Dear colleagues, staff and students, distinguished guests, and especially Vice Chancellor, Sizwe Mabizela.

It is a privilege to stand here today as the chairperson of NTEU, the National Tertiary Education Union which represents all staff grade six and above at Rhodes University.

It is a privilege to represent the aspirations of Rhodes staff:

our aspirations to contribute productively and creatively; to be valued; to be heard; to be a part of something bigger than ourselves.

Rhodes is bigger than all of us.

And it is bigger than any one of us because, as an educational institution, as a transformative intellectual project, it has a responsibility to educate, to explore, to create, to heal our society and to build new knowledge, the import of which we perhaps cannot even begin to imagine.

And transformation is at the centre of this vision.

To transform, not only our demographics, but just as importantly to transform into a home for all who have invested so much into Rhodes.

To go beyond parochial concerns and to transform our students, our larger community and our vision of ourselves in order to sustain the dream of the just and equitable society that we all long for.

But in the pursuit of these aspirations, it is important to realize that at their heart, must lie a deep responsibility to the people who sustain them.

We need to remember that it takes real people to wrestle these dreams into reality.

It takes lecturers, professors, tutors, administrators, secretaries, plumbers, gardeners, cleaners and many, many more who dedicate their time, commitment, collegiality and loyalty in support of this beautiful dream.

We, in NTEU, believe that Rhodes can only achieve this dream – and surpass it – through returning that dedication that is continually demonstrated by staff. We can only achieve this dream if management and unions work together to make Rhodes a home for all.

We can only achieve this dream by seeing solidarity movements like unions as part of a sustainable solution rather than as irritants to be undermined, derided and ignored.

We can only achieve this dream by forswearing the crudeness of managerialism for its own sake;

by shunning self-serving empire building; by standing up to political interference and by tempering the need to cut budgets with mindfulness of the after-effects.

We believe that managers at Rhodes – in order to be true leaders -- must actively nurture our staff,

treat us with respect, provide sustainable and worthy career paths, actively promote worker rights,

improve the working environment, maintain humane pensions and healthcare options to care for us when we are worked out and broken invest in staff training and education, be completely intolerant of gender and racial discrimination and bullying behaviour in general.

It means giving staff and students a voice – and then listening to us with humility and patience.

This is our struggle and our vision.

Mr Vice Chanellor, we know that you share this vision.

And that is why it gives me, as chairperson of NTEU and on behalf of the NTEU National executive, the Branch executive, our members and Rhodes staff, great pleasure to congratulate you.

Welcome to our struggle.