

SAARS BON VOYAGE & ALUMNI CONFERENCE
SATURDAYS, 26 AUGUST 2023
KELVIN GROVE CLUB, CAPE TOWN

POST-EVENT REPORT

On a blustery Cape Town day, where one experienced all four seasons in 24 hours, some sixty Rhodes Scholars and their partners gathered to bid *Bon Voyage* to the twelve Rhodes Scholars-Elect (2023) from South Africa, Malawi and Zimbabwe, who depart for Oxford on 20 September 2023.

The morning commenced with an address by Billy Downer (South Africa-at-Large & Brasenose 1980). SAARS President, Lisa Klein (SA-at-Large & St Antony's 1994), in words inspired by Edwin Cameron, introduced Billy as a highly accomplished, formidable, hugely effective and most importantly, intrepid lawyer, who has become the pivot in the prosecution of one of our democracy's most shameless scoundrels, former President Jacob Zuma. Without Billy, that prosecution -- pivotal to the rule of law and constitutionalism in South Africa -- would long ago have folded. Above all, what we admire is Billy's astonishing courage -- in the face of vilification, lies, distortions, sheer naked aggression, bogus court cases, calumnies and untruths he has remained serene. He is the face of our collective societal effort to hold Zuma to account.

The theme of Billy's address was: "*Rhodes – Forty years on*". He spoke about his journey from Pretoria Boys' High School, where students sang the School Song (Forty Years On) at rugby games and at graduation, to Oxford University where he read Law, to joining the State prosecutor's office on his return to South Africa, then "the skunk of the world at the heights of apartheid." Billy weaved personal anecdotes and reflections on his time at Oxford (writing weekly letters home, posted via Airmail, and phoning his family from a "Tickey Box") to detailing some of the nuances involved in his work pursuing societal justice as a senior State Advocate. He reminded scholars of the often-disproportionate impact they can make when returning to and working in countries like South Africa, and encouraged them to think about this at the end of their time at Oxford.

Forty Years On

*Forty years on, when afar and asunder
Parted are those who are singing today,
When you look back and forgetfully wonder
What you were like in your work and your play.
Then, it may be, it will often come o'er you,
Glimpses of notes like the catch of a song
Visions of boyhood shall float them before you
Echoes of dreamland shall bear them along.
Follow up, follow up, follow up, follow up, follow
up!
Till the fields ring again and again
With the tramp of the thirty good men-
Follow up!
Follow up!*



Rhodes Scholars-Elect, Sophia Rabie (Diocesan College/Herschel, 2023) and Kapil Narain (KwaZulu-Natal 2023) then introduced their fellow Rhodes Scholars-Elect, with whom they had spent time at a dinner hosted by Rhodes House staff on Friday night. The pair revealed some hilarious stories, quirks and interests that were definitely not listed on their fellow Scholars CVs.



Rhodes Scholars-Elect 2023 - South Africa, Malawi and Zimbabwe – dinner at Bouchon, Cape Town, 25 August 2023



NRF P-rated researcher and a lead author of the recently published Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report, UCT-based Dr Chris Trisos (South Africa-at-Large & Wolfson 2008), spoke about the framework drafted at the UN Convention on climate change in Rio in 1992; and the three IPCC Working Groups which focused on I) The Physical Science Basis, II) Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability, and III) Mitigation of Climate Change. He regaled the audience with anecdotes about drafting the 2023 IPCC Synthesis Report, the horse-trading that went on behind the scenes at this critical meeting of scientists and international stakeholders in Switzerland to reach consensus on its findings, and its clear message of danger even so.

A panel of speakers concluded the programme, as they briefly updated the community on key Rhodes Trust focus areas:

- The School Scholarships – Malebogo Ngoepe (South Africa-at-Large & Wadham 2010)
- The LEI (Legacy, Equity & Inclusion) project on 'The Trust and Africa in the 21st Century' - Jess Auerbach (South Africa-at-Large & St Antony's 2009)

- Lifelong Fellowship - Sorina Campean (Director, Lifelong Programmes) and Helen Nicholson (Alumni Relations Manager), The Rhodes Trust



There was much for Scholars to talk about over lunch at the Kelvin Grove Club, as they engaged with the speakers; graciously wished the Scholars-Elect well with their studies in Oxford; and caught up with old friends.

Sincere thanks go to the dynamic SAARS Organising Committee, comprising Lisa Klein (South Africa-at-Large & St Antony's 1994) and Charne Lavery (South Africa-at-Large & Balliol 2008) who crafted the programme. We are so grateful for all that they continue to do to ensure that SAARS remains relevant, in touch with Scholars in the region, and grows relationships in the Rhodes community.

