

The thirteenth Chancellor of Stellenbosch University (SU) – Dr Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert – was inaugurated during a glittering ceremony at Stellenbosch on 1 August this year.

In his address of introduction and investiture at the event, Prof Russel Botman, Rector and Vice-Chancellor of SU, said that the inauguration of Dr Slabbert is a sign that the University is an institution that acts according to the demands of the times as an active and relevant role-player in the formation and realisation of the future of our country.

“Stellenbosch is known for producing leaders with a formative - yet divergent - influence on the course of the history of this country,” he said.

“Stellenbosch is also known for producing dissident or alternative voices – people who did not slavishly follow distorted ideologies but who represented those who were wronged and who represented the social conscience under repressive circumstances.

“The spirit of their ideas for freedom and of their conviction of the value of equality could never be locked away among the four walls of a prison cell. It is this spirit of Stellenbosch that should be celebrated, nurtured and perpetuated,” he said.

Prof Botman singled out Dr Slabbert as one of the “other voices” of Stellenbosch and said that, during his days as student and, later, as lecturer, he made known his “frustration and disaffection with a government and political order that he experienced as unacceptable”.

He praised Dr Slabbert for, inter alia, his outspokenness in the face of injustice and his unwavering belief in dialogue and honest discussion among authentic interlocutors. Here, Prof Botman referred to the Dakar conference in 1987 - arranged by Dr Slabbert and Dr Alex Borrairie - where principally Afrikaans politicians, academics and business people made the “leading and historic” visit to Dakar, Senegal, to enter into discussion with the then prohibited ANC.

According to Prof Botman, Dr Slabbert embodies the principle of critical citizenship. In this respect, he represents a keystone of the SU's pursuit of the yielding of students who can best serve our growing democracy and the challenges of our economy.

New Chancellor inaugurated

In his inaugural address as Chancellor, Dr Slabbert said that it is an extraordinary privilege to become Chancellor of his alma mater and that the University formed an important part in his life both as student and as lecturer.

He said that SU, as do all tertiary institutions, faces enormous challenges in a South Africa going through a fundamental transition. “How can a tertiary institution such as Stellenbosch reflect on the basic values of our Constitution and protect those values? Can Stellenbosch University reconcile the challenge of transformation with the preservation of academic excellence? How does the University avoid the risk of being caught up in the pretensions and dogmatics of fruitless issues? I sometimes think that the language debate runs the risk of becoming one of these. There are - of course - many other challenges.

“It is in the sphere of civilian involvement that a university such as Stellenbosch can make breakthroughs, not only in the field of tertiary education but also in training and education in general. Naturally, Stellenbosch should not forfeit world expertise and competitiveness.”

It is in this field, Dr Slabbert said, that he offers his services and he has, in other contexts, “experienced empirically how people from civil society can fundamentally change the lives of



The Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Prof Russel Botman, hangs the toga of the new Chancellor, Dr Frederik van Zyl Slabbert, around him.

Photos below: On the left are Dr Slabbert and his wife, Ms Jane Slabbert. On the right are the Chancellor and the Minister of Education, Ms Naledi Pandor.

exceptionally needy people”. Nothing can give Stellenbosch a greater sense of its own value and relevance than to achieve in this field as well.

“Stellenbosch is - and remains - an extraordinary university. Today is a notable day for me in that I can say to you and to my university: In this new role, I am - and remain - more than your Willing Servant.”

Ms Naledi Pandor, Minister of Education, said that the University is privileged to have Dr Slabbert as Chancellor, since he does not fear change. “His Chancellorship will go a long way towards helping the University to overcome the transformation still facing it.” ^m

- Read a summary of Dr Slabbert's address at www.sun.ac/university/Management/Kanselier.html.