

Your Excellencies, vice-chancellors, promoters, medallists, award winners, professors, honorary doctorates, jubilee doctors and new doctors, students, honourable guests! It is my great pleasure to welcome you all today to Stockholm University's inauguration and conferment ceremony of 2016.

Distinguished doctors honoris causa – whether scientists from universities near and far, or other contributors to science and culture – it is my great pleasure to welcome you all today to Stockholm University to honour your great contributions to our university.

We are here today to honour all of you who, in different ways, have achieved great success as academic researchers and teachers – through your research, by successfully completing your doctoral studies, or through your outstanding teaching efforts. In this way, each of you has made important contributions to Stockholm University.

As a university, we are always part of a context. No university has remained unaffected by the turbulence within Swedish higher education in recent years. At the same time, it has not shaken Stockholm University to the core. We know our core values and what we have to adhere to. Openness and transparency in our recruitment, scholarly integrity alongside a strong culture of quality in our education and research, all supported by a simple and strong organisation – these are the requirements we impose on ourselves as one of the leading universities in Sweden. As new doctors, you have just undergone the ultimate test of your capabilities as independent researchers. As professors, you have been recruited or promoted upon a thorough review by experts. Now it is your responsibility to help maintain and uphold a high quality of research and strong scholarly integrity.

However, universities are neither local nor national, but global. Our mission is to act internationally, with the world as our horizon. Our contacts across borders are essential for successful research, and our student exchanges promote and develop these global contact networks. The politicians' recent, somewhat belated talk of the need for internationalisation is welcome, of course, but above all, it is very familiar. This is the reality we have already been living in for a long time.

Already in the Middle Ages, when the first universities were founded, there was intense exchange within Europe, as the research at our Centre for Medieval Studies has shown. This exchange contributed to the subsequent development of ideas that led up to the scientific revolution and the Age of Enlightenment, which in turn laid the foundation for our modern democratic societies. Many of our fundamental values in today's Swedish society are universal, but many of them, in the form that we know them, also have their origins in Europe. The freedom of thought, the freedom of research, the free exchange of knowledge: these are all values that we tend to take for granted, and that are absolutely fundamental to Europe today. It would be wrong to throw them away. Professors, doctors, and award winners: academic freedom is the most fundamental precondition for your achievements that we are here to honour today.

Nevertheless, these values are now under threat in many ways, not least by the wave of populism and nationalism that is currently sweeping across the Western world, blocking the resolution of the refugee crisis caused by the wars in the Middle East. The idea that nationalism is completely foreign to us as a university is confirmed by the powerful reactions of my vice-chancellor colleagues in the United Kingdom this summer, who expressed their strong concern about the British universities' international exchanges in the future. Other points of concern in many parts of the world today – in Africa, Asia, and Europe – are more specifically related to academic freedom. They may have political causes on a scale far greater than the purely academic issues, but they have a significant impact on academia nonetheless, both locally and internationally.

At the same time, terrorist threats are spreading fear around the world, and these are explicitly aimed at our free, democratic society. Here it is worth remembering Franklin D. Roosevelt's winged words: "There is nothing to fear but fear itself." Universities have a completely central task: to demonstrate the core values that our society is built upon, which are based on the freedom of thought that academia has had to both protect and develop over the years.

One year ago, I stood here and said that it was a festive occasion, but that there were serious things going on around us. I was referring to the refugee crisis that largely dominated

the national headlines, with many new arrivals every day. Since then, the government has limited the reception of refugees, and the acute crisis has moved elsewhere in the world. At the same time, in Sweden today we find ourselves in a situation that is in many ways exceptional. We have received about 200,000 refugees in two years, and it is now our responsibility to give them the best possible opportunities to integrate and contribute to the development of society. Passive and uncertain waiting is devastating to human creativity – and thus we need a more flexible reception that is able to overcome various bureaucratic obstacles. If we can handle this situation well, and civil society obviously plays an important role in this, all our newly arrived refugees will be a tremendous resource for Sweden. Once again, the universities have a key role to play.

As the previous university chancellor, and now acting chancellor, pointed out in a debate article in the summer, the current refugee situation, if handled properly, actually also constitutes a unique opportunity to develop the internationalisation of the universities. Stockholm University is currently doing its part through, for example, the following: fast tracks for foreign academics and the responsibility for coordinating teacher training, where the first teachers will graduate already this autumn; our responsibility for “Korta vägen” in Stockholm and on Gotland; our responsibility to provide professional development to foreign teachers and validate their foreign qualifications; and the efforts of, for example, the National Centre for Swedish as a Second Language, The Institute for Interpreting and Translation Studies, and the Department of Swedish Language and Multilingualism who, together with the Swedish Academy and the Marcus and Amalia Wallenberg Foundation, are now developing an intensive training programme in Swedish for newly arrived school children. Stockholm University is also making a central investment in this area this year, both through increased support for the many voluntary efforts that are already taking place around the University, and through a large investment into new research on children, migration, and integration. As a university, we have to do everything in our power to contribute to the integration of our new arrivals, and thus to our common future.

This autumn, we are of course waiting with bated breath for the new research bill that will be presented in November. We have received some indications of what it might contain through various press conferences by members of the government. The major investment

into research on climate change and the environment is, of course, very welcome by Stockholm University, which in the recent Shanghai Rankings placed fifth globally in environmental science. We were also recently ranked fifth place globally when it comes to the influence of Arctic research. The University's very broad environmental research involves everything from effects at the molecular level to the global climate system. The research ranges from the study and analysis of environmental and climate issues, including their impact on nature and society, to chemical processes – “green chemistry” – and societal issues regarding administration and organisation. This research area is characterised by extensive collaboration with the surrounding community. We will continue to develop all this. Next week, we will also inaugurate our new research vessel, the R/V Electra, with state-of-the-art equipment for geophysical observations and water and sediment sampling, which will be highly beneficial to future marine research in the Baltic Sea.

The budget bill for 2017, which was presented last week, also provided some concrete indications of the universities' future development. We know that the block grants will increase, and this will be the largest individual increase. From an international perspective – where we need to look no further than our neighbouring countries Denmark or Finland to see significant cuts – this is gratifying. However, despite the increase, the proportion of block grants does not increase in relation to the funds allocated to research areas, which are largely related to investments into societal challenges. The distribution of new block grants across the country has not yet been determined, but one guiding principle is the educational ties to research. With increased block grants, the major research universities will most probably also be expected to take greater responsibility for infrastructure going forward. The research infrastructure is already under-funded, while the need for new infrastructure greatly increases as the research develops. This is a tremendous challenge, perhaps the greatest for the major universities going forward. Here it is necessary for several parties, from both the public and private sectors, to join forces in order to secure commitments that have already been made and thus ensure development.

However, notwithstanding the fluctuations of research policy and sometimes short-term interests, one thing is clear: you, who have contributed to the long-term development of our university through your research and education, have made great efforts for the future.

Stockholm University is standing strong, with prominence in free basic research, but also, to a large extent, applied research, education, and collaboration, both nationally and internationally. Today, I want to thank all of you for what you have done in your respective fields, for the benefit of the entire University. But above all, I wish all of you happiness and success in your continued efforts in the service of science and society. Dixi!