

## **Invo Tech Launch Speech:**

**Professor Ahmed C. Bawa – Vice-Chancellor & Principal**

### **Durban University of Technology**

- Councilor Nomvuzo Shabalala, Deputy Mayor eThekweni Municipality
- The Chancellor of the Durban University of Technology Ms Ela Gandhi
- The Chair of Council of the Durban University of Technology Dr Jairam Reddy
- Mr Siddiq Adam, Acting Head of Department of Economic Planning and Tourism
- Distinguished guests and colleagues.

On behalf of DUT it gives me immense pleasure to welcome you all to the University to help us launch *INVOTECH* – the Innovation Technology Business Incubator. This is an extremely important beginning and brings together many strands of activity at DUT, in the city and province and many concerns about the nature and culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in South Africa. *INVOTECH* is the embodiment of a new approach – a new basis – for the building of this culture of innovation.

It is wonderful to see that this launch has generated such interest and has attracted guests not only from within our region but also that there is a strong contingent from the other provinces.

The future is upon us. GEAR thrust South Africa as an economy into the heart of globalization. This made specific demands for us to begin to shape our science and education systems to meet the needs of building our national capacity to compete globally, to fill highly-specialized niches, to understand that knowledge and information are the new raw materials of production. Hence the creation of the National System of Innovation – a specific element of which is *INVOTECH*. Whether we like it or not we are now fully a part of the knowledge economy and the challenge for us is to understand how we can be active, powerful participants in such a world rather than to allow other bigger players to determine how we fit into it. We have to become the shapers of our history – we have to become the subjects of history rather than its objects. So my easy way of talking about this is to say that we must *reimagine our future*. Let's shape our engagement in this

*Brave New World* in a way that we determine. Let's take charge of our ability to create, innovate and be entrepreneurial.

Whether we like it or not, we are immersed in a world that is racing along with technology. We arise every morning and fixate on the emails waiting in our inboxes, the text messages on our phones, the BBMs that await an immediate response – from here, there and everywhere around the world. Or we reach for the remote to flip through a choice of more than 100 channels – from BBC to Al Jazeera to Russia Today to CNN to CNBC. As the revolution in Libya plays itself out we are there, watching it blow by blow. We watch the famine in Somalia and then watch the rise on the Dow Jones Industrial Index and find the world's contradictions in our homes. It isn't just the macro-media that is taking hold of our living spaces. The social networking sites – the micro-media have taken hold of our lives too – whether we are tweeting, posting on Facebook or chatting on Skype. This is the scary *Brave New World* of Aldous Huxley.

Whether we like it or not we have to reimagine the future. We have to think about the world in terms of what it may be – not what is like today. As a student

of physics I used computers that filled entire rooms, entire floors of buildings. They were hopelessly slower and of lesser capacity than today's laptops and tablets. Textbooks were my meandering paths to the volumes of knowledge I had to cover as I trained to be a physicist. Now the Internet and e-books make these almost obsolete.

In order for us to grow and evolve as individuals and to be successful in business we need to constantly reimagine the future. Our time span for this deliberation has been shortened because of the pace of change. 80% of all scientists that have ever lived are living today! Think about that.

And yet this presents a tension. The telescoping of our planning and policy processes – that fact that we are forced to think about the future in such short quanta of time means that we very sadly do not think strategically as much as we should. What do I mean? Too much of our thinking is driven by the need to solve immediate problems. And so we very seldom sit back or stand up and think about reimagining the future – how do we shape a future that is best for the overall development of our society – for all in it. How do we transcend the notion of

building a knowledge economy to building a knowledge society that has positive outcomes for all in it? So while we are carried by the waves of technology we must also think strategically with a wide-angle lens that allows us to reimagine the future. *INVOTECH* is a part of this long view – this ability to reach strategically into the future.

Using this as a point of departure, it gives me great pleasure to address you this afternoon. *INVOTECH* is a partnership between the Durban University of Technology and SEDA STP (SEDA Technology Programme). I would like to say to our partners today that we are very proud of this alliance and I am doubly proud of the confidence that you have exhibited in our University. We are committed to ensuring the success, growth, expansion and positioning of *INVOTECH* as a leading Innovation Technology Business Incubator as a local, national and international facility.

The key challenge facing our society is to produce sustainable job creation and this will be one of the key focuses of developing successful technology development businesses. This will herald a new chapter in our history of SMME

development and directly address and enhance job creation in the high tech sector.

I can assure our partners at SEDA, that the Durban University of Technology is ideally positioned to drive incubation within the technology innovation and development sector. This priority is fundamental to our mandate as a university. At the very heart of an institution that must cultivate innovation is its research capacity and its capacity to develop the researchers and technologists that form the basis of our future national system of innovation. To educate and develop young people to the point where they may attain masters and doctoral degrees requires the existence of a strong, vibrant research enterprise. It is a necessary condition – without it innovation cannot happen.

We must ask also what *INVOTECH* would do for DUT? *INVOTECH* has the shape and size to enhance the realistic prospect at DUT for innovation and commercialization of products and services. More importantly, it will provide the basis for building the culture of innovation and entrepreneurship among our students – a very important national challenge. Our staff, students and

community may, with the help of the incubator enter the global stage by developing and diffusing new product innovations into the market.

This would stimulate research and development in key areas such as renewable energy, nanotechnology, biotechnology, agro-processing and mobile technologies to mention just a few key strategic business areas.

The resultant effect would be the production of more research outputs, the opportunity for SMMEs to participate in multimillion rand industries and a motivation for young graduates to innovate and become graduate entrepreneurs.

National priorities will drive the development of high technology enterprises – priorities such as the demand for renewable energy, which in turn would lead to spin-offs in the form of businesses in software development, installations, support services, maintenance and new product development.

The Incubator will allow SMMEs to create strategic partnerships with each other, joint ventures, and in some cases, mergers to ensure that larger fractions of our GDP are created through small enterprises.

The Incubator may also be thought of as a catalyst to cluster small businesses into sectors such as electronics, pharmaceuticals, chemical, logistics, and so on. Such clusters may help to draw critical skills to the region and attract foreign partners and investors into what we have some to think of as the gateway of Africa.

The expansion of the SMME sector would see more of our graduates being absorbed into the labour market. You would have noticed from the slide show that all of this is not a pipe dream but a very realistic scenario.

With the existence of special relationships between DUT and the Dube Tradeport, the Port and Harbour, the sugar industry, the motor industry, the maritime industry, and so on, the establishment of the e-Skills Hub here, the role of *INVOTECH* as a basis for the creation of SMMEs is well placed.

Tonight we are meeting with the Department of Communications to consolidate our agreement on the creation of an e-Skills Hub here at DUT. It will focus on four areas: e-Government, the penetration of e-Skills into our schools to improve the quality of learning and teaching, e-Health and the provision of cheap broadband to rural and peri-urban contexts. On Thursday, we are hosting a function to celebrate the outstanding research of a doctoral student in the Department of Biotechnology Ms Nokuthula Mchunu-Nxumalo, who cracked the genome of a particular thermophilic fungus with enormous potential for biotechnology applications. And every day we celebrate the team of staff and students who test applications for the Android OS platform at the rate of 600 per week. So I aver that the Incubator is in good hands.

I would like to conclude by saying that the establishment of *INVOTECH* builds on a rich tradition of engagement between DUT and the context in which it is embedded. This engagement will have multiple outputs and we hope that it will provide a strong basis for a growing relationship between the University and the

Department of Economic Planning and Tourism. I would like to thank you all for attending this event. Thank you and welcome.