

**Speech by Professor Martyn Poliakoff
Foreign Secretary of the Royal Society
at
The Royal Society Pfizer African Academies Reception**

**31st October 2012
Embassy of the FDR of Ethiopia**

Your Excellency Ambassador Berhanu;
Members of the African Academies;
My colleagues and friends.

It is really wonderful occasion for me tonight and first of all because it is really wonderful for us to be host, we the Royal Society, to so many talented African Scientists and I hope this is just a small stage in the development of African Science.

I would obviously like to thank the Ambassador and his colleagues, particularly Mr. Tewolde Mulugeta, for hosting us here at the Ethiopian Embassy. We chose the Ethiopian Embassy because the Ethiopian Academy of Science is the youngest academy, perhaps next year we will be in the Tanzanian High Commission or the Ghanaian High Commission, so that we will do a tour of the different centres of African Science in London.

But I think it is important to stress that the Ethiopian Government has been an extraordinary example for supporting science. Certainly in the UK, we could not dream of having 70% of our students doing science and technology and I think this is an extremely bold experiment and I hope very much that it will work.

I think it is important to realise that Africa is faced with potentially very large problems in the future - with expanding population, with increased expectations of standard of living - and it is going to be scientists in Africa who will be leading this because without each country having its own scientists to drive that country forward, it is not going to be possible. Obviously those scientists cannot solve all the problems but they need to be there in the frontline so they can bring in people from other countries to help them solve it. And I hope that the Royal Society's role is going to be very strong in bringing together the African Academies and creating a community of scientists across the whole of the African continent.

We still have a long way to go. We do not have many French-speaking African scientists here today but we hope with our new programme that we are going to launch on Thursday [1st November] that we will actually start connecting the French-speaking and English-speaking scientists in Africa as well, of course, as the Portuguese-speaking ones in Mozambique, because Africa is a very diverse continent but many of the problems, I think, are in common and together you can work and help solve them. And of course it is a tragedy that this is a huge chunk of the population of the world which is still in early

stages of its scientific development, and I am sure there are many brilliant scientists in Africa and we need to help them join the scientific community.

As I was saying to some people just before we came here, my dream is that I will go to a conference in a few years time and there will be African scientists there and nobody will think this is unusual. They will just be the same as German, French or English scientists...they will just be part of the international community.

So because my father was Russian, I feel that we should have a toast and we should drink a toast to the future of African science.

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