

## **Opening Words for SUA Micro-conference on Development and Decolonization**

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Welcome to our Soka University Athenaeum, and our Micro-conference on Development and Decolonization. I look forward to some amazing presentations about West Africa, and West Central Africa, and I am grateful to all of you for being here and making this possible. For those of you who are new to Soka University - we are a leading liberal arts university dedicated to fostering global citizenship, and our campus celebrates cultural diversity and brings students together in dialog to create a uniquely vibrant, interdisciplinary culture.

Our Athenaeum is a unique facility and we have enjoyed a number of meetings here in the past two years including a conference on Disease in the Age of Globalisation, three Life Science Symposia involving our Science advisory board and the SUA community, and monthly Meet the Author events sharing the scholarship of our faculty with our SUA community. This meeting is the first of its kind - a micro conference - that was organised by James Spady, and it brings together scholars from across Los Angeles and across Africa, including our visiting scholar Samuel Ntewusu, who has been staying here at SUA for the past week as part of a short course on African political development. I am grateful to James Spady for organising this meeting, and for helping to connect us with scholars like Dr. Ntewusu and to help us engage in larger discussions about Africa. Here at SUA our Learning Cluster program allows for faculty and students to explore a topic in depth for 3.5 weeks in an immersive, experiential learning setting, and James made two journeys to Ghana with students in this program, and our meeting today in some ways is a direct outcome of these explorations in Ghana, where James met with Samuel Ntewusu, and made a visit to Ashesi University, one of the most exciting emerging new liberal arts institutions in Africa, and we are delighted to have our campus community benefit in this way from James' effort and from our Learning Cluster explorations. I look forward to future meetings of this sort as we move forward here at SUA.

I would also like to thank Ian Read, and SUA student discussants for their work on their presentations today, along with our visiting scholar from Ghana, Samuel Ntewusu, and our distinguished guests from UCLA, UC Berkeley and Ashesi university. I also thank all of those in Academic Affairs who made this visit possible - Ed Feasel, VPAA, Clare Lorenzo in the Academic Affairs office, and our many staff and students who have been able to bring this event together so well. Thank you for all your efforts (massive applause)

I also want to mention that here at SUA our buildings are named after notable peacemakers, and our newest academic building, Maathai Hall, is named for Wangari Maathai, who was able to found the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. Her work was able to provide both economic development and environmental conservation in rural Kenya through tree planting, and her movement has inspired similar efforts across Africa and the world.

Soka University has an educational philosophy based in nurturing the whole student and developing student potential to its fully while emphasising the interconnectedness of all cultures

while building compassion, courage and wisdom in our students. This philosophy is also similar to the African humanist philosophy of Ubuntu - which was developed in Eastern, Central and Western Africa. Desmond Tutu described Ubuntu as follows: “It speaks to the very essence of being human. . . . It also means that my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in theirs. We belong in a bundle of life. We say “a person is a person through other people. I am human because I belong, I participate, I share.”

Today we will have a chance to experience a sense of this interconnectedness as we all discuss the development and historical perspectives in Africa together. I look forward to today's meeting, and am happy to see all of us here to belong, participate and share our thoughts. Enjoy the meeting and again welcome to our conference!

### **References**

Tutu, D., *No future without forgiveness*, Ames: New York: Doubleday, 1999.