

Speech by Edwin Constable, Professor of Chemistry and Vice Rector at University of Basel

Good morning Honourable Minister Naledi Pandor, State Secretary Dell'Ambrogio, Ambassador Meuwly, Vice-Chancellor Price, representatives of Swiss and South African Academic, Research and support Institutions, honoured guests, friends and colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

As a representative of the Swiss leading House, the University of Basel, it is a pleasure and an honour to say a few words at the launch of the SA-Swiss Bilateral Research Chair in Global Environmental Health. My good friend and colleague, Marcel Tanner from the SwissTPH, will say something on the scientific aspects of the collaboration. Nevertheless, I would like to congratulate Professor Aqiel Dalvie of the University of Cape Town on his successful appointment and also Professor Martin Roosli who is the Swiss collaborator of the project. I find the research topic highly relevant and one not completely removed from my own areas of interest. I wish them the very greatest of success in this joint endeavour.

We are here today like proud parents to celebrate the entry of our new baby, the Global Environmental Health Chair into

the world. Like all babies, the gestation period was not without its anxieties, but the healthy result is one that we are proud of. However, as we all know, a great deal happens in the run up to a successful birth - in particular, the parents need to meet and get to know one another. This Chair is the first of a number to be established between the University of Basel and South Africa and is the culmination of a getting to know you period that has spanned over 100 Years!

Our Co-Leading House and Associated Institute of the University, the Swiss TPH, has long been involved in health activities in Africa and has established a close relationship with the University of Cape Town. However, the engagement extends beyond health and the Life Sciences. Our University had both a Competence Center for Africa and a Center for African Studies, indicating the importance which we attach to our cultural ties with this continent. Combined with the ongoing involvement of University of Basel institutions for European Global Studies, Swisspeace and Urban Studies we have a broad palette of interaction with Africa.

We have long been involved in collaborative projects with sub-Saharan Africa in the social sciences, in particular aspects of urbanization and post-urbanization, in studying the cultural history of Africa and its interaction with Europe,

together with the better known health and drug discovery activities as well as new projects in nanoscale science and sustainability.

How did the relationship between our new parents, the University of Basel and South Africa, develop? A critical enabling tool has been the Swiss South African Joint Research Programme which we have been proud to represent as the Swiss leading House. Since SSAJRP was launched in 2008, sixteen joint research projects, more than one hundred exchanges and nine projects involving industry partners have been supported in a wide range of areas. This Chair is the first to be directly supported from the programme. We will shortly be initiating early career exchange programmes in the areas of migration and nanoscale science which will hopefully provide siblings for our baby.

I would like to close by saying something about our exciting new future with the University of Cape Town. We are developing a close bilateral relationship with the University of Cape Town and it is a particular pleasure that the holder of the first SARChI Chair will hold a dual affiliation between the Universities of Basel and Cape Town.

The combination of the oldest University in Switzerland with the best-ranked University in Africa is a marriage of experience and excellence that is truly made in heaven. The Basel focal areas of Life Sciences, African Studies, Sustainable Development mesh perfectly with those of Health Sciences, Internationality and Integration of the University of Cape Town.

Strong connections in the fields of social sciences, anthropology and history already exist, with joint supervision of doctorates and joint research projects between the two Universities being well established.

One of the most exciting new developments is the establishment of a new Institute for Urban and Landscape Studies at the University of Basel. This is a completely new programme in Urban Studies with a mission to educate graduate personalities trained in analysing and managing urbanisation in the 21st century to fulfill the core societal responsibilities of our university. The key research and teaching theme is the Formation of Space in Urban Areas with a holistic perspective to understand the ways in which individual cities evolve. The focus will be on Africa and the partnership with the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town is a key structural feature with

students spending at least one Semester here. In addition to the new Professors who will be appointed at the University of Basel, a critical factor is a Professorship in Urban Studies as a joint appointment with University of Cape Town. I am happy to say, that interviews for this position are ongoing here in Cape Town as we speak.

In conclusion, I would like to thank once again Minister Pandor and all of her team for the enabling role in bringing the parents together to allow us to celebrate the birth today. I would also like to take the opportunity to wish the new Chairholder, Professor Dalvie the very best in his scientific endeavours and interactions with Switzerland. I look forward to welcoming him again in Basel. Most importantly, I would like to reinforce the message that the State Secretary has given, that Switzerland and South Africa are important and natural partners. From our side at the University of Basel, we welcome the opportunity to be a part of this enterprise and hope that our own modest contributions will contribute to the success.

Ingqwalaselo!