

# **Opening address by the Minister Naledi Pandor MP, at the 23rd Colloquium of African Geology, The University of Johannesburg**

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Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Rensburg;

Deputy Vice Chancellor, Prof. Parekh;

Dean of the Faculty of Science, Prof. Burger;

Your Excellencies, ambassadors and high commissioners;

Leaders of business;

Students;

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentlemen

Let me start by thanking you for inviting me to deliver the opening address at this 23rd Colloquium of African Geology. I'd like to take the opportunity to extend a warm South African welcome to our guests from other African countries and different regions of the world.

I'd also like to congratulate the South African bid committee for successfully campaigning to host this Colloquium. In the same breath, let me acknowledge the University of Johannesburg for agreeing to host this prestigious event, as well as the collaborative efforts of the University of Witwatersrand, the Nuclear Energy Corporation of South Africa, the Geological Society of South Africa and the Mineralogical Association of South Africa.

Since the launch of the Colloquium of African Geology in 1964, there have been 22 Colloquia of African Geology, 17 of which have been held in Europe, and only 5 in Africa, specifically in Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Morocco, Mozambique and Tunisia.

No major event in geosciences has taken place in South Africa since the 15<sup>th</sup> International Geological Congress in 1929, which makes the hosting of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Colloquium of African Geology in South Africa particularly special.

This Colloquium presents us with a unique opportunity to showcase our country's geoheritage to Africa and the rest of the world. It will also give impetus to our preparatory work in anticipation of hosting the 35th International Geological Congress in 2016.

Having said this, allow me a moment to reflect on South Africa's long and fascinating geological history, dating back about 3,7 billion years.

The foundation upon which the geological formations of South Africa developed is the Kaapvaal Craton, which largely comprises Archaean gneisses and granitoids, as well as greenstone belts, the best known of which is the Barberton greenstone belt, from which more than 10 million ounces of gold have been mined.

Then there is the Bushveld Igneous Complex, which is the world's largest known layered intrusion, known for platinum group metals, chromium and vanadium-bearing titanium-iron ore formations, and large deposits of industrial minerals, including fluorspar and andalusite.

The premier diamond pipe near Pretoria is the oldest productive diamond-bearing kimberlite in South Africa, and it yielded the world's largest gem diamond.

The vast Karoo basin, covering about two thirds of South Africa, hosts the fluviodeltaic sediments and coals of the Ecca Group, and also preserves a unique, almost complete 80-million-year record of land-living vertebrates. These coal horizons are actively exploited, and provide the main source of energy for South Africa.

However, the most fascinating feature of South Africa's geological history is perhaps the unique examples of early life on earth.

2009 marked a year in which our rich heritage of Fossils was strengthened by the discovery of 'Astrolopithricus' Sediba

South Africa's geological history is equally rich and diverse.

Of course, this rich mineral endowment is not confined to South Africa, but spans the entire African continent.

Geoscience plays a critical role in the growth and development of our mineral resources, and can therefore be considered a strategic science, in so far as it addresses the development needs of our country and continent. The theme of the Colloquium, “Together in Africa for a Leading Role in Geosciences”, is therefore very apt.

I hope that one of the outcomes of the colloquium will be a framework for collaboration in a range of areas including teaching and post –grad development.

South Africa is currently bidding to host the Square Kilometre Array (SKA). If we succeed in bringing the SKA to Africa, it will place Africa at the centre of global scientific advancement in the areas of physics, astronomy and high tech engineering. Our rich geological resources also give us the potential to develop as a geology research hub.

I hope that, as African scientists, policy makers and students, you believe, as I do, that Africa must work harder at expanding its investment in knowledge generation and innovation. It has become very clear that we need to strengthen our Science and Technology achievements if we are to have sustained growth in Africa. This new focus must be more on our strengths including our rich geological diversity.

One of the strategic initiatives of my Department is the “Framework for Mining and Geosciences Research and Development in Africa”.

It serves as a guide for South Africa, and Africa, to capitalise and maximise the opportunities that exist within the entire mineral chain, including exploration, mining, processing, value addition, fabrication, new uses and rehabilitation.

To realise the strategic objectives of this Framework and develop a greater appreciation for the geosciences, it is imperative that we vigorously promote geosciences education in Africa, and highlight their importance in addressing our national development goals.

South Africa is also a founding member of the Group of Earth Observations (GEO) and has been involved as a co-chair since its inception.

GEO is coordinating efforts to build and construct a Global Earth Observation System of Systems or GEOSS for monitoring, predicting, and responding to hazards at local, national,

regional, and global levels.

At the GEO Ministerial Summit in Beijing last year, my Department showcased pictures captured by the South African microsatellite SumbandilaSat, as well as the Risk and Vulnerability Atlas, the South African Earth Observation Portal, and the Earth Observation Data Centre. Stronger links between the Colloquium of African Geology and GEOSS would be of value to both.

By increasing and improving the public's awareness and knowledge of geology, we will be in a better position to expand our current human capital and skills base in this sector.

We must deliberately intensify our efforts to attract more young people and women into the geosciences, specifically to pursue careers in exciting fields such as engineering geology, geohazards, geochemistry, geophysics, marine geology, medical geology, paleontology and, of course, research and teaching.

I'm impressed with the foresight you have shown in dedicating a session to "Women in Geosciences", and holding a full symposium focusing on young earth scientists.

Let me assure you that I eagerly await the report on the outcomes of your deliberations on these two critical areas.

In closing, I reaffirm the Department of Science and Technology's commitment to providing a conducive climate for our scientists and researchers to continue finding innovative solutions to problems that plague our country, continent and world.

Thank you.