

WELCOME ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT

**THE NEPAD MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

ON

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BY

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CHAIRMAN: NEPAD STEERING COMMITTEE**

Mr Chairman
Honourable Commissioner Gawanas
Honourable Ministers
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you this morning to the NEPAD Ministerial conference on Science and Technology.

I thank you for accepting our invitation and for joining us in the campaign to raise the development profile of science and technology. Our view is that science and technology are the greatest enablers of development. Without enhanced ability to harness advances in science and technology, Africa will not be able to address poverty, eradicate communicable diseases, including HIV and AIDS, industrialise and achieve self sustaining development.

Following the experts workshop in February this year, Prof Babatunde Thomas and Dr John Mugabe of the NEPAD Secretariat engaged a number of experts and institutions, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) regarding the next steps. In the process, they worked very closely with the South African Ministry of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology and consulted with representatives of a number of African countries and Regional Economic Communities.

The idea of a Ministerial conference on Science and Technology crystallised during these consultations.

I thank you most sincerely for responding to our call. Political championing of science and technology is very crucial to the success of this endeavour. Unless there is strong political leadership, both by Ministers and Heads of State and Government, it will be difficult to obtain the budgetary support that is required and also to convince the development partners to prioritise science and technology.

We welcome the representatives of specialised science and technology agencies and multilateral institutions. Your support is highly appreciated.

May I also welcome and thank the South African Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Dr Ben Ngubane. Without your passion for science and technology, leadership and support, it would have been extremely difficult for us to organise this conference. This conference is co-sponsored by the NEPAD Secretariat and the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology

We are extremely honoured by the presence and participation of the Honourable AU Commissioner, Adv B Gawanas. She is Commissioner for Social Affairs and currently acting Commissioner for Science and Technology.

Commissioner Gawanas was one of the four commissioners who paid a visit to the NEPAD Secretariat for four days last month. The visit gave us an opportunity to discuss with the Commissioners the harmonisation of our work with that of the AU Commission. I am pleased to report that we made good progress. We are therefore very pleased to receive the Commissioner as our guest once more.

Honourable Ministers

The senior officials have been meeting for the last three days. They deliberated on a number of issues that are critical to the advancement of science and technology in our countries. Their report will be presented to you later in the day.

During the last two years, NEPAD has produced detailed implementation plans covering the following priorities; Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance, Agriculture, Health, Short-term Action Plan for Infrastructure Development and Environment. In addition, prepared all the core documents for the African Peer Review Mechanism. The detailed implementation plans were approved by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union after due consideration by the relevant Ministers. The plans are now being implemented and the NEPAD Secretariat is assisting countries with the preparation of country specific projects and mobilisation of resources from the private sector and development partners.

Now we have turned our attention to science and technology. The objective is to develop a strategic framework and an Action Plan. The plan must identify actions and projects with time frames. It must also specify actions that are required at country, regional and continental levels.

I believe that the senior officials have prepared a report that merits your serious consideration. They have endeavoured to make concrete proposals.

I am pleased to report that NEPAD is already adding value to science and technology by leveraging resources from development partners.

The International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) has just received the sum of 30 million Canadian Dollars from the Canadian Fund for Africa to strengthen its research capacity in the field of biosciences through the support of NEPAD. ILRI will serve as a focal point for the African scientific community in conducting cutting edge science research in Africa. National Agricultural Research Institutions including Universities will benefit from the facilities at ILRI where world class research will be carried out. ILRI will in this regard serve as the first NEPAD supported Centre of Excellence in biosciences in Africa.

Out of the 30 million Canadian dollars, 3 million will be made available to NEPAD to conduct specific studies, develop profiles of potential Centres of Excellence, including feasibility studies for the establishment of other Centres of Excellence in different Regional Economic Communities across Africa and the formulation of guidelines for establishing regional networks.

I am also pleased to announce that yesterday Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) announced that it will contribute ZAR 3 850 000 to foster science and technology development in Africa.

The IDRC contribution is supporting efforts by African leaders to promote the application of science and technology (S & T) for economic growth and poverty reduction. The grant will help the African Forum on Science and Technology for Development (AFSTD) to develop its research programmes and activities. The AFSTD was recently established in South Africa in connection with the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

AFSTD will create networks of excellence and programmes across the continent in priority areas such as science and technology policies, technological innovation, science and engineering education and biotechnology.

The IDRC is hoping that its support will be matched by other donors.

Honourable Minister,

It is these developments that give me hope about the future. Your deliberations and conclusions will enable us to accelerate the pace. The NEPAD Secretariat and officials of the Department of Arts, Culture and Science and Technology stand ready to provide whatever assistance you may require.

To ensure your comfort and relaxation in the evening, Minister Ngubane has arranged exhilarating entertainment. I am sure you will hear more about the entertainment programme at a later stage.

In conclusion, I wish you a very successful conference and a memorable visit to Gauteng, South Africa.

I thank you.