

PRINCIPAL'S FAREWELL DINNER: RECEPTION AREA, CONFERENCE CENTRE, HATFIELD CAMPUS: MONDAY, 8 JUNE 2009: 18:30: ADDRESS BY THE SENIOR VICE-PRINCIPAL, PROF CR DE BEER

Honourable Programme Director, Prof Ramaranka Mogotlane

Prof Wiseman Nkuhlu

Prof Calie Pistorius and Prof Michelle Olivier

Ladies and gentlemen

It is quite special for me to make a speech on this occasion. Over the past eight years, my colleagues in the Executive and I have shared many experiences with Prof Pistorius. To use the old Afrikaans expression, together we ate a bag of salt. Sometimes the salt tasted like saltpetre, at other times it was bland and tasteless.

Eight years ago, the exiting Vice-Chancellor and Principal intimated that the "ship" (the University of Pretoria) has been turned in a different direction, but has alas not yet reached the knots necessary to win the race.

As a young dean with limited exposure to senior management of a university, Calie Pistorius was given the daunting task of drastically increasing the speed of the vessel – a challenge that he tackled with innovative thought, an unorthodox style, an inspiring work ethic and his usual enthusiasm. To the disgruntlement of many he dared question that which had been accepted as academic gospel for many years.

Here in Tshwane it is allowed to say "hy het die bul by die horings gepak" (or "he tackled the bull by the horns"). The challenge, to use Calie's own image, was "to increase the groundspeed of the plane". The plane being, of course, the University of Pretoria, which was often characterized by the ear-popping decibels of breathtaking engine revolutions with little progress to show for it.

The inevitable question was whether it was not all a figment of the imagination or of youthful optimism. Fortunately, by that time I was already convinced by a

well-known Afrikaans songwriter and singer (and may I add by our student groups over the years) that wisdom will not be limited to old age and that, in fact, wisdom could actually be rather dangerous in the hands of an old man. Koos du Plessis captures it so well in his song:

*“As wysheid met die ouderdom
se grysheid en berusting kom
moet ek tog teen wysheid waak.
Wat wil ‘n ou man daarmee maak?”*

Over the past eight years, Calie Pistorius has indeed had a significant impact on the groundspeed of the University of Pretoria. I will say more about that later.

Ladies and gentlemen, may I politely remind you that we are indeed saying goodbye to both Prof Calie Pistorius and his wife, Prof Michelle Olivier.

Allow me to address a short word to Prof Michelle Olivier.

This is particularly appropriate as there is often a lack of appreciation and an insensitivity for the quiet contribution made by the wife of a Vice-Chancellor and Principal. Over time, Prof Olivier has established her own career as an academic in the field of Law. She enjoys wide recognition for her knowledge of various legal disciplines. Her departure leaves the University wanting of her academic skills.

This evening, however, we wish to acknowledge, in particular, what it demanded of her, amidst all her other obligations, to withstand the never-ending harassment of an official programme with Calie. Inherent to her job description was the fact that, for the most part, she received limited recognition for that which she did, while at the same time having to face the crushing waves of wrath for perceived complicity in other matters.

Michelle, this evening, we wish to acknowledge your contributions, that of an academic in own right, and the role you played to hold Calie's hands high. Just how encompassing this role was, will become clearer shortly when I refer

to Calie's contribution. I would like to call on Prof Michelle Olivier to come forward. The wife of our Chancellor, Mrs Nkuhlu, will present you with a small token of our appreciation.

[Presentation of flowers]

But, ladies and gentlemen, the person in the dock, who is responsible for us coming together this evening, is the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Calie Pistorius.

Calie has been Vice-Chancellor and Principal since August 2001 and will leave the service of the University on 31 August 2009 – a term of office of eight years.

I am not going to read his CV tonight. I do not think it is necessary to do so at an occasion such as this.

Those who carry managerial responsibility in an academic institution have the singular obligation to create opportunities for academics to grow in pre-eminence and in so doing to receive wide-ranging (and in particular international) recognition and to put the interests of the institution first. The day-to-day activities of a Vice-Chancellor and Principal are therefore interwoven with and inextricably linked to the well-being of the University.

Where we wish this evening to give credit to Calie for his contribution to the comprehensive success of the institution, we can do so appropriately by referring not to his CV as such, but to a number of key statistics pertaining to the University.

Since his appointment, the number of residential students grew with 37,6%. This was manifested in a growth of undergraduate students from a total of 21 297 in 2001 to a total of 30 326 in 2009 (a growth of 42,4%) and a growth in postgraduate students from 8 914 in 2001 to 11 257 in 2009 (a growth of 26,3%).

The number of black and white undergraduate students grew from 5 937 and 15 360 respectively in 2001 to 13 123 (a growth of 121%) and 17 203 (a growth of 12%) respectively in 2009, whilst the number of black and white postgraduate students grew from 3 455 and 5 460 respectively in 2001 to 5 694 (a growth of 64,8%) and 5 608 (a growth of 2,71%) respectively in 2009.

The number of degrees and university diplomas (excluding all continuing education certificates and diplomas) increased from 9 563 in 2000 to 12 524 in 2008, an increase of 31%.

With regard to finances, the income of the University increased with 13% per year. Included in these numbers are state subsidies, which grew with 10,8% per year.

The University's investments showed a growth of 125,9%, whilst reserves grew with 132,7%. The growth in reserves must also be seen in the context of the significant capital expansions that were undertaken, the bulk of which was also financed from reserves.

Financial aid to which students of the University of Pretoria has access grew with 37% per year.

With regard to staff, the number of permanent staff members increased from 3 274 in 2001 to 3 591 in 2008 (an increase of 9,7%). Included in this number was the number of academic staff, which grew from 1 452 in 2001 to 1 638 in 2008 (a growth of 12,8%). The number of permanent black staff members grew from 820 (25%) in 2001 to 1 305 (36%) in 2009.

The permanent staff members were assisted by a large number of temporary staff members.

With regard to facilities, a number of new buildings and facilities were erected and put into operation since 2001. These included:

The Client Service Centre

The Law Building, which houses the OR Tambo Law Library

The FABI Square laboratories

The Centenary Lecture theatre

Extensions to GIBS,

Extensive renovations to the Aula, including the addition of an organ

The Tuks Village and Tuks Naledi residences, and the addition of a new wing to Nerina.

Various sport facilities were built and upgraded.

The Steve Biko Academic Hospital was completed by the Gauteng Provincial Government.

A new facility for the Biomedical Research Centre (BRC) was built at Onderstepoort, following the closure of the HA Grové facility at the Pretoria Academic Hospital.

The old Technical Building on the Main Campus was converted into offices, computer labs and the Sci-Enza science centre.

The eastern part of the Experimental Farm was cut off and sold to the Gauteng Province for the establishment of the Innovation Hub. The University is currently considering establishing a facility for its Institute for Cellular and Molecular Medicine on the Innovation Hub.

The construction of the new Engineering complex, including a new entrance from University Road and structured parking is under way.

With regard to information technology, the multi-year systems renewal project is under way. The project cost is R200 million.

Network points have seen a growth of 300% from 5 000 to 20 000. From 2001 to 2008, seats in computer labs have grown by 267%.

With regard to Campus Enterprises, the number of courses offered by CE@UP increased from only 108 in 2000 to 1 418 in 2008. The revenue of CE@UP increased from R28 million in 2001 to R130 million in 2008, a growth of 364%.

The revenue of BE@UP increased from R9 million in 2001 to R58 million in 2008. This represents a growth of 544%.

In 2008 the group income of E@UP was R225 million.

Ladies and gentlemen, statistics are impersonal. It says very little of context, of the power of the sum total of multiple contributions and interventions, of what it takes physically, emotionally and in terms of the management of human relations to make all of that which I listed happen. Statistics can offer no guarantee with regard to procedural or substantive quality in respect of the main tasks of the University of teaching and learning, research and postgraduate studies and community engagement. For these assurances one has to search policy, compliance with evaluation criteria and accreditation, and other mechanisms to gauge the academic standing and stature of the institution.

Ladies and gentlemen, during his term of office, Calie Pistorius displayed an unwavering commitment to quality. One would be hard pressed to find better testimony to this fact than the recent HEQC report in which the University receives overwhelming praise for the quality of its operations over a broad spectrum.

Statistics often also show little of that which could have been done better or that which simply did not come to fruition as planned. To avoid a conversation about this would be to play hide and seek with the realities of the day. A balanced and responsible discussion is essential.

What can be said this evening, without reservation, is that Calie Pistorius, through the strategic frameworks developed under his leadership, has indeed compiled the agenda for immediate and future debate.

Ladies and gentlemen, this evening we must recognize the fact that the University of Pretoria is privileged to have been led the past eight years by a Vice-Chancellor and Principal:

- who could establish the place and role of the University of Pretoria as an internationally recognized institution within an era in which the contours of the Higher Education Landscape in South Africa underwent fundamental changes.
- who managed to give further momentum to the ability of the University to adapt to ever-changing circumstances.
- who strengthened and aligned resource allocation and provision (in the comprehensive sense of the word within the university context) in order to keep the aspirations of the University as contained in its strategic frameworks afloat in the midst of global challenges in this regard.
- who, through sustained efforts to build national and international networks, enabled the University of Pretoria to shine as a key role player in the South African university arena and beyond, and freed us from the perception that the University of Pretoria is South Africa's best kept secret.

Ladies and gentlemen, this evening, we agree that we are saying goodbye (in Afrikaans, "afskeid neem"), or rather that we are starting the process of doing so.

Suddenly, the imminent departure of Calie and Michelle is very real, like a vague image suddenly springing into focus. I don't know what the origins of

the Afrikaans word “afskeid” are. I also cannot explain to you the full meaning thereof. The word in my mother tongue is tinged with a spirit of despondence, of brokenness, of something that is taken away to for ever leave an incompleteness behind.

Ladies and gentlemen, those of us who are together here this evening are not standing at the point of rupture suggested by the word “afskeid”. It is not a point where we wish or dare to be. It is certainly not a place where the University of Pretoria can afford to be as the Principal couple take their leave of us. I prefer to say goodbye with a smile. Something that is perhaps more apparent from the Dutch version of the Afrikaans “totsiens”, namely “tot kyke”. In short, we say goodbye in order to see each other again.

Such a greeting can be characterized as follows:

- That which binds us together has not come to an end. In fact, there is the silent conviction that our bond is strong enough to withstand the onslaught and distortion of the unknown future and to endure through it. It can be no other way. The imprint Calie has left as scholar, as academic leader and manager and ultimately as Vice-Chancellor and Principal on the University of Pretoria cannot be erased by the strokes of a pen in a letter of resignation, or blown away like footprints in the sand. As was the case with your predecessors, your contribution will be the platform and point of reference from which the “ship” will leave, in a manner of speaking, the harbour where we now have to dock for a brief while.

It is our call to sail towards our ever-changing destination (our vision and mission) which we only know as an enticing and inviting glimmer on the horizon. We have to set and achieve our objectives as an institution. It would, however, be catastrophic for the University should these objectives become final destinations and lose the dynamic distortion (and therefore change) inherent to alluring visions that beckon from afar.

Calie, this University benefited greatly and grew as a result of the fact that you coaxed us on to burst through the sound barrier of international recognition and local relevance and in so doing to become an inspiration for a new (innovation) generation and ultimately to send this generation, and I believe generations to come also, into the world with the faith, self-confidence, equipment and instruction to create the future.

That which binds you to the University of Pretoria is not coming to an end. The platform which you helped build, the frameworks that have been developed, are there to also facilitate the next shift that will commence shortly – it is a core building block that has been put into place, upon which the building of the University of Pretoria can proceed with confidence. It is also our expectation that our bond will be given an altered content – but that it will remain meaningful despite the progress of your life and that of the University of Pretoria.

- Our saying goodbye this evening sends you forth, or rather, sends you on. The University of Pretoria, colleagues and friends, send you on with pride and expectation. We trust that the University of Pretoria and its people (staff as well as students) have played a role in equipping and empowering you for the important work that you will be resuming at a different place.

Calie, we are sending you on, not only with pride as an alumnus of this University, but also with the expectation (and good wishes) that you will be successful. You have often said it yourself that one of the most important tests of the success and stature of an institution is the success of its former students. As we remain here, we remain committed to making you and the world out there proud of what the University will achieve in years to come. We hope that along with your youth and energy, this will strongly empower you and that it will assist in making the road of success that we wish you to enjoy wide and smooth.

I asked our good friend, Prof Cas Vos, who could not be here this evening, to send you on with a poem. I will give you the Afrikaans text, but for the benefit of our guests this evening, I have broadly translated Prof Vos's words as follows:

Journey to Hull

The *ilias*, book I, line 477, the *odusseia*, book II, line 1
and the *ilias*, book VII, line 1
For Calie

When daybreak lifts its rosy fingers
you have to start packing for the journey to Hull

and pray to the gods, call and plead
with them to carry you under their wings.

Ask that you may sail over expansive seas
as dawn spreads out like a rosy shroud.

The table is set for you with song,
fresh bread, old wine and ripe figs.
Take, eat and raise your glass to the adventure.

The fierce Poseidon who stirs the seas
and shakes the earth like a night hut
will not have you running scared.

Go, sail under the hand of dawn
through the *scylla* and *charybdis*
for close by, close by is the far off land of Hull.

- Our greeting is not the kind that one extends at a crossroad. No, it is a greeting, to borrow an image used by André P Brink in his memoirs, to be used at a fork in the road. At a crossroad, we are apt to say to each other: We disagree on the direction – therefore, each one goes his own way. We can also avoid the crossroad by merely continuing in our old direction, without feeling the pressure to make certain adjustments. Calie, that is not where we find ourselves. We have come to a fork in the road. It forces us to take decisions, and, as we choose to progress along the road, we also have to take responsibility for the choice we made. The road demands that we adjust our direction from time to time. There

is no straight route to our destination. This does not imply that the road we took to get to this point was wrong or that we are lost.

Calie, we believe that, in the spirit of a fork in the road, you have chosen to further plan your future.

As far as I'm concerned, your departure also brings the University to a fork in the road. And for us, the same rules of engagement apply. A university with aspirations such as those held by the University of Pretoria does not have the luxury to simply continue on its set course. Choices have to be made with regard to the road that we take, and this has to be done with an awareness of the responsibilities and uncertainties that this entails. A change of direction is required.

- When we say goodbye, we also wish to give recognition for that which has been achieved in your term as Vice-Chancellor and Principal. We are all proud of that which has been achieved over the past couple of years. Therefore, we say goodbye to you with a pat on the back. Friends say goodbye with the unabashed expectation that they will soon have the opportunity to enquire about each other's wellbeing. There will be much to discuss and to enquire about when we see each other again.

Our best wishes accompany you and Michelle.

Ladies and gentlemen, the University of Pretoria commissioned artist Cyril Coetzee to paint the portrait of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Pretoria, Professor Calie Pistorius.

Coetzee holds a Masters degree in Fine Arts from Rhodes University and receives national and international recognition for his paintings and portraits. He has exhibited widely in South Africa, Switzerland, Canada, India and the USA.

I now call on Prof Calie Pistorius to unveil his portrait.