

Speech for the opening session of the conference
Towards Other Earths II – The Star-Planet Connection
Teatro Rivoli, 2014.09.15

Dear Minister of Education and Science, Professor Nuno Crato

Dear Director of the Centre of Astrophysics of the University of Porto Professor Pedro Avelino

Dear Colleague Paulo Garcia, representing FCT

Dear Conference Organizers

Distinguished Conference speakers

Distinguished Guests of this session

Dear Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by greeting the members of this opening panel and welcoming all the more than 200 delegates coming from the most respected Research Centres in Astrophysics, from all over the World, maybe it is appropriate to say, considering the theme of this conference, Towards Other Planets, ... and beyond!

A special thanks is due to our Minister of Education and Science, Professor Nuno Crato. You know that you are always very welcome in our University and it is indeed a honor to have you presiding to the opening of this important initiative of our University.

I have also to thank Professor Pedro Avelino and CAUP for this invitation. I am delighted to address this audience, in this opening session, for what this conference means and these are not words of occasion. Indeed these are words of someone that in all his professional life, as academic and educator, as researcher, as Dean of the Faculty of Engineering and now as Rector, has been working for more than 35 years in favour of international cooperation. In fact, this meeting has all to do with my programme of work for the University of Porto, for the next 4 years – a programme made of commitment to national and international cooperation, with other academic institutions, with companies and other organizations from our society.

It is worth mentioning to you that over the past two weeks, from the 2nd of September till Today, this is the 4th international meeting where I have the pleasure of being in opening session, here at the University – a congress concerned with thermophysical properties, with circa 500 hundred delegates, a world congress on education sciences with over 2400 delegates, a congress on chemical engineering with 400 plus participants and now this conference in astrophysics.

This means that over the past two weeks the University of Porto and the city of Porto were the places where more than 3500 scientists from all over the world met (or are now meeting) to discuss science.

This is one of the contributions that Porto gives to Science.

On this major issue of cooperation, let me share with you some thoughts:

Cooperation, and especially international cooperation, is the only way for the future in our open and global world of this XXI century.

The proactive contact and cooperation between academic and research communities, and between these and the society as a whole, is decisive for educational, scientific, technological and intellectual advancement in all fields of study.

Our success in doing well, through national and international cooperation, is largely dependent on how much and how strongly we are able to promote one major value in our open society. The keyword for this value is TRUST, and this value we shall be able to promote in as much as our quality is perceived and understood by all stakeholders and partners, both at national and international level.

The dimension of cooperation that we are able to promote and attract is thus simultaneously a promoter of our development and a key indicator of the stage of development where we stand.

Dear Organizers and delegates,

It is absolutely clear to me that your conference is an event of great academic and scientific interest. It is a conference with major international scope, gathering most prestigious speakers and addressing topics of undeniable scientific relevance. It is therefore an opportunity for the worldwide community specifically concerned with research about extrasolar planets, an active area of research in modern astronomy, to share their recent achievements, to exchange valuable experiences and, not the least, to inspire young researchers for their so relevant work.

For all these reasons, it is quite gratifying for the University of Porto to host this conference. We are very honoured and be sure that we all will do our best to deserve the trust placed in us.

A word of acknowledgement is due to our colleagues and to the staff from the Centre of Astrophysics, in the persons of the director of the Centre, Pedro Avelino and of the chair AND co-chairs Nuno Santos, Pedro Figueira and Sérgio Sousa.

I am sure, because I know well how these developments occur, that bringing to Portugal and to Porto this major event has much to do with the international recognition, the quality and

visibility of your work in this area. By all means this is good for Portugal and for our university and you deserve high credits and our public recognition of your work.

This conference is to me also a very appropriate way to celebrate the 25 years of CAUP, the largest Portuguese research institute in Astronomy and indeed the one exhibiting the highest scientific productivity in Space Sciences with more than 800 papers published and over 25.000 citations registered. An institute that, additionally is a remarkable promoter of the scientific culture in our country through the activity of the Porto Planetary. I look forward to seeing what you are going to achieve in the next 25 years!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me give you a very short introduction of the University of Porto.

The University of Porto was formally established on the 22nd of March 1911, but its origins date back to the 18th century, with a succession of institutions, the first of them created in 1762, that after several merges gave rise to the University in 1911. So, we are speaking of more than 250 years of history and experience in education and research.

Specifically, over the past 40 years, the University of Porto has been putting a lot of effort into expanding its international scope, as well as promoting the exchange of advanced knowledge with experts across the globe.

Today our institution is the second largest of Portuguese universities, with more than 32.000 students, more than 1800 FTE Faculty and more than 1600 technical support staff.

We are organised into 14 faculties, covering essentially all areas of knowledge, and we are the academic partner of a business school, in association with the major companies and institutions of the region.

About 10% of our students come from 112 countries.

About 10% of our students work for their PhD.

Our research is mainly organised into 51 certified research units and is responsible for more than 20% of the Portuguese scientific production indexed in the Web of Science.

Several indicators of academic quality show a continuous progress along the years.

The University of Porto is catching up with the top 100 European universities, being clearly within this group in several fields.

In the current academic year 2014-2015, four thousand new students have chosen the University of Porto to study, this being the highest rate ever of places filled in Portuguese public education: 96%. As in previous academic years, the University of Porto is still the most sought-after Portuguese institution, as the first option, in the first round of national

examinations for university admission. More than 25% of applicants to higher Education Institutions have chosen the University of Porto as their first option.

The figures are indicative of the university's reputation and of its top grade entry requirements. We attract the best of our young people finishing their secondary education.

It is clear that we must do better, much better, tomorrow, than we are doing today, but we have good reasons to say that we are doing well.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I know that some of you are in Porto for the very first time. According to historical descriptions, we can trace back to the days of the Romans, more than 2000 years ago, the existence of a settlement known as Portus Cale, located by the Douro River, close to where the Luis I bridge and the Port Wine cellars are today. The name of Portugal derived from Portus Cale. So, we come from ancient civilizations. Therefore, I would like to invite you to enjoy the architectural heritage and the cultural and human wealth that our city has to offer, and also to invite you to visit the University of Porto.

We appreciate very much you being here. We wish you a pleasant stay in our city and a very fruitful conference.

Thank you.

15 September, 2014

Teatro Rivoli

Sebastião Foyo de Azevedo, Rector