

VLIR UOS - Honorary doctorate for prof. José Ramón Saborido Loidi - 15 May 2019
Speech by rector Caroline Pauwels

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

15 May was destined to be a special day for Prof. José Ramón Saborido Loidi. Many years ago it was the day of his PhD-defense at the University of Odessa, and today, this 15th of May, he will be awarded an Honorary Doctoral Degree by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

With this Honorary Degree, we not only honor Prof. José Ramón Saborido Loidi, but we also honor the idea of academic cooperation between North and South, and the possibility of fruitful exchange between countries with very different histories, regimes and ideologies.

Internationalisation rightly is a top priority in most universities around the world. This is or should be self-evident: academic life transcends national boundaries.

Scholarly networks are established on the basis of mutual research interests, not on the basis of national or ideological sympathies.

It is not the nationality of the authors of a publication that is of relevance, but whether that publication enhances our knowledge.

The choice of a lab or an institute for a research stay is not made on the basis of nationality. The only thing that matters is whether the stay will be fruitful, will teach you things you could not learn at home and provide you with new insights.

That is why we encourage our students and researchers to participate in exchange programs. We are convinced that doing part of their training in

another country, in another academic environment, will enrich them and help them develop as a person.

Academia is by nature international: national or ideological boundaries should never become an obstacle to scientific exchange. The aim of internationalisation should always be building bridges, breaking down walls.

The Vrije Universiteit Brussel is a university with a clear mission. We are an innovative university, based on the principles of free inquiry and critical thinking. A never-ending quest for knowledge, insights and enlightenment guides us in our teaching, research and societal outreach.

In this quest, we are guided by a number of values:

- Respect for and trust in each other,
- Curiosity in everything we do,
- Striving to obtain the highest possible quality,
- Multidisciplinarity and cooperation
- Diversity as an asset
- Striving for sustainability
- Aiming at social relevance in all of our actions

These same values have been the driving forces of our cooperation with the Cuban universities. The cooperation was always based on dialogue, on mutual respect, on understanding between all parties. No matter the beliefs or the ideologies, we always listened to each other. Listening to each other makes us better people; by listening to each other, we will become better universities.

But this cooperation also improved our educational and research performance.

Thanks to either eye-opening stays in Cuba, or to working together with Cuban scientists in one of our own labs, VUB students graduated as global

citizens. Intensive and open innovative collaboration has resulted in joint publications and joint PhD's.

This collaboration showed us how to obtain sustainability and continuity. We started with a one to one collaboration with only one funding source. Currently all Flemish universities are involved with all Cuban universities, funded by various organizations, and with involvement of higher education institutions of other countries as well.

José Saborido not only understood this, but also supported, as an academic, as a rector and nowadays as a politician, the importance of and the need for this type of collaboration.

It is the way forward to a better society and to building bridges between Cuban and Belgian higher education institutions. Through internationalization, we change lives, while sharing minds.

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

With this Honorary Degree, we honor the contributions of Prof. José Ramón Saborido Loidi to the idea and practice of academic cooperation between North and South in general, and between Flanders and Cuba in particular.