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**Keynote address of African Union Commission Chairperson, HE Dr.
Dlamini Zuma at the launch of the Golden Pen Award, Department
of Medicine. University of Cape Town. 3 October 2013**

Programme Director

Faculty and Members of the UCT Department of Medicine

Friends and Colleagues from the Medical and Scientific Community

Family members of Proffessor Kirsch

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am deeply honoured to deliver the Keynote Address at the launch of the first Ralph Kirsch Golden Pen Award.

It is quite appropriate that the award is dedicated to a South African who during his life was a doctor, a teacher, a mentor, a scientist, a coach and did all these things with compassion and dedication.

I am particularly honoured to pay tribute to Proffessor Kirsch, and his lifetime contribution to the health sector in the areas of internal medicine, liver research, medical education, administration and leadership, in the year when Africa celebrates the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the Organisation of African Unity now the African Union, in 1963.

The OAU was launched fifty years ago on 25 May in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia by the thirty-two independent African states and with the participation of national movements who were still fighting for liberation.

The OAU defined its core mission to rid the continent of colonialism and apartheid, and to unite African countries for the continent's development and integration.

Ladies and Gentlemen

From the onset, the newly independent countries and the OAU recognised the importance of investing in people. Thus Mwalimu Nyerere, the first President of an independent Tanzania declared that in order to build the new nation on the basis of equality and human dignity, there were *three major enemies* that had to be confronted. The three enemies he identified as Disease, Ignorance and Poverty.

Media editor Ansbert Ngurumo¹ noted that at the time of Tanzania's independence in 1961:

Nine million people were scrambling for health services in 98 hospitals, 22 rural health centres and 975 dispensaries. The entire country had 12 doctors!

Of the entire population, only 11 percent had access to clean and safe water.

With an illiteracy rate of 80 percent, Tanganyika did not have a single university in 1961, but there were 11,832 secondary school students and 186,000 primary school pupils.

By 2004, Tanzania had 822 doctors, 2 physicians for every 100,000 people, still way below the 20 per 100,000 recommended by the World Health Organisation. By 2010, 44% of rural households and 79% of urban dwellers of the country had access to water².

The Millennium Development Goals, adopted in 2000 also placed emphasis on the '**three enemies**' of poverty, disease and ignorance, with its specific targets around poverty and hunger, maternal and infant mortality, reducing HIV, tuberculosis and malaria, access to primary education and gender equality.

The joint *MDG 2013 Report* of the African Union Commission (AUC), the African Development Bank (ADB) and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), made this assessment of Africa's progress on the Millennium Development Goals:

The report shows that were MDG progress measured in effort, Africa would rank among the best. Indeed, Africa has made great strides. But the continent's low development has required more effort to make meaningful progress. And while it might not reach the finish line first, its efforts should not

¹Ansbert Ngurumo, "48 years of our fight against Poverty, Ignorance and Disease: have we attained our goal?"

²United Republic of Tanzania (2012). *Briefing: Economic Impact of Water and Sanitation*. http://www.sanitationandwaterforall.org/files/Tanzania_-_2012_Economic_briefing_EN.pdf

*be discounted.*³

In recent years, both Africa's under-five mortality rate and its maternal mortality rate have declined significantly. Between 1990 and 2011, the continent reduced its under-five mortality rate by 47 per cent. But an inexcusable amount of children and pregnant women still die every year from preventable causes.

Africa has also halted and reversed the spread of HIV/ AIDS, with a drop in prevalence rates from 5.9 per cent in 2001 to 4.9 per cent in 2011, due to strong political will and focused interventions.

While tuberculosis and malaria remain serious health threats, Africa as a whole has halted the spread of both. Tuberculosis infections and deaths have fallen sharply in recent years, as have malaria cases and deaths, with improved prevention and treatment playing a large role in the declines.

Despite these achievements, a number of challenges remain, including greatly increasing the number of health and medical professionals that we train. In this regard, we should look at the example of Ethiopia who over the last decade drastically increased the number of medical professionals by building new universities and medical schools in a number of their rural provinces. Thus we see the progress in improving their general health profile and in such areas as maternal and infant mortality.

Prof. Ralph Kirsch in addition to being a doctor and teacher, was also a researcher scientist and a prolific writer, having published a few hundred articles, papers and book chapters.

The continent and its professionals and scientists need to follow this example, increasing pure and applied research outputs into the health challenges and burdens of disease facing Africa.

I am therefore particularly pleased to hear that the UCT Department of Medicine has not only increased its faculty, but also increased its outputs of research and publications.

We must also take more decisive and urgent steps in all countries across the continent, including South Africa, to drastically reduce infant, child and maternal mortality. As Liya Kebede, a WHO Goodwill Ambassador reminds us:

³MDG 2013 Report can be downloaded from
[http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/Millennium%20Development%20Goals%20\(MDGs\)%20Report%202013.pdf](http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/Millennium%20Development%20Goals%20(MDGs)%20Report%202013.pdf)

Every day we hear about the dangers of cancer, heart disease and AIDS. But how many of us realize that, in much of the world, the act of giving life to a child is still the biggest killer of women of child-bearing age?

This... is not just about health. It is also a powerful call for radical progress in women's rights and the rights of their children.

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is this reality which prompted the African Union during the celebrations of its Golden Jubilee not only to look back at the past, but also to chart the way forward for the future.

The African Union Commission has therefore started the process of consultations on the realization of Agenda 2063: a the vision for the next fifty years that will lead to an integrated, prosperous and people-centred Africa that is at peace with itself.

The continent-wide discussions on Agenda 2063 address three main questions: (a) the vision of the type of Africa we want by 2063; (b) the strategies and milestones that will take us towards realization of this vision; and (c) what role each of us should play in the realization of this vision.

Africa continues to suffer a disproportionately heavy burden of ill health and disease. The contribution of the health sector and of medical professionals and scientists towards Agenda 2063 is therefore absolutely necessary. We look forward to receiving the inputs from the UCT Department of Medicine and other institutions, organisations and individuals to Agenda 2063⁴.

One of the major priorities of the AU in the next 50 years is investing in its people. By 2050, Africa's population will have doubled from the current one billion to two billion. Over half of that population will be women and over 70% of them young.

Our people are therefore Africa's most precious resource and asset, provided they are well educated, skilled and healthy, have adequate shelter and nutrition; access to water, sanitation and reliable energy, and thus able to unleash their creativity, innovation and vitality towards the continent's economic, social and cultural development.

We must therefore continue to strengthen Primary Health Care and support Universal Health Care, as set out in AU's *Ougadougou Declaration on Primary Health Care and Africa's Health Systems*, adopted in 2008. Professor Ralph Kirsch was a champion for a Primary Health Care approach in South African, as the essential means by which "health for all" could be attained.

⁴For more information visit the AU Agenda 2063 website: www.agenda2063.au.int

He championed the introduction of the primary health care approach into teaching, in the medical curriculum, and practice in the clinics and hospitals. He was also amongst those advocating for Hepatitis B vaccination at birth to prevent hepatocellular carcinoma in later life.

He is therefore an inspiration not only for South Africa, but the continent as a whole.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Africa must have a skills revolution, training millions of its young people, its men and women to participate in continental development, to provide quality public services including health services, to build and maintain infrastructure and to develop industries, services, agriculture and agro-businesses.

Whilst investment in our people is our number one priority, there are other Pan African priorities which no doubt will benefit health. These include:

- Prioritising agriculture, food and nutrition security-by being self-sufficient in food. We can save more than US\$ 20 billion that Africa are currently spending on importing food, which can be spent on education, health and other priorities. At the same time we can also add value to the food we produce, and feed the world, given Africa's abundant arable land.
- Developing energy infrastructure, which in itself is a driver for development, but in its absence, can be a binding constraint.
- Catching up with the backlog in Infrastructure in other areas such as water, transport, ICT and social infrastructure, including sanitation, shelter, schools, clinics and hospitals.
- Transforming our economies and eradicating poverty through rapid industrialisation; fostering job creation and the growth of the private sector; and benefiting our mineral and other resources for the benefit of our people and for shared prosperity.

Once again, all of the above is only possible if we have a healthy and skilled population. We therefore all have a responsibility to ensure that we do our part in contributing towards Africa's shared prosperity.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The humanity, rigour and compassion that Professor Kirsch brought to the medical profession is best summarised by this testimony from one of his former students, Dr. Bridgit Farham, who upon his death wrote:

On a personal level, I first met Ralph as a student, as I am sure was the case with many of my readers. As a teacher he was superb. He brought passion to his enormous knowledge of internal medicine.

This inspiration was behind the many hours I spent in the wards, often simply talking to patients, learning medicine hands-on. His emphasis on the importance of detail - a careful history, a meticulous examination - stayed with me through my relatively brief clinical career.

His approach was one of analysis and problem solving; investigations were only useful if they were going to change management - an approach that is sadly lacking in today's world of hi-tech medicine, with the poor bewildered patient left somewhere in the middle.

On yet another personal note, when I started as South Africa's first democratic Minister of Health, having to navigate a fragmented health service of fourteen different departments, Ralph always had time to talk, to listen and to be a sounding board.

His advise was invaluable on the challenges of both tertiary and primary health care and on the broader transformation issues in health that South Africa faced at the start of her transformation. He was a compassionate and supportive person and proffessional, that always made time for others.

I am therefore honoured to announce the inauguration of this first Ralph Kirsch Golden Pen Award, awarded by the three institutions to which Proffessor Kirsch dedicated his life: the Groote Schuur Hospital and University of Cape Town through the Department of Medicine and the South African Medical Association through the *South African Medical Journal*.

I hereby call the first Ralph Kirsch Golden Pen Award worthy recipient, Proffessor Mike Machaba Sathekge from the Department of Nuclear Medicine, University of Pretoria and Steve Biko Academic Hospital Pretoria.

Our heartfelt congratulations to Professor Sathekge on your outstanding work and on being the first recipient of this prestigious Award.