

AMASA 12 - 2016

WELCOME NOTE

Johannesburg, 7 November 2016

Chairperson, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my honour today to stand in the place of the President of ASSAf and welcome you to this important meeting of AMASA. The recently elected President of ASSAf is Prof Jonathan Jansen. Prof Jansen, recently resigned as Rector and Vice Chancellor of Free State University and has assumed a research fellowship at Stanford University. He sincerely regrets that he could not be here to welcome us on behalf of ASSAf. Prof Brenda Wingfield, of Pretoria University is also the Vice President of ASSAf, and she too, as I understand it, is overseas at this time. That then leaves me as Vice President to do the honours.

Let me also take this opportunity to acknowledge the immediate past President of ASSAf, Prof Daya Reddy who stood down at the last AGM of ASSAf. Prof Reddy has steered ASSAf so ably over the last three years, and especially extended the reach and partnerships of ASSAf through Africa and internationally. Last year he was elected as the next President of ICSU.

I am also delighted to welcome here Prof Robin Crewe who has also served a distinguished career as President of ASSAf as well as President of NASAC. Prof Crewe continues his association with ASSAf and with the science scholarly community across the world.

May I also take the opportunity to welcome members of the Executive and Council of ASSAf. In particular I make mention of Prof Himla Soodyall, the General Secretary of ASSAf. (Prof RN Phaswana-Mafuya...

On behalf of ASSAf I extend a word of welcome Board members of NASAC who are co-sponsoring this AMASA event with ASSAf. The Board of ASSAf will be holding their Meeting and AGM alongside this event.

Our partners in this event are also welcome: the Department of Science and Technology, UWC Centre for Excellence in Food Security, and GenderInSite. I also welcome our overseas partners: Leopoldina, Germany's National Science Academy, IAP/Carnegie Foundation, UNESCO/IAP, USAID, New Zealand High Commission and all our guests are most welcome.

ASSAf is very honoured to host this 12th Session of AMASA in South Africa. It will be remembered that ASSAf had been among the early supporters of the AMASA initiative and held one of this meeting in 2010. We are delighted to welcome you back. In the meantime, AMASA has undergone a metamorphosis. It is now owned by the African academies of science. It is a strategy to beneficiate our networks, and to grow our strategic value to our countries and to Africa. Over the ten previous meetings we journeyed together with our partners in the United States, Germany, UK and elsewhere.

At the 11th AMASA Meeting we undertook some specific actions and we established as operational strategy that should enhance the work of Academies of Science in Africa. NASAC is a partner in this endeavor. It means that our collective contribution to the advancement of science in Africa, and the quality of our advice to governments, our values of independence and evidence-based scholarship should take Africa a step closer to realizing the dream that has been so eloquently espoused in the Agenda 2063 adopted by member States of the African Union. I thank my colleagues in NASAC for this partnership. Today I mention Prof Yousuf Maudarbocus, the Vice President of NASAC, and Ms Jackie Olang, the Executive Director, as well as colleagues attending this event.

In advance let me thank Prof Roseanne Diab, the Executive Officer of ASSAf and the staff at the ASSAf Office for the work that has gone into organizing this event here, especially for the partnership with NASAC.

On behalf of ASSAf I welcome all of you to this AMASA 12 event. I trust that you will find it worth your while as an occasion for learning, establishing networks and for the affirmation of what we do for science in our respective societies. Welcome.

I have no doubt that you are aware that we have invited you back to South Africa this time for a very special reason. This year ASSAf is celebrating its 20th anniversary since it was established by an Act of Parliament in 1996. The idea of a national science council was passionately driven and pioneered by, among others, Prof Wieland Gevers, the doyen of research scientists in our country. It was recognized that South Africa needed to make a fresh start in keeping with the constitutional vision expressed in the Constitution that was adopted that year. That vision is eloquently stated in the Preamble of the Constitution, for example, where it says that the new democratic and constitutional dispensation was to “improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person.” Towards that end ASSAf did not see itself as a continuation of the previously established science academies, the Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns, as well as the Royal Society both of which were steeped in the apartheid and colonial past and neither could be expected to become the scientific voice of the new Constitution.

ASSAf was then established with the commitment to advance science for society. It was to help scientists to recognize that all science, all knowledge is ultimately for a purpose, and that society at large values knowledge that advances human flourishing. For twenty years then we can say that ASSAf has advanced this mission. With well over 500 members, with regular events like lectures, scientific publications, and with a readiness to tap on the resources of the scientific community to

offer evidence-based advice to government, ASSAf has stuck to its mission. You join us at this event to affirm with us the abiding importance of that mission not just for South Africa, but for Africa as a whole.

The theme for this conference is as judicious as it is strategic. It is well chosen in that it fits into the strategic vision of both the African Union and the United Nations. It is judicious in that it bears the wisdom of the scientific world in Africa to contribute to the policy formation and to shape the strategic impact of science in Africa. The theme was conceptualised in partnership with the Standing Committee on Science for the Reduction of Poverty and Inequality of which ASSAf is a member.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has thrust the world into the spotlight about the prevailing and persistent scandal of poverty in the world today. Following the Millennium Development Goals that have had mixed success, we have now introduced sustainability into the mix. One of the architects of the SDGs, Jeffrey Sachs, has said that the SDGs will need the “unprecedented mobilization of global knowledge operating across many sectors and regions.” That is the advance intelligence that the science community must embrace.

Occupying pole position in the 17 SDGs that have been adopted is SDG 1 “ We are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfill their potential in dignity and equality, and in a healthy environment.” Note the move away from the language of poverty alleviation to one of total eradication. It bears acknowledgement, in this regard, that the SDGs must be understood, read and interpreted as “integrated, indivisible, global in nature and universal in scope.” This suggests that the issue of extreme forms of poverty become a responsibility of all nations, not just in terms of the provision of development aid, important as that may be, but also in establishing conditions for fair trade, for the advancement of science and technology, industrialisation and agricultural and health

priorities. This is a wholesale humanist project in which the science world must drive. This is the only guarantor of a world safe from war and conflict, and that sustains human wellbeing and flourishing.

As we know, the Agenda 2063 of the African Union is just as assertive about these aspirations. It states that the Africa we want must be “ a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.” The AU Heads of State and Government equally affirm a determination to “eradicate poverty in our generation and build shared prosperity through social and economic transformation of the Continent.”

There is a welcome recognition in the AU Agenda 2063 that these aspirations would be meaningless without advanced science and technology, without good governance, and without a citizenry that is both engaged and accountable. It therefore states that these aspirations must be driven by “ a well educated and skilled citizens, underpinned by science, technology and innovation for a knowledge society is the norm...”

The Agenda 2063 is very firm about the agency of Africa’s scientists as the intellectual resources necessary to achieve Africa’s ambitions. The undertaking therefore is to “build and expand an African knowledge society through transformation and investments in universities, science, technology, research and innovation ...”

On that account, it is appropriate to welcome my esteemed friend Dr Mamphela Ramphele as our Guest Speaker this morning. Dr Mamphela’s academic life and social activism have spanned the contours of the theme we seek to address at this AMASA 12, as a health activist, a researcher and academic administrator, as well as a latter-day business person. As a then budding social scientist Mamphela worked on the research team that produced the study on poverty in South Africa in the 1980s, *Uprooting Poverty* under the leadership of Prof Francis Wilson. I

guess her time at the World Bank would have confronted her with the debilitating challenge of poverty across Africa. For us, though, we should seek viable and sustainable strategies to declare poverty history in Africa within our lifetime.

Welcome to Dr Mamphela Ramphele. Once again, we welcome all of you.

N Barney Pityana GCOB
VICE PRESIDENT OF ASSAf
Johannesburg, 7 November 2016.