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**WELCOMING ADDRESS AT THE FORMAL LAUNCH OF THE AFRICAN TAX  
INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA, SOUTH AFRICA  
14 JUNE 2007**

Mr Vice Principal, honourable guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Writing about the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Roman botanist and writer Pliny the Elder, Sinnigen and Boak in their book *A History of Rome to AD 565*<sup>1</sup> state (and I quote) –

“[he] took notes during almost every waking minute - but he was a credulous, unimaginative compiler of all sorts of antiquarian information. He read 2,000 books as sources for his *Natural History*, and at his death he left his heir and nephew, the younger Pliny, some 160 volumes of notes.”

Now whether Pliny was indeed an unimaginative first-century “nerd”, I would not know, but he indeed had a moment of lucidity and brilliance when he concluded: *Ex Africa semper aliquid novi* (“From Africa always something new”) – as today, almost 2 000 years later – Africa is surely as exiting and in many respects as novel as it must have been in Pliny’s times.

As the second largest continent, with an aggregate population in excess of 850 million and with more than 1,000 spoken languages (some researchers estimate it to be more than 2,000), how can Africa not be exciting, interesting and important?

Senator Robert F. Kennedy,<sup>2</sup> addressing students at the University of Cape Town on 6 June 1966, said the following:

“For the fortunate among us, the... danger is comfort, the temptation to follow the easy and familiar paths of personal ambition and financial success so grandly spread before those who have the privilege of education. But that is not the road history has marked out for us... Like it or not we live in interesting times. They are times of danger and uncertainty; but they are also more open to the creative energy of men than any other time in history. And everyone here will ultimately be judged – will ultimately judge himself – on the effort he has contributed to building a new world society and the extent to which his ideals and goals have shaped that effort.”

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<sup>1</sup> *A History of Rome to AD 565* (1977) 6<sup>th</sup> ed. McMillan: New York on 371.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/speech/rfksa.htm> (accessed on 7 October 2006).

These words are as true today as they were 41 years ago.

In his best seller, *A Short History of Nearly Everything*,<sup>3</sup> Bill Bryson states the following–

“Our instinct may be to see the impossibility of tracking everything down as frustrating, dispiriting, perhaps even appalling, but it can just as well be viewed as almost unbearably exiting. We live on a planet that has a more or less infinite capacity to surprise. What reasoning person could possibly want it any other way?”

Almost 5 years ago to the day, on 23 June 2002, the Southern African Tax Institute was launched in this auditorium. At that occasion Mr Trevor Manuel stated the following:

“The words ‘taxation’ and ‘celebration’ usually evoke very different emotions, and few people would contemplate using them in the same sentence. However, tonight marks an occasion where ‘taxation’ indeed calls for celebration...”

Although for us involved and influenced by the ATI it is indeed a moment to celebrate and be happy, it is also a moment to reflect and acknowledge the responsibilities that go with acquired knowledge and enhanced skills. In the words of former South African president Nelson Mandela: “Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.”

Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu said:<sup>4</sup> “The journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step.” Although we have already made some progress over the last 5 years, tonight yet again marks the beginning of an exciting new phase of the journey. I trust the ATI will seize the opportunities and the challenges this wonderful continent presents – realising but revelling in the fact that these challenges are indeed daunting.

I conclude by quoting the first paragraph from Bill Bryson’s *A Short History of Nearly Everything*.<sup>5</sup> And although Bryson is referring to the creation of the universe and the miracle of our existence as humans beings on this planet, it is indeed strangely appropriate in the context of our joyous gathering this evening:

“Welcome. And congratulations. I am delighted that you could make it. Getting here wasn’t easy, I know. In fact, I suspect it was a little tougher than you realize.”

Mr Vice Principal, honourable guests, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you.

*Nkosi sikelel’ iAfrika.*

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<sup>3</sup> (2003) Broadway Books (soft cover) on 369.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/24004.html> (accessed on 7 October 2006).

<sup>5</sup> See Bryson *op cit* 1.