

# JET Celebrates 15 Years of School Development

*Professor Ihron Rensburg, Vice Chancellor of the University of Johannesburg, delivered the keynote address at JET's 15th anniversary Annual General Meeting. The address, in remembrance of Eric Molobi and Beyers Naude, outlined JET's achievements and the current state of the nation.*

Professor Rensburg opened his speech by paying tribute to JET's founders and leaders for their remarkable vision, mission, values and programme of action.

## The formation and development of JET

He described JET as "a remarkable partnership" that "brought together leading and contending private sector companies and political, education, labour and business organisations at a time of great challenge" and as an "extraordinary example of enterprise, focussed passion, innovation, foresight and of a breakthrough partnership."

Professor Rensburg went on to laud JET for having established itself as a leading education development agency working across diverse partnerships with government, international and South African donors and service providers, to improve the quality of education and the relationship between education and the world of work, in line with the organisation's founding aim: "to ensure that, by contributing to the transformation of the education sector, it would assist in overcoming" the oppressive inequalities of



*Professor Ihron Rensburg  
University of Johannesburg*

the past "and transforming the "acutely deprived conditions in which the majority of South Africans had been forced to live."

*From left to right:*

*Penny Vinjevold, National Department of Education, Chabani Manganyi, University of Pretoria, Cheryl Carolus, Peotona Group Holdings, Ihron Rensburg, University of Johannesburg and Nick Taylor, JET*



## in this issue



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He added that over the past fifteen years JET has had many successes in its core focus areas of improving the quality of teaching and learning in public schools, providing skills training to adults in the work place, and promoting socio-economic relevance and employability as key considerations in higher education and vocational training. He singled out the implementation of large scale projects as one of the most significant lessons learnt by JET along the way.

### Historical context

Professor Rensburg set the founding of JET in its historical context, describing that time in South Africa as “ a battle period of mass mobilisation and engagement with the state, and of optimism, hope, creativity, ambition and enterprise... but also a period of romanticism and of infantile belief that everything was possible... a period of fearlessness, of an all conquering spirit and of a certain South African swagger and “exceptionalism” as embodied in the 1980s/1990s youth slogan, “Nobody Can Stop Us.”

This period of idealism saw the formation of many institutions founded on similar principles to those of JET.



*Roelien du Toit and Arwen Sleigh, JET*



*Eric Schollar, Educational Consultant and Thabo Mabogoane, JET*

### Current state of the nation

In contrast, he had a more sombre message to impart about the present state of the nation, to which he applied the words “grim”, “stark”, “alienated”, “barren”. He wondered “How is it possible for this nation to have so little hope and courage, to be so uninspired, to be so leaden footed? “

He then went on to explore the reasons for this change of attitude and mood, citing a variety of contributing factors. These include the present political situation, fraught with uncertainty, rumours of corruption at the highest levels, and the scramble for power, which have led to “telling questions about the character of our leadership collective, about their commitment, and about the level and limits of the consolidation of our nation and democracy” and the failing capacity of critical organs of state evidenced by the debacles surrounding the Commissioner of Police, the Director of Prosecutions, the SABC, and the Department of Home Affairs among others. In addition, he enumerated several national crises: the present power crisis, the recent xenophobic attacks, racism rearing its head at schools and universities, the crisis in Zimbabwe and South Africa’s lack of response, the escalating food and fuel costs, the inability to tackle crime and even our apparent lack of ability to win at soccer!

Quoting from an annual opinion poll, Professor Rensburg noted that 60% of South Africans are “ in a bad mood” - pessimistic about the country - a telling response about the South African character and our response to the current situation.

### Past achievements

Yet, as he pointed out, if we took the time to reflect on the past 15 years, we would see that South Africa has achieved many things. A stable macro-economic and fiscal environment has facilitated a phenomenal economic growth rate. Together with an improved tax collection system this has enabled significant expansion in areas such as housing and electricity, water and schools delivery. State debt has been significantly reduced. There has been major investment in infrastructure comprising roads, railways, airports, stadiums and telecommunications. There are many successful institutions, both state, (for example SARS, SA Reserve Bank, the Treasury the

Housing Ministry), and private, (MTN, Vodacom, Mvelaphanda, Kagiso Trust Investment and African Rainbow Minerals) that have flourished. South African companies such as SA Breweries, AngloGold, Sappi, Goldfields and Sasol have become part of the global economy.

In addition, Rensburg reminded us of South Africa's successful response to the political/constitutional crisis in the eighties and nineties, achieving a peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy in the face of the possibility of violence and bloodshed.

This all provides convincing evidence that South Africa can face the challenges and rise to the occasion to build the nation.

However, it seems that all the gains have been forgotten amidst the sense of doom and gloom that pervades the collective consciousness.

### **The way forward – nation building and democratic consolidation**

To account for this pervasive pessimism and to suggest ways of moving forward, Professor Rensburg offered three theses:

#### **Affirmation of the Constitution**

The first is that “inclusion and caring for all people, coupled with public affirmation of the supremacy of the Constitution and democratic practice lie at the heart of nation building and democratic consolidation, and that we had a good, but now somewhat squandered start in our 1996 Constitution”. He explained that the adoption of the 1996 Constitution, the “outcome of struggle and compromise that includes rather than excludes” provided a foundation on which to build the nation, but that the Constitution and its principles, and consequently nation building and democratic consolidation, have not been nurtured. He questioned whether we have “at all times acted within the spirit and letter of the

Constitution to advance nation building” and most importantly, whether we have been perceived to do so. He called for a renewed commitment to “a nation-wide campaign within and without the local, provincial and national legislatures, community sectors, private sectors and the family to renew, affirm and bring confidence to state and society”.

#### **Inspirational leadership**

The second argument he presented was that “creating an expanded and restructured state – which includes state apparatuses, policies, laws and programmes - that is capable of delivering its services efficiently and effectively especially to the poorest of the poor, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for creating a nation.” Nation building depends equally on “hope, ambition, trust and confidence of all the people”. The accomplishment of this requires “inspirational leadership” such as that embodied by the likes of Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Huddleston and experienced during the anti-apartheid struggle. Professor Rensburg noted that some of those currently in power present poor role models, contributing to the perception that democracy and



*Brian Whittaker, Business Trust*

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*Nevina Smith, JET and Albert Chanee, Gauteng Department of Education*



nation building are not the main imperatives of our leaders. Inspirational leadership, which has “within fifteen years systematically disappeared from public life”, is essential, at all levels of government and society, to inspire us to once again build the nation in the face of adversity.

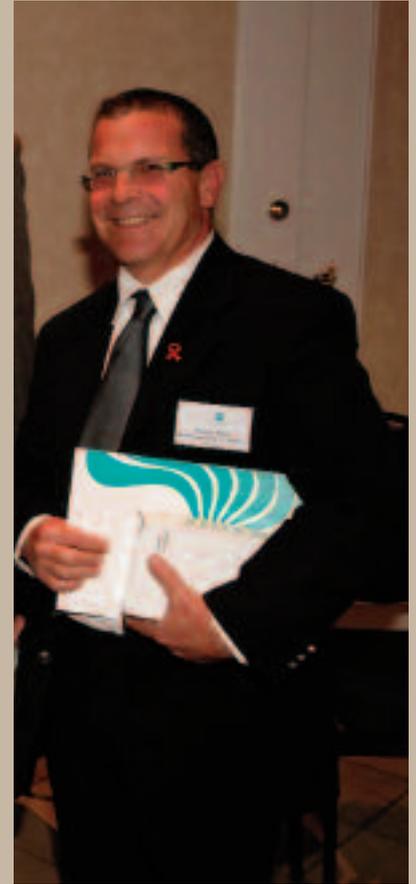
### **Caring state**

Rensburg’s third thesis was that the nation and the consolidation of democracy are threatened by an unbalanced focus on stable and predictable macro-economic and fiscal policies to the detriment of ensuring the provision of food, health, jobs, skills, education and houses. Whilst macroeconomic and fiscal stability are necessary conditions, they are not sufficient for the creation of a “caring” state. He calls for the state to show compassion, and not adopt an attitude of “let them tighten their belts further”, neglecting basic needs in favour of policy. He said “What is required at this time is the presence, not the absence of compassion in crises and catastrophe. What is required is a compassionate not a distant and removed state. What is required is enterprise, rather than the pedestrian, leaden footed and mealy mouthed culture. For when we have done thus, we will have brought hope, sunshine and comfort to the poorest of the poor”.

### **Conclusion**

In concluding, Professor Rensburg rekindled the hope and idealism of the past, asserting that “should we be able to attend to these matters

- creating an inclusive and caring for all society; public affirmation of the Constitution and democratic practice; unleashing and nurturing an inspirational leadership; and, putting people and their desperate needs rather than policy first - then we can rise up once more from our pain, our fear of failure, and the muck, and again continue with the building and consolidation of an embracing, inclusive, caring, enterprising, performing, prospering, inspired and plural nation and democracy. And, it is then that we can reclaim the meaning of our Constitution, calling on our character to embrace all of these – compassion, inspiration, wisdom, contemplative reflection, humility, sacrifice, courage, fearlessness, enterprise and rootedness”.



*Graeme Bloch, Development Bank of South Africa*

*Left to right: Diana Zhou, JET, Aneesha Mayet, JET and Nqabomzi Gawe, Durban University of Technology*



## Address by Mike Rosholt at the JET Annual General Meeting

*It gave me great pleasure to be asked by our chairman, Jeremy Ractliffe to host this event marking JET's first 15 years of activities. My brief is to talk of how JET came into existence and of the people involved. May I start by paying tribute to Brian Whittaker, who played such a major role, for his phenomenal memory of JET's birth.*

JET's origins were directly linked to the major political events of the early 1990's, in particular the unbanning of political organisations and the release of Nelson Mandela. The private sector had already, on its own initiative, developed agencies in an attempt to solve the country's many political and socio economic problems. I refer here in particular to the Urban Foundation under the leadership of Jan Steyn. JET, however, was the first to be launched with the approval and assistance of the public sector.

It began with discussions between senior businessmen, executives and experienced members of the Urban Foundation board. The lead was taken by Harry Oppenheimer and Julian Ogilvy Thompson who made it possible for Michael O'Dowd to spend a considerable amount of time in setting up the initial structure and its objectives.

Very important and basic principles were that whatever JET's aims and functions were to be, they had to be accepted by government, in particular by Nelson Mandela himself, and by black public and private sector organisations, and that representatives from these bodies would accept representation on the JET Board. There followed discussions between Nelson Mandela, senior ANC leaders and business leaders and these principles were firmly accepted.

It was then that I was asked to chair the board of the new organisation and, realising just how much was involved, I persuaded Jan Steyn, who was leaving the Urban Foundation to chair the new government funded Independent Development Trust, to second Brian Whittaker to JET.

There were initially three main challenges facing us –

Firstly, the composition of the board and agreement as to its responsibilities and functions:

We were rather naïve in assuming that with the President's blessing, and the fact that the finance would be raised entirely from the private sector, the response task would be much of a formality. How wrong we were.

We had many meetings with individuals and with organisations and the common reaction was "What is the catch? Why had white business changed so radically? What was in it for



*Mike Rosholt, Non-Executive Director, JET Education Services*



*Cheryl Carolus, Peotona Group Holdings and Mike Rosholt, Non-Executive Director, JET*





*Lettie Miles, Zenex Foundation and Jane Roach, JET*

them?” And then we found that the negotiating style of all organisations differed significantly. As a result it took us no less than two years to successfully conclude negotiations before JET’s formal launch on 29 January 1992.

By then we had assembled an impressive representation – from the ANC (Cheryl Carolus), the PAC (Mogale Mpahletle), COSATU, NACTU, SADTU, (Duncan Hindle and later Naledi Pandor), FABCOS and NAFCOG.

It was only much later that we came to understand what an important part Cheryl Carolus had played, when we learned that she had been deputed by Nelson Mandela himself to ensure our “bone fides” and assure him that the private sector was on the level. And so, this evening’s function and JET’s very existence owe a great deal to her.

Secondly, raising the necessary funds:

Anglo American and De Beers made a very important founding commitment of R250 million

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and despite the fact that it was a time of political complexity and nervousness in the private sector as to what the policies of the new government might turn out to be, fourteen other companies brought the total of pledges up to R560 million, a considerable amount of money in those days.

Thirdly, choosing JET's field of operations:

It was agreed from the outset that making meaningful contributions to education should be JET's main activities and that this required the selection of competent executives. And so we were very fortunate to secure the very experienced Professor Chabani Manganyi, a psychologist and former vice chancellor of the University of the North as our first executive director.

At the same time we secured Nick Taylor, then at Wits, as his deputy and between them they structured the organisation into an independent and sustainable entity which has made a long term and lasting contribution to educational development in South Africa. This task has been carried on with great success by Nick, our C.E.O. since Chabani left to become Director General of Education.

I cannot allow this opportunity to slip by without paying tribute to Brian Whittaker for his major part in setting up sound management and financial discipline in JET, a foundation he laid for his successors after his move to the Business Trust.



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