

Wilhelm Krull: Speech on the occasion of the South African Large Telescope (SALT) Inauguration, 9 November, 2005

Dear Khotso,
Dear Minister,
Distinguished Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be back in South Africa, and to have the opportunity to address you this evening. It is a great privilege to speak on an occasion of such significance for the scientific future of South Africa and the astronomic community worldwide.

Foundations like to focus on funding good projects. They believe in Friedrich Schiller who once said: "If what we are doing does not speak for itself, then words won't be of any help either." ("Wo die Tat nicht spricht, da wird das Wort nicht viel helfen.") I am sure that tomorrow the Southern African Large Telescope will speak for itself, but tonight a few remarks must be made.

First of all, I should like to thank you, Khotso, and your colleagues very much for the warm welcome and the splendid hospitality. I am looking forward to spending more time with you during the coming days. And I would like to congratulate you on the accomplishment of such a great endeavour on behalf of the Federal Minister of Education and Research, Mrs. Edelgard Bulmahn, the Minister of Science and Culture in Lower Saxony, Mr. Lutz Stratmann, and the current President of the University of Göttingen, Professor von Figura. I convey to you their best wishes for a successful opening and sustainable development of SALT.

Tomorrow we will officially open Africa's Giant Eye, as President Mbeki has put it in his much acclaimed opening speech of the South African Pavilion at the EXPO 2000

in my home town, in Hanover. And he continued by saying that the new telescope will enable us to "observe our earliest stars, learn about the formation of our galaxy and the lives of other worlds so as to give us insights into our future."

Now, that the telescope will be inaugurated, five years after the ground-breaking ceremony at Sutherland, I am sure that South African researchers and their international partners will know how to make use of the hexagonal mirror array gathering more than 20 times as much light as the largest hitherto existing African telescopes. So, I think, we can really look forward to an exciting time full of new observations and first order scientific results.

In view of these great opportunities, the Volkswagen Foundation as well as the Lower Saxon Ministry of Science and Culture, and also the Federal Ministry of Education and Research responded positively to Professor Klaus Fricke's proposal to ensure German participation in this exciting project via his institute at the Georg August University of Göttingen. Further significant steps along this path of success have been taken by the university's leadership and Professor Reiner Dreizler as well as Professor Wolfram Kollatschny, whom I want to thank wholeheartedly for their sedulous efforts. I am glad that President emeritus Professor Horst Kern and his wife Professor Ilona Ostner are with us tonight.

There are many more to be thanked, but first and foremost I would like to thank you, Khotso whom I first met together with Reinhardt Arndt in 1993, and then more intensively when I came to South Africa in order to participate in the "System Wide Review" in January 1998. From this very beginning you – despite or perhaps even because of your background in the life sciences - had a vision of SALT as a flagship project of science and technology for the African continent. And despite all obstacles and other urgent needs you have always realized the invaluable role SALT will play to establish South Africa at the forefront of international science. I would like to congratulate you on your courage, your vision, and your wisdom to invest in a world-class scientific facility with which South Africa has shown that it can contribute to fundamental science on a par with the international scientific community. – As this is also the "Einstein Year", the UNESCO International Year of Physics, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Einstein's "annus mirabilis", his major

breakthroughs in relativity theory in 1905, I cannot help but quote Albert Einstein who once said: "Right at the centre of all the difficulties, there is also room for opportunities." ("Inmitten der Schwierigkeit liegt die Möglichkeit.") And you have really made use of these opportunities amidst all the difficulties the African continent is still confronted with.

With SALT South Africa has set a landmark which will help to develop new ways of sustainable capacity-building, to take a long term view in order to ultimately empower African researchers with the confidence and the courage to chart their own future. I am optimistic that the intellectual lighthouse we will inaugurate tomorrow will achieve wider impacts and convince decision-makers that changes are feasible: The light sent out by this project will shine beyond the borders of astrophysics and the South African nation. For research is international by definition: many research areas nowadays even deal with topics that have emerged in a global context.

The traditional, postcolonial approaches to collaborative research are no longer viable. Several European and American foundations have already begun to change their strategies and funding modes accordingly in order to improve on North-South as well as South-South cooperation. In addition, initiatives such as "Europe in the World", the attempts made to mobilise leadership and resources towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, the HIV/AIDS funders' initiative, and the EFC Sub-Saharan Africa Funders Network as well as the Volkswagen Foundation's Initiative "Knowledge for Tomorrow. Cooperative Research Projects in Sub-Saharan Africa" (the first workshop was set up jointly with Khotso Mokhele and his NRF staff) have become widely acknowledged as important steps towards taking on jointly the responsibility to successfully engage in locally informed and sustainable research capacity building. Otherwise, I am afraid, we will not succeed in responding adequately to the grand challenges of our common future.

Let us turn our eyes forward this evening. Together we should look to a future which will be characterised by cooperation and hopefully also symmetric partnerships in research and capacity building. Allow me, therefore, to raise my glass to toast to our common future which we will jointly shape. To international friendship in science! To South Africa!

