

SPEECH FOR THE PRINCIPAL, COLLEGE OF BIOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI, ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE HABITABLE PLANET WORKSHOP AT THE SCI LABORATORY ON MONDAY 1ST JULY 2013 FROM 12 NOON

- Dr Neville Sweijd, ACCESS Operations Manager and Colleagues from South Africa
- Deans and Directors of the Schools and Institutes of the University of Nairobi
- Chairmen of Departments
- Distinguished Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the University of Nairobi and Kenyan society at large, I welcome you all to Kenya, and to the first Habitable Planet Workshop to be held outside of South Africa and Namibia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I understand that the ACCESS habitable planet programme is a DST funded initiative in which 3rd and 4th year students take part in a ten day workshop around the topic of Earth Systems Science. Due to the initial national focus in South Africa prior to this particular event, specific emphasis has been placed on why Southern Africa is an exceptional place to study Earth System Science, with a view to inspiring and building the confidence of young scientists and thus attract more students to science research. I am informed that ACCESS has managed 13 Habitable Planet Workshops and

has built up a significant track record and experience in organising and running the events in many varied locations in South Africa and Namibia.

I recall that the year 2008 was proclaimed the International Year of Planet Earth by the UN General Assembly, as this was seen as a potentially powerful means of demonstrating how society could profit from the accumulated knowledge of the solid Earth as part of the Earth System. This was in recognition of the fact that:

- the geosciences can contribute significantly to a safer, healthier and wealthier world;
- this potential contribution is seriously under-used by society and should be substantially increased;
- proclamation of an international year under the aegis of United Nations Member states would help the Earth sciences to make their full contribution to the sustainable stewardship of the planet.

This Habitable Planet Workshop series, of which you are now a part, in my view ties in very well with these noble global goals for planetary stewardship.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I understand that the workshop comprises:

- (a) A series of **core lectures** which tell the story of why Earth is habitable. Here, you will address problems such as climate change with an informed understanding of how the systems (from physical to

- political) that make the planet habitable function, and how they are interrelated.
- (b) A series of **key lectures** which give in depth discussion of local research, given by researchers from the host institute, University of Nairobi, and by internationally renowned visiting researchers. These are important to show you, the participants, that research is a valid and exciting career choice.
 - (c) A suite of **field trips** selected to highlight why Kenya is special in the story of the Habitable Planet. These are picked to be symbolic/iconic of why Kenya is a special region in which to study Earth Systems Science.
 - (d) A range of **interactive activities** will be carried out and popular science movies will be screened. I understand that these are intended to involve you, the participants, and engage you in debate in order to learn through being critical rather than through being taught.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When this Habitable Planet Workshop was advertised, it generated a great deal of interest, not only from the Kenyan and South African university students, but also from other diverse parts of the world. This reflects the great leap in interest in recent years to learn more about the world that we live in and to be able to sustain it and ourselves by so doing.

I see represented here today, eminent scientists, as well as young and up-coming scientists who will interact, discuss and learn about the field of Earth System Science. Going through the Workshop Programme, one can

immediately see the interdisciplinarity of Earth System Science issues. The presenters comprise geologists, biologists, climatologists, physicists and social scientists, amongst others. This is commendable, as some of the major milestones in scientific research have been achieved through multidisciplinary research, and no doubt a lot has been achieved through system approaches. Clearly also, the problems of global environmental change cannot be effectively tackled without a multidisciplinary approach.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the initiators and the sponsors of the Habitable Planet Workshop, as well as the South African and Kenyan coordinators, who have worked very hard and devoted their time in organizing this Event. I wish all the participants exciting, educative, and life changing learning and exchange during this workshop.

Thank you very much for your attention. I now declare this workshop open.

PROFESSOR BERNARD O. ADUDA
PRINCIPAL, CBPS