

KEYNOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE FIFTH BRICS ACADEMIC FORUM, HOSTED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING (DHET), DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION (DIRCO), HIGHER EDUCATION SOUTH AFRICA (HESA) AND DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY (DUT), 10 – 13 MARCH 2013

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Durban, South Africa
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BRICS Academic Forum: Towards a Refocused Debate

Chairperson;

Director-General of the DHET, Gwebs Qonde

Deputy Director-General of the DIRCO, Ambassador Sooklal

Heads of delegation from the five BRICS countries

Distinguished Academics and Researchers from the BRICS countries

Members of the diplomatic corps

Leadership of the Durban University of Technology (present here)

Distinguished guests and colleagues

I should start off by thanking the organizers for inviting me to this Forum. I should also take this opportunity to congratulate the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET); Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), Durban University of Technology and Higher Education South Africa (HESA) for organizing this Academic Forum.

As a “non BRICS” scholar myself, I will stray from the formalities of a keynote address, and raise substantive issues, and where possible, pose provocative questions.

The 5th Academic Forum reaffirms the correctness of the truism that globally and politically, the influence of the BRICS countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – is rapidly increasing. Indeed, the BRICS economies have grown so dramatically in the past few years that they could overtake the combined size of the G7 nations - the Western-dominated group of economies - within the next decade or so. Two of the five BRICS members, China and Brazil, are now ranked among the world's five biggest economies, with China overtaking Japan recently to rank behind only the United States in size. These are exciting developments in the evolution of a new global political and economic order.

Chairperson;

I am particularly delighted that the organizers have chosen the theme ***BRICS AND AFRICA: PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT, INTEGRATION AND INDUSTRIALISATION***. This theme underscores the role of BRICS in the conceptualization and implementation of a global development agenda for the developing world. The Forum should interrogate better ways of advancing economic development in poor regions of the world including Africa, and should respond practically to the following three interrelated challenges, amongst others:

- 1 How can the developing world, including Africa, as a continent, be lifted out of the “low” or “middle-income syndrome”, i.e. rates of growth and development that do not allow the continent to move out of poverty and under-development? It should be noted that even though high growth rates continued for over the past decade, driven largely by resources, we have seen signs of rising inflation and current account deficit in some parts of the African continent including South Africa. What kinds of contribution can the Academic Forum make in relation to increasing rates of economic growth in Africa, and ensure that the benefits of such growth are shared equitably?

- 2 Although Africa is endowed with natural resources, its challenge is to move from a path built on consumption and commodity exports to a more sustainable developmental path based on industrialization. Is there scope for BRICS, working closely with the African Union and other economic bodies on the continent, to conceptualize and implement an Africa-wide industrialization strategy?

- 3 What are the key strategic considerations to be made before setting up the famous BRICS Development Bank? The need for the bank is fairly obvious if you look at the growing trade among the BRICS countries and the frustrations these countries have had with existing development financing institutions like the World Bank and the IMF. Although it is understood that the Bank can be a lender of choice to Africa, how can it be used to correct trade imbalances between BRICS and Africa, by getting BRICS to invest more in African industry, including infrastructure to ratchet up local production and exports. It is in the interest of this Forum to suggest financing priorities of the proposed bank to the Heads of State Summit.

I hope these important matters will find some place on the agenda of this Academic Forum to be discussed and resolutions proposed for discussion by the Heads of State.

Chairperson;

We appreciate that assembled in this room are leading academics and policy makers from all the BRICS member countries, primarily to debate the challenges and prospects of this geopolitical structure in the context of global and international governance imperatives. Over the

next few days, this Forum will create opportunities for academics and policy makers to debate critical and strategic issues relating to BRICS, and how best it can be (re)positioned to advance South-South cooperation and broadly a developmental and progressive global agenda.

There is no doubt that the **theory and praxis** of BRICS, as an emerging geo-political bloc for political and economic diplomacy has become more urgent than before given the challenges that BRICS countries and the world as a whole face. The challenge of rapidly eradicating poverty, underdevelopment and reducing inequality in the BRICS countries remains a key priority. The challenge of reforming the global system of governance both at the political and economic levels cannot be over-emphasised. The imperative to strengthen cooperation amongst the developing world through a deliberate and conscious strategic framework remains relevant.

Chairperson;

This Academic Forum should ask itself a question: what is so enticing about BRICS, and does its **scholarship** or even **theorization** matter?

Over 10 years ago, Jim O'Neill, Head of Economic Research at Goldman Sachs', coined the term BRIC. In 2003 Goldman Sachs made its first detailed projections of how the rise of BRIC countries might shape the world economy. It was anticipated at the time that BRIC economies will grow faster, and outran the economies of the major developed countries. At the time, Goldman Sachs predicted:

The relative importance of the BRICs as an engine of new demand growth and spending power may shift more dramatically and quickly than many expect. Higher

growth in these economies could offset the impact of growing populations and slower growth in today's advanced economiesⁱ.

These countries were seen as engines of global growth, and predictions were that China will overtake the United States as a leading economy of the world in 2050.

However, after the formation of BRICS, some scholars were reticent to give BRICS a chance because it was formed on the eve of the global financial crisis. Political scientists either dismissed BRICS as a “mirage” or proposed alternative acronyms to designate what they consider to be more appropriate and coherent blocs. To these scholars, BRICS was simply a heterogeneous bloc with very little capacity and capability to achieve “sufficient consensus” on a range of vexing geo-political and economic matters on the global agenda. It was a marriage of convenience, based purely on an undefined agenda to counter the hegemony of the Western powers in the global system of governance. Attached to this scholarship was the notion that individual countries joined BRICS for their own selfish needs, which often run counter to the collective needs of the member countries.

On the other hand, some scholars have argued that although BRICS combine considerable assets and ambitions, it lacks the strategic posture and depth to challenge the US leadership or entrench a new world order. According to these scholars, if it wants to play a transformative role, BRICS would have to agree on blueprint for change, which includes a realistic timetable for implementation, a commitment for controversial domestic reforms.

With scholarship and research now gravitating away from the predictions of Goldman Sachs, and with new developments shedding some light on the challenges and prospects of BRICS, this Academic Forum should further interrogate the relevance and appropriateness of this

scholarship and attendant research on BRICS. In responding to the question, does theorization and scholarship on BRICS matter, one can be bold to say, yes without this Academic Forum discussing better ways of contributing to the research and scholarship on BRICS, on a global scale, the very strategic objectives of this important body could be undermined and jeopardized by scholarship and research from other countries whose economic diplomacy and broader geopolitical interests are threatened by the emergence of this body.

I guess the question I am trying to ask is: how can this Academic Forum, building on the previous ones held, unearth opportunities **for new and alternative scholarly narratives on BRICS to emerge, and how can it contribute to the strengthening of BRICS**, in the context of the current global challenges and risks.

Proceeding from the premise that research output is a manifestation of the improvement of human capital in any economy (cf Inglezi-Lotz & Pouris 2013)ⁱⁱ it is vitally important for the BRICS countries to discuss progress made by member countries separately and collectively in relation to Research and Development (R&D) performance. In their study entitled, *Comparative Analysis of Scientific Output of BRIC Countries*ⁱⁱⁱ (2011) based on 1980 to 2009 data downloaded from the Scopus database, there are interesting trends emerging with implications for the strengthening of the science systems in BRICS countries:

Projections from this study indicate that **publication productivity of the United States is saturating** and there **could be a significant increase in the publication share of the BRIC region in the future.**

If the present trend continues, then BRIC may surpass the US by the year **2013** and China's contribution will be the highest, followed by India, Brazil and Russia.

By 2020, BRIC countries may be the largest producer of the publications, comprising nearly 37% of the world publication output. This may further increase to **45% in 2025**, while the US may face stagnation during the period^{iv}.

In order to consolidate these gains, this Academic Forum must reflect on strategies for strengthening the capacity of the BRICS countries to emerge as a global leader in research and development in future, including increasing spending on research in all BRICS countries as a percentage of GDP. The trends also suggest shifts in the production, flow and consumption of knowledge in the world. In order for these trends to take root, these researchers suggest that BRICS countries must continue to invest heavily in developing infrastructure for research and development in different fields of Science and Technology, as well as in frontier areas such as atomic energy, space sciences, electronics, telecommunications and biotechnology. The Academic Forum must offer suggestions on how best the research and innovation infrastructure could be built, and how R&D performance of these countries could be improved in the medium to long-term.

Chairperson;

Let me conclude by positing some thoughts on some few matters that the Academic Forum may need to devote some attention to.

- 1 This Forum should review the resolutions it took at the previous Academic Fora, and assess general progress with regard to implementation of the resolutions taken. In this way, this 2013 Academic will be building on previous discussions on these important matters.

- 2 The Academic Forum should make practical suggestions on how the resources from the private sector could be mobilized for the advancement of BRICS agenda, including R&D performance of the BRICS member countries. The success of BRICS depends on the extent to which it harnesses resources in the hands of the private sector for a maximum development impact. For an example, if appropriately marshaled, the new multinationals coming into the BRICS economies have an important role to play in advancing the imperatives of BRICS.

- 3 The Academic Forum should spell out the exact role of the “ideas institutions” in propelling forward a BRICS agenda. Such institutions include public universities, science councils, research institutes, and so on. Without active participation of these institutions in the shaping of a BRICS agenda, this noble concept will face a determined intellectual combat strategy from the West to undermine its prospects. It is important that a strategy is developed to mobilize the participation of these institutions in BRICS initiatives in all member countries and research funds set aside for this purpose, beyond annual Academic Forum. As professor Stefani Collini^v, of English literature and intellectual history at the University of Cambridge, puts it, universities “provide a home for attempts to extend and deepen human understanding in ways which are, simultaneously, disciplined and illimitable”.

- 4 The role of civil society organisations cannot be underestimated. In order for the BRICS agenda to enjoy popular legitimacy, mechanisms should be found to engage Professional groups, trade unions; consumer organisations; non-governmental organisations (NGOs); community-based organisations (CBOs) and religious organisations on the broad strategic objectives of BRICS and for civil society

organisations to enable them to find creative ways of making contribution to the implementation of such an agenda. Some form of social compacting between states and other sectors of society in each country should be explored.

- 6 The Academic Forum should debate the merits and demerits of possible strategic alliances between BRICS and the G20, United Nations and other relevant bodies in the global governance system. For an example, how possible and effective can BRICS become a “caucus” within the G20 and United Nations?
- 7 Are there better ways for South Africa, through its foreign policy imperatives and other means, to serve as a “trusted” interlocutor between BRICS and other African nations? How entrenched are the fissures in the continent for this proposal to take root?
- 8 How best can the BRICS countries boost their investments in Research and Development, and share the requisite infrastructure for each other’s mutual benefit?

Chairperson;

The complexity of the issues that the 5th BRICS Academic Forum has to grapple with, underlines the fact that there are no easy solutions. The discussions to take place in the parallel sessions on such sub-themes as **BRICS and the Global Economy; Reform of the Institutions of Global Governance; Co-operation on Africa; Education; Research and Skills Development and Industrializing Economies;** and **Peace and Security** reflect in part the huge expectations of the populations of the developing world from this Academic Forum. This Forum can etch itself in the memory of these populations for time to come, if it produces not only a set of practical recommendations in relation to the broad themes identified and the questions I have posed, but also mechanisms for implementing such recommendations. As

Christian Brutsch and Mihaela Papa of Centre for Rising Powers (University of Cambridge) aptly put it:

“BRICS can get their act together...and exploit the West’s relative decline to drive a hard coalition bargain. Yet if they end up doing nothing, they - and perhaps the developing world at large – will soon lament the early demise of another promising attempt to globalise the international order”

This is a possibility all of us at this Academic Forum should aim to defeat.^{vi}

On behalf of Higher Education South Africa (HESA), and in whose name I speak, I wish you a successful Academic Forum. As HESA, and the South African public university sector, we look forward to receiving your report.

Thank you.

~END~

ⁱ Brutsch, C & Papa, Mihaela. 2012. **Deconstructing BRICS: Bargaining coalition, imagined community or geopolitical fad?** CRC Working Paper Series. Centre for Rising Powers: Department of Politics and International Studies.

ⁱⁱ Inglezi-Lotz; R & Pouris; A. 2013. The influence of scientific research output of academics on economic growth in South Africa: An autoregressive distributed lag (ARDL) application in **International Journal for all Quantitative Aspects of Communication in Science and Science Policy**. Vol 95(1): 129-139.

ⁱⁱⁱ Naresh Kumar & Nadia Asheulova, 2001. Comparative analysis of scientific output of BRIC countries in **Annals of Library and Information Studies**, Vol. 58: 228-236.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Collini, Stefan. 2012. **What Are Universities For?** London: Penguin.

^{vi} Ibid.