

## **Address at the opening of the Law Faculty Building and the Oliver R Tambo Law Library**

University Of Pretoria, Tshwane: 15 March 2005

Master of Ceremonies, Professor Ramaranka Mogotlane,  
Chancellor of the University of Pretoria, Dr Chris Stals,  
Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Calie Pistorius,  
Chairperson of the University Council, Professor Esmé du Plessis,  
Dean of the Faculty of Law, Professor Duard Kleyn,  
Mrs Adelaide Tambo,  
Your Excellencies, members of the diplomatic corps,  
Faculty members and students,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen:

I am truly delighted to participate in this very auspicious occasion of the opening of the Law Faculty Building and the Oliver R. Tambo Law Library. I thank you for your very kind and gracious welcome to one of our premier universities.

I am very happy to be here because I see in this university the dedication that characterises the majority of our people to transform our country into a truly non-racial, non-sexist, prosperous and democratic society that belongs to all South Africans. I say this because some among us may recall the reception that the ANC got on 26 September 1990 when the ANC flag was burnt by a minority group at this university, which, contrary to the views of the majority at this University, wrongly believed that a non-racial democracy was a threat to the whites of this country.

It is therefore fitting that you have chosen to ensure that the legacy of one of the finest sons of South Africa, lives on by naming the law library after O.R. Tambo. As we know, Oliver Tambo was a teacher, a lawyer and an outstanding leader and servant of the people of South Africa, who dedicated his entire life to the freedom and democracy that we enjoy today.

Speaking at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, in 1987, Oliver Tambo said this about a future democratic South Africa:

"...We want to see a political system in which all South Africans will have the right to vote and to be voted to any elective position without reference to colour, race, sex or creed. We are committed to the birth of a society in which all democratic freedoms would be guaranteed, including those of association, of speech and religion, the press and so on. We wish to guarantee the rule of law and ensure the protection of the rights of the individual as a fundamental feature of any new constitutional arrangement.

"At the same time, we are convinced that the new democratic order will have to address such other burning questions as freedom from hunger, disease, ignorance, homelessness and poverty. For this to be translated into reality will demand that we address seriously the question of increased production and equitable distribution of wealth."

In the last decade we, as government, have remained true to this vision. I am confident that this university has also worked hard to contribute to the democratic and prosperous South Africa articulated by O.R. Tambo.

Accordingly, we are very encouraged by the steps you have taken to ensure that this university is open to all South Africans. We are also greatly encouraged that the University of Pretoria has re-defined itself as a progressive and truly South African university, with a large black student population. Clearly, the work should continue to ensure that all our people see and feel that this university belongs to them.

As government we are ready to lend a hand to your efforts, so that together we are better able to make this and other universities accessible to all our people; to ensure that this and other universities produce more of the people who will consolidate and advance the work that has been done to realise the vision to which O.R. Tambo dedicated his entire life; to enable this and other universities to become important centres that advance the programme of the renewal of our continent.

As you continue the work of transformation of this university, I have no doubt that your work will be enriched by the fact that you have as your Chancellor Dr. Chris Stals, who also sits on the Panel of the Peer Review Mechanism of our continental programme, NEPAD.

I am happy that this university has correctly positioned itself as an African university. Through partnerships with other universities in different parts of our continent, various programmes at the Law Faculty, and the admission of students from other African countries, this university has already positioned itself as a contributor to the renaissance of our continent.

Universiteite is belangrike instellings in ons samelewing, en dus word elke tree wat hulle vorentoe neem, verwelkom; elke tree agteruit betreur.

Ek hoef nie te beklemtoon nie dat, op hierdie stadium van ons nasionale ontwikkeling, vordering met die daargestelling van 'n hoër onderwysstelsel, wat aan nasionale en internasionale verwagtinge voldoen, uiters belangrik is vir die welvaart van ons burgers en die voorspoed van ons land. Ons het nou die geleentheid om die goeie van die verlede te neem, om daartoe by te voeg wat beter sal wees, en om dit saam te omskep in die toekoms wat ons almal verlang.

[Translation: Universities are important institutions in our society, and therefore every step forward they take is to be welcomed; every step backward to be regretted.]

I need not emphasise that, at this juncture in our national development, progress in establishing a higher education sector that meets national and international expectations, is vital to the welfare of our citizens and the prosperity of our country. We now have the opportunity to take from the past what was good, to add what will be better and to mould these into the future that we all desire.]

Law is the bedrock on which our constitutional state is founded. In contrast to the past, South Africa now has a Constitution that protects the weak and the downtrodden, while at the same time providing the environment for vigorous economic development.

This fine structure that is named after our leader, O.R. Tambo, seems to reflect architecturally some of the objectives contained in our Constitution:

- Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;
- Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is = equally protected by law;
- Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person; and
- Build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.

Universities can assist in achieving all these objectives. But it is especially the third, improving the quality of life of all citizens and freeing the potential of each person, that I wish to emphasise today. Education is the key to unlocking each person's potential and improving the quality of life in general. That is why the Constitution provides that:

"Everyone has the right to a basic education, including adult basic education; and to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible." [Sec 29 (1)].

Accordingly, among other things, education is given the largest allocation in the national budget.

In this respect, I would like to compliment the University of Pretoria, as I have learnt that your institution currently generates the highest output of accredited research in the higher education sector, besides being known for the quality of its education programmes. I am also aware that this university has made great progress in its transformation from a predominantly white, Afrikaans institution to a truly South African University that welcomes all, irrespective of race, gender, creed or nationality.

I am told that the enrolment of black students passed the forty per cent mark last year, with the corresponding figure for postgraduates being forty-three. I think we will agree that this trend should continue so that all South Africans regardless of race, creed, religion, language, and gender, will truly find this university a pre-eminent and welcoming centre of learning.

Due to globalisation, education is fast becoming internationalised. It goes without saying, that despite the legacy of the past, despite the socio-economic deprivation suffered by many of our students, despite the inadequate schooling some have had, and despite the costs of erasing apartheid through mergers, incorporations and other forms of transformation, all of which we must continue to address, our universities have no choice but to emerge at the end of this process, ready to compete with the best in the world.

By definition change challenges inherited wisdom and destabilises the existing order. It invades the comfort zones of the conservative and creates new space for the innovative to bring in the new. Inevitably, the processes of change affecting our system of higher education will also produce these outcomes.

Since such change is inevitable, one of our principal tasks is to determine how we should manage it. That process of the management of change must guarantee our country certain outcomes.

It must guarantee that we continue to have excellent institutions of higher learning, excelling in education and research, such as this University. It must guarantee that we do not tolerate the destructive behaviour we saw in some of our campuses recently, while we respond seriously to all legitimate concerns.

It must guarantee that we catch up with the best in the world in terms of the generation and use of knowledge capital to create the winning society we all yearn for. It must guarantee that we produce the intelligentsia that must be at the cutting edge of our process of renaissance.

May this new home of the Law Faculty, with its prestigious Oliver R. Tambo Law Library, help us to achieve these outcomes, consolidate your achievements, and inspire you as you continue to transform and attain even greater heights of excellence in future. My best wishes accompany you in those endeavours.

Thank you.