

BIO-08 CONFERENCE WELCOME

Monument

Monday, 21 January 2008

The Chairperson's and officials of the South African Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, the South African Society for Microbiology, and Biotech SA, conference participants, invited speakers, presenters, distinguished guests, conference organisers, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen – Molweni, good morning

On behalf of the University of Fort Hare, the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, and the academics, students and support staff of Rhodes University, a very warm welcome to Rhodes University, to iRhini/Grahamstown, to the Makana District, and the Eastern Cape; and to our international colleagues and visitors, an especial welcome also to South Africa.

The term 'conference', as opposed to say a 'colloquium' or 'seminar' can be and is often stretched to encompass myriad activities. So it is the case with this conference, which under the rubric of Bio-08 creatively and efficiently brings together five days of wide ranging of activities that encompass three conferences that have as their objects of knowledge Biochemistry, Molecular Biology, Microbiology, and Biotechnology, numerous workshops, an AGM, opportunities for informal engagement and even some volleyball thrown in.

I trust that you will enjoy a stimulating and productive five days and that you will emerge with insights and ideas that through healthy scientific

competition and co-operation will penetrate and push further the barriers to discovery, science, knowledge and understanding in the areas of Biochemistry, Molecular Biology, Microbiology and Biotechnology.

For transport, logistic and costs reasons, compared to universities in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town and Durban, Rhodes and other Eastern Cape-based universities have to work especially hard to attract and host national and especially international conferences. That we do so with considerable success is, I believe, a measure of the quality of the scholars and scientists that can be found at our universities and the recognition that their scholarship enjoys nationally and internationally. Thank you to colleagues at Rhodes, Fort Hare and Nelson Mandela for securing the hosting of Bio-08, and thank you too to the different societies for choosing the Eastern Cape and Rhodes as the venue.

I am most pleased that Bio-08 is jointly organised by Rhodes, Fort Hare and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan. For in as much as healthy competition which is not destructive is important, so is institutional and scholarly co-operation if we are to advance fundamental scientific research and to also contribute to addressing the social and economic development challenges of the Eastern Cape, South Africa and the continent.

I am also pleased with the efforts that have been made to facilitate student representation at this conference. The reproduction of a new generation of scholars and scientists, who also more extensively reflect the demographics of our country, is an urgent and pressing challenge. Conferences such as this are important mechanisms for the induction of new and emerging scientists into scientific networks and for attracting them to an academic career.

For Rhodes there is especial significance in Bio-08 being co-hosted and held here. 2008 marks the 21st anniversary of the origins of biotechnology at Rhodes University. Developments and achievements in biotechnology at Rhodes have been impressive and have also spawned the Environmental Biotechnology Research Unit, a hub for innovative applied research and postgraduate and post-doctoral research. We look forward to further decades of excellence in biotechnology teaching and research and to consolidating and deepening the value and impact of EBRU.

In closing, I wish you a very stimulating and productive conference, an enjoyable stay at Rhodes and in iRhini/Grahamstown and I am confident that you will find us hospitable hosts.