks of connectivity and structured and continuous programmes to train teachers to use modern technology for educational purposes.

It is also clear that to ensure fast and effective development, ICT programmes should, at an early stage, be integrated into the teaching and learning processes, as well as the administration and management systems.

Entire communities need to be exposed to the benefits of ICT and positive attitudes created towards the cultivation of awareness and everyday access and use of this technology so as to bring all our people into the information age.

Education, and thus the development of the human resource capital amongst our people is surely one of the prerequisites for closing the digital divide. Yet, for the year 2000 of all registered matric pupils, only 34.4% registered for Science (11.6% on higher grade) and 60.3% registered for mathematics (8% for

higher grade). These enrolment rates are clearly unacceptable. The situation is even more alarming when viewed in the light of pass rates.

Perhaps more worrying, is the enrolment and pass rates in these subjects for black students. The estimated number of black pupils enrolling for mathematics in the higher grade constitutes only 5.9% of all black matric pupils, while only 9.7% of all black matric pupils enrol for Physical Science at the higher grade. Again, this becomes more disturbing when we look at the pass rates for black students in these two critical subjects.

Clearly, this makes our common challenge that much greater. Government on its own cannot deliver the resources and skills required to close the digital divide within our society. Thus, we make this urgent plea to all of our people, but especially to the business community, to unite and form an active coalition to meet this challenge of promoting mathematics, science and ICT both in schools and communities.

The Trustees of the Crossroads Education Fund recently informed me of their plans for the Fund. I must say that I was delighted to hear that these plans are linked and synchronized with our own National ICT Strategy.

Embodied within the development of a vision, mission and guiding principles for the Fund, consideration is being given to the following areas:

- Extension of the current focus on the IT sector to cover broader, human capital development within the national context;
- Linking the work and output of the Fund with the National ICT Strategy in the context of e-Education;
- Ensuring that the Fund evolves as an effective facilitator for private/public partnership projects; and,
- Evolving a specific role on bridging the 'digital divide' by promoting and supporting the socio-economic potential of increased IT literacy within South Africa.

I am sure that the distinguished Guests here will find the programmes of the Fund to be relevant to their own business operations. This should encourage the establishment of lasting collaborative relations that should help the development and prosperity of our country.

I hope that this interaction will foster the on-going engagement of local and international partners and together with the Education Fund make a contribution in our work of narrowing the digital divide.

To achieve the tasks the Fund has set for itself, the Trustee base has been expanded and now includes executives from the private and public sectors and individuals who understand and are practitioners within the ICT sector.

It is to strengthen this relationship that the Fund felt it opportune to be present at this function organized by SAP this evening. We are therefore very pleased that you have made it possible for us to speak, not just about the Crossroads Education Fund, but about some of the broader common challenges that we face.

I trust that you will be able to meet and network with the Trustees of the Fund and look forward to our continuing and deepening partnership as we work further to empower all our people and make ours the winning nation we all wish it be.

I thank you.