

**Address by the Minister of Higher Education and Training,  
Dr Naledi Pandor MP, at the 4th South Africa-Japan  
University (SAJU) Forum gala dinner**

University of Pretoria

23 May 2019

Japanese Ambassador to South Africa, His Excellency,  
Ambassador Norio Maruyama,  
Deputy Vice-President of Tokyo University for Foreign Studies  
(TUFS), Prof Jun Matsukuma.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you at this important bilateral gathering of higher education scholars, scientists and leaders.

Japan has remained one of South Africa's most important commercial partners in Asia and has consistently ranked as either South Africa's third or fourth most important trade partner internationally. Relations between our two countries have been strengthened through a variety of educational, cultural and industrial exchange programmes.

SAJU provides us with a special opportunity to share experiences on a whole range of issues. I hope that through the SAJU Forum, South Africa will be able to tap into the strengths of Japan and make positive developments in various disciplines.

In South Africa we regard science and technology as the key to solving the difficult questions to do with sustainable economic growth.

I would like to briefly reflect on three issues related to sustainable development and offering opportunities for university collaboration.

First, we need to understand the nature of the rapid changes that are shaping all aspects of our world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Not least among these changes is the ease of travel between countries and continents, which means developments such as disease outbreaks in one region rapidly spread to another.

HIV-Aids, malaria and tuberculosis are on the rise in regions previously considered to be safe, while non-communicable, including lifestyle, diseases now have a devastating impact in the developing world.

More than ever we need greater global solidarity. Collaborating on research into these challenges would provide a very useful basis for university and research partnerships between South Africa and Japan. We would propose that such partnerships should focus strongly on women led research partnerships and business innovation from the research.

Second, we must understand the role that can be played by new actors involved in responding to our global challenges. In research and innovation, the role of non-state actors such as multinational companies have become essential, informing the need for new and innovative models of public-private partnerships.

State actors too are changing. Emerging economies have stepped up their investment in research and innovation and new South-South alliances offer new options for international cooperation.

Despite many constraints, many countries have sustained and even increased their national research and innovation investment.

Third, we need to develop new partnerships for international research and innovation cooperation.

International partnerships should be co-owned and co-determined by all their constituents. Developing countries today are at the forefront of global scientific discovery as highlighted for example by the pioneering work undertaken in South Africa in areas such as microbicides to prevent HIV-Aids, as well as drug and vaccine development for malaria and tuberculosis.

In this connection the SKA – arguably the most exciting global science project for the twenty-first century – which is being co-hosted by Africa, provides an important example of future possibilities.

The construction of the MeerKAT, the South African designed and funded precursor to the SKA, has been finalised. MeerKAT benefited from extensive international partnerships. It has attracted some of the world's leading astronomers to South Africa, with several taking up full-time positions at South African universities.

Our partnerships with the eight other African nations that will host remote stations of the SKA remains strong and we are developing with them, in preparation of the full SKA, a new African network of telescopes, the African Very-long Baseline Interferometry Network or AVN.

We recognise that we need to be part of a vibrant African research and innovation system. So we look for international

cooperation to support science and technology capacity-building here in South Africa and in Africa.

African research lags behind the rest of the world in most science disciplines.

We know where the problems lie.

There's too little regional collaboration among African countries.

There's too little public support for sustainable development.

There's too little focus on programmes to mobilise science and technology for sustainable development.

I have been to Japan on a number of occasions and I was particularly impressed by the science forum whose format inspired me to set up a similar forum here in South Africa.

It's an annual event, now into its fourth year.

African governments must take the lead in pushing for science-led development: STEM should be a strategic priority.

Science is at the heart of the African Union's Agenda 2063. It could form the basis of collaboration you will develop through this meeting. I hope that your emerging partnership will include research and post graduate training opportunities in fields other than Science and Technology and will include collaboration on African initiatives such as the Science in Africa (EASA), an initiative of the African Academy of Sciences and the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

Such initiatives help to keep African scholars and scientists at home, collaborating in them with our colleagues in Japan will assist us in expanding Africa based research and innovation.

I know that research is international and collaborative, but I want the international to mean from Africa by Africa-based scientists too.

I believe our friends in Japan do have the same interest we do in addressing our health services, food insecurity, climate change, inadequate infrastructure, low skills development and technology hunger.

These problems should also be addressed by African and Africa-based researchers. We must create partnerships that have a clear purpose, a well crafted agenda of science-based initiatives, and public funding that adequately resources researchers and their institutions.

The mandate for our research, development and innovation must be unequivocal - find solutions to our problems, create and respond.

The agenda for this meeting has some very good topics and excellent high – level participation. I look forward to hearing of the partnerships and collaborations that will be finalised at this meeting.