



FROM THE CHAIR



This is the last Annual Report in this Council's term of office. We can look back on four years of significant, decisive and tangible progress by the HSRC in transforming itself into an organisation of the new democratic South Africa. Some of the major developments in this regard are summarised in the CEO's message and on pages 81 to 83 of this Report.

As a country, we are about to mark the first decade of democratic rule. In spite of some serious capacity deficiencies at certain levels of Government, our political dispensation is solid and stable. The support institutions established by the Constitution are nearly all functioning; the independence of the judiciary and the integrity of the Constitutional Court are widely recognised; and democracy has consolidated and deepened beyond the formal political architecture.

It does not require blind and uncritical patriotism to recognise South Africa as one of the exemplary constitutional democracies, not only in the developing world but also in the world generally.

As we enter the second decade of democracy-building, the challenge will increasingly be for civil society to understand and play its role in the establishment of a pervasive and profoundly rooted democratic culture.

The science councils, including the HSRC, have themselves gone through a period of redefinition of role and function. Science and scholarship are not above and indifferent to the social and political turbulence of societies and countries. The HSRC in particular experienced the damaging consequences of making social science subservient to the national priorities of the apartheid state.

The challenge was to transform the organisation to respond to the new national priorities, arrived at by a democratic government in recognition of the needs of the entire

population. The Council also recognised that democracy demanded that a science council, even though primarily funded by Parliament, should not continue the slavishly uncritical relationship that its predecessor had with the government of the day.

This Report details the ways in which the HSRC responded to the challenges of democratic transformation. That response is encapsulated in a credo of "social science that makes a difference". The identification of what have been termed new priority areas of research was a major part of this response.

The HSRC's transformation has gone beyond the necessary but ultimately preliminary measures of participation and process towards an understanding that its core activities should meet the demands of a democratic society, one in which the social needs themselves are fundamentally democratised to serve the needs of every citizen.

We believe that the organisation has moved significantly in that direction.

One of the most consistent and persistent debates in Council as well as between Council and the research executives of the organisation revolved around the balance between research consciously seeking to serve defined national priorities and fundamental social science enquiry, scientifically indifferent to the demands of immediacy. Once more, we believe that we have kept alive the awareness of that necessary tension in a society that must combine developmental imperatives with the sometimes competing demands of democracy-building and civil liberties.

We thank Minister Ben Ngubane for the opportunity and privilege to have been involved in this process of transformation of a key area of our society. The support we received from him, the Deputy Minister, the Director-General and the Department was a highly encouraging signal of how seriously this Government takes scientific enquiry in the reconstruction and development of our society.

Dr Mark Orkin and his senior management have worked very hard at ensuring transparent and accountable corporate governance in the organisation. The quality of reporting to Council has been exceptional and exemplary, helping Council to execute its fiduciary and oversight functions.

As a Council we wish to convey our thanks, appreciation and congratulations to the entire staff of the HSRC for moving the organisation into its new mode and function.

My thanks, finally, to the members of Council for the enthusiasm with which they approached their task, and the time and energy they put into it.

Professor G.J. Gerwel, Chair