OPENING SPEECH FOR THE SACCPS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PEACEBUILDING IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Prof. Moses Musonda, Zambian Open University

It is with great pleasure that I deliver these opening remarks to this conference on Peacebuilding in Southern Africa, held by what is now known as the Southern African Centre for Collaboration on Peace and Security, or SACCPS. I see the network growing in numbers, strength and depth, and am convinced that it will continue to grow. The Zambian Open University is proud to be involved in this programme and will continue to play a role in its evolution.

I would like to thank all of you for attending, especially those who have travelled great distances to be here. I am also happy to learn of the attendance of members of government, the diplomatic corps, and civil society. For although this network and this conference have been set up by academic institutions, in the region and beyond, and although academic output is an important component, it is vital that research remains firmly rooted in the real world, and able to learn from and contribute to policy and the activities of civil society.

This is the third conference held by the SACCPS. The first conference looked at peacemaking, that is, negotiations and mediation efforts aimed at bringing conflict to an end. The second year focused on peacekeeping and peace enforcement, which are the measures taken after a peace agreement has been reached and are designed to prevent the agreement from being breached. This year, the subject of the conference is on peacebuilding, which is a host of measures taken to consolidate peace, and to take away any incentives that there may be for a return to hostilities.

Peacebuilding is a broad and expansive concept, and definitions vary. I'm sure you will spend the next two days exploring where it begins and where it ends. For most, it includes not only the reconstruction of physical infrastructure, such as houses, schools, roads and water pipes, but also social and even psychological reconstruction, measures aimed at rebuilding trust and confidence within communities and individuals. It is also about the systems of governance, including the consolidation of democratic process, and of mechanisms aimed at ensuring justice.

Ambiguity is also found in terms of where and for how long peacebuilding is conducted, and is, perhaps, part of what makes peacebuilding so important. For while peacebuilding is most obvious in its initial phase in the immediate aftermath of armed conflict, it goes far beyond this, connecting to activities designed to promote development, much like those implemented in non-conflict societies. It can also be considered an activity that is designed to prevent a situation developing into armed hostilities, even in situations where there was no armed conflict to begin with.

All of these elements show us just how relevant the issue of peacebuilding is

throughout southern Africa. Post-conflict situations continue to require our attention, not only in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where some armed hostilities continue today, but so too do places where armed conflict ended many years ago. Mozambique is a case in point, where tensions appear, regrettably, to be rising again, some twenty years after peace was achieved. Angola is another situation where the need for peacebuilding remains. The same applies for non-conflict situations throughout the region, perhaps most notably the tensions over who will hold the seat of power, in places such as Zimbabwe and Madagascar. But there are political and social tensions in every society, and Zambia is certainly not immune in this regard. Peacebuilding is a common concern for us all.

Having read over the program for this conference, I can see that these are just some of the topics that are being discussed at this conference. I will not go any further in speaking of them, but will leave it to the presenters to share with us in detail, over the course of this weekend, the valuable results of their research.

This Southern African Centre for Collaboration on Peace and Security and this conference are being developed by a group of dedicated researchers and practitioners, many of whom are with us today. And although the Centre does not yet exist in a physical state, it appears to be developing as an active online community, and this interaction over the course of the past three years has undoubtedly led us to where we are today.

I understand that this is the final year of the program in its current form, as the funding scheme by the current donor is scheduled to come to an end. Too many organisations and projects begin to crumble as the funding fades away, but I do not see this as the future for the SACCPS. Conferences do required funding, but much of the work that is being done by the SACCPS is being done in the absence of any financial incentives. It is the voluntary sharing of thoughts and academic work, much of it online, in the form of blogs, the academic journal, and video interviews.

I'm confident that the presentations, discussions and interventions that we will hear over the course of this weekend will continue this trend, serving not only to enlighten us and broaden our perspectives, but also serving as the spark for future collaborative efforts, involving both researchers and practitioners, and for the strengthening of networks of people dedicated to furthering the interests of peace and security.

Allow me to conclude my remarks by thanking you all once again for your participation in this important conference. I look forward to bearing witness to the fruits of this conference, and also to the further growth and development of this network in the near future.

Thank you.