



Dr Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert, well-known political commentator and founder of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa), is the new Chancellor of Stellenbosch University (SU). An electoral college of the University appointed Dr Slabbert to this position on 12 May.

New Chancellor

IS WORTHY AMBASSADOR

“He has made a contribution in various fields to dialogue and the democratic processes in the country and as such is a worthy ambassador for the University’s vision statement of greater role playing in the South African society and on this continent.”

This is how the Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Prof Russel Botman, responded after Dr Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert was appointed as the new Chancellor of SU in May. “His alma mater gladly welcomes him back as the ceremonial head of our University.” He added that Dr Slabbert has had ties with SU as alumnus and former member of staff for a long time.

Dr Slabbert (68) succeeds Prof Elize Botha, who died in November last year. Prof Botha’s second term of office would have expired in June this year.

Responding to the news of his appointment, Dr Slabbert said it was a great privilege to accept the position and that he would do his best to do justice to it.

Background

Dr Slabbert, who was born in Pretoria, is an alumnus of Stellenbosch University and obtained four degrees here. In 1961 he received a BA degree, followed by a BA Hons (cum laude) in 1962, an MA degree (cum laude) in 1964 and a DPhil degree in 1967. He also was a lecturer at SU, the first resident head of Majuba men’s residence, and resident head of Simonsberg.

In 2003 he was chairperson of the panel that investigated residence traditions and campus culture at Stellenbosch.

Besides teaching at Stellenbosch, he has also taught at Rhodes University and the University of Cape Town. He was professor and head of the Department of Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg from 1972 to 1974.

Dr Slabbert is a recipient of the Abe Bailey Travel Scholarship and the American Cultural Exchange Scholarship. He also was a visiting fellow at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in November 1982 and was selected five years later as the Tanner Lecturer at Brasenose College in Oxford. He also is a former visiting fellow of All Souls College, Oxford.

In 1974 he became a member of parliament for the Progressive Party, and was leader of the official opposition, the Progressive Federal Party (PFP), in the former government from 1979 to 1986.

After his retirement from politics and in collaboration with Dr Alex Boraine, later vice-chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, he founded Idasa (initially known as the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa) in order to promote dialogue between young Afrikaners and the then banned liberation movement, the ANC, and its affiliates. In 1987 Idasa organised the now famous visit of mainly Afrikaner politicians, academics and businesspeople to the ANC in Dakar, Senegal.

Dr Slabbert then became a full-time political analyst and consultant for a variety of companies.

In 1993 he founded the Open Society Foundation for Southern Africa (OSFSA), followed by the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) in 1995 – both George Soros-funded organisations. OSISA is active in humanitarian initiatives in nine Southern African countries. Dr Slabbert also serves on the board of the Open Society Institute in New York.

He currently is the non-executive chairperson of Caxton & CTP Publishers and Printers (Ltd) and Adcorp (Pty) Ltd (both listed companies). He also serves on the directorate of FirstRand Ltd.

Dr Slabbert has received honorary doctorates from Simon Fraser University in Canada, and from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the University of Free State.

He has written a number of books, including *The Last White Parliament* (1986), *The Quest for Democracy* (1992), *Afrikaner Afrikaan* (1999), *The System and the Struggle* (1990) and *The Other Side of History* (2006).

The Chancellor is the ceremonial head of the University, and is elected in terms of the University’s Statute. The Chancellor awards degrees in the name of the University at graduation ceremonies and fulfils other ceremonial duties. **m**

- Dr Van Zyl Slabbert will be inaugurated as Chancellor in August. The December *Matieland* will carry an article on the occasion.