ADDRESS OF WELCOME
by Dr T. G. Cleasby, General Chairman

Mr Prime Minister and Mrs Vorster, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, and Fellow Delegates to the XVth Congress of the ISSCT:

As General Chairman it is a great pleasure for me to welcome all of you to the Opening Ceremony of the XVth 'Golden Jubilee' Congress of the International Society of Sugar Cane Technologists. We are particularly honoured that the Prime Minister, The Honourable Mr B. J. Vorster, and Mrs Vorster are with us today, and that the Prime Minister is to open the Congress. We are also very pleased to have amongst our distinguished guests the Administrator of Natal, The Honourable Mr W. W. B. Havemann, and Mrs Havemann; The Minister of Transport, The Honourable Mr Lourens Muller; the Mayor and Mayoress of Durban, Councillor and Mrs Williams, and the Chairman of the South African Sugar Association who is Honorary President of the ISSCT Mr Bruce Morris, and Mrs Morris.

It is the first time in the fifty year history of our Society that a congress has been opened by the Prime Minister of the host country. The fact that this is happening today is, I believe, a great compliment to our Society, as well as an indication of the importance South Africa and its Sugar Industry attaches to this conference. May I express the hope that you, Mr Prime Minister, and all our guests will enjoy your morning with us and that we will enable you to feel part of this great assembly and brotherhood of sugar technologists and sugar men.

To all delegates to this congress, may I say how delighted and relieved I am to see you all here after our travels by train, bus and aeroplane in the Eastern Transvaal and Kruger National Park. For the record I can say that we didn’t lose a single delegate! We left a few behind occasionally, but they managed to catch up with us. The rest of the congress should be slightly less strenuous, although I hope just as enjoyable.

Today the International Society is almost exactly 50 years old, as the first congress was held in Honolulu on the beautiful Hawaiian island of Oahu from the 28th July to the 14th August, 1924. The meeting was held as the sugar section of the first Pan-Pacific Food Conservation Congress and was attended by 58 delegates from 10 sugarcane producing countries. Of the delegates, only 20 were from outside Hawaii, and the proceedings took the form of informal discussion on the cultivation of sugarcane and the manufacture of sugar.

It was during this meeting that the International Society of Sugar Cane Technologists — the ISSCT — was formed, and from this meeting it has grown. While the child has flourished, I don’t know what happened to the parent. I cannot say whether or not there was ever a second Pan-Pacific Food Conservation Congress. At this meeting the first officials of the Society were appointed for the second conference which was held in Havana, Cuba, in 1927. Mr Hamilton P. Agee of Hawaii was the first General Chairman.

Fifty years later the International Society is holding its XVth Congress and
has over 2,000 members in more than 65 countries throughout the world. Of these members, over 850 are attending this congress from 46 countries, and nearly 200 of the overseas delegates, to our delight, are accompanied by their wives who, we sincerely hope, will enjoy the congress and particularly the programme which has been arranged for them.

The first record I could find of the Constitution of the International Society is in the Proceedings of the third congress held in Java in 1929. It states that the objectives of the Society are to promote the discussion of technical problems of the sugarcane industry by means of congresses held, as far as practical, every three years; to foster at all times the free and frank interchange of technical information, and to support worthy research projects designed for the benefit of all.

With the exception of the war years, conferences have been held every three years, and there is no doubt that the International Society has, in terms of its Constitution, fostered a great brotherhood of international sugar technologists who really look forward to meeting each other every three years to discuss technical papers and to inspect the sugar industry of the country where the congress is being held. It was with this very much in mind that the South African sugar industry invited the Society to hold its XVth Congress in Durban and now has the pleasure of welcoming all delegates and their wives.

In the short time available delegates will have an opportunity to see a fair cross-section of the South African sugar industry, but unfortunately only a little of South Africa itself. Those of you who visit the Cape during the congress will see a little more. Others will visit Swaziland and see something of its sugar industry. As hosts, we are very conscious of our responsibilities, and we have tried to do everything we can to make your stay a happy one.

A full programme has been arranged as there is much to see and many people who want to entertain you. If there is anything else we can do, please do not hesitate to let us know what it is and, most important of all, we would like to have your frank comments on what you see of our industry, for in this way we, too, will benefit greatly from your visit.

As this is our Fiftieth Anniversary, it is appropriate that I should say a little more about the ISSCT. The most remarkable and valued feature of our Society is that although many sugar industries compete for world markets, they allow their technologists to come together every three years to exchange technical information freely and to see in greatest detail the sugar industry of the host country. This is perhaps one of the best examples of international co-operation at an industrial and technical level, and one from which all sugar industries have gained enormously.

I attended my first congress in 1959, on the second occasion the congress was held in Hawaii. On my return I wrote in my report that “the spirit of the conference was one of complete co-operation and the free exchange of knowledge has to be experienced to be fully appreciated”. On the lighter side, I can give you an example of that co-operation as I read a paper entitled “The Overhead Irrigation of Sugar Cane in Natal”. I don’t believe it was a particularly good paper, but it was well illustrated by slides. The first slide showed the rolling coastal hills of Natal, and the second one was supposed to do the same. To my horror, there was a stunned silence followed by convulsions of laughter as projected on the screen was an Hawaiian bathing beauty who today would
be called a streaker! My remark only confounded the confusion, but I did find out afterwards that the slide had been inserted as a result of international co-operation and, although it was at my expense, it certainly enlivened a rather dull paper!

The past 50 years have seen enormous growth in the sugar industries of the world, and a similar growth in the technical knowledge concerned with the industry. What challenges, therefore, lie ahead during the next 50 years? I think the only thing one can say with certainty is that there will be enormous challenges and that they will be as great as, if not greater than in the past. As technologists, we serve the sugarcane industry in fields varying from engineering to plant breeding, and it is our technology which maintains the sugar industries of the world and on which they ultimately depend. On the other hand, although we are important, we will only succeed if we have humility and humanity. Sugar is an industry which it is a privilege to serve, for in spite of what some of our medical friends have to say, sugar is, and I hope always will be, associated with the good and happy things of life. The commodity we produce is not only a sweetener but also a food.

We are also fortunate that sugar is a product which people like, to the extent that at the present time demand is outstripping the world’s production. In consequence, we have had record world prices to the delight of many industries and companies. However, in the long run, even unrealistically high prices have their problems for, amongst other things, they open the way for substitute products and, generally, if prices are too high today, they will almost certainly be too low tomorrow.

I only mention this because we as technologists will inevitably find ourselves involved in the problem of trying to satisfy the world’s growing demand for sugar. Where the capital to do this comes from is the problem of the businessman and financier, but how this capital is used is going to depend very much on technologists, for we are ultimately responsible for the efficiency and economy of all sugar enterprises. Yields of sugar per hectare will be even more important in the future than they have been in the past. Transport and production costs will depend to an increasing extent on new techniques and methods researched and developed by technologists. By-products will become more and more important, and the total economy of producing sugar will have to be continually reviewed. The mechanization of agricultural operations is another important aspect, although it is not only one of simple economics as it also depends on the willingness of people to do work they sometimes consider menial and often hard.

You will see in our industry the enormous problem presented by the mechanization of the harvesting operation due to the terrain and other factors associated with rainfall and conservation. I hope that you will see how we are beginning to tackle this problem while we still have people to cut cane and also how much we value the people concerned. For economic reasons, the vast majority of the South African industry is wedded to a trash policy, and other sugar industries may be forced to follow this policy for reasons of atmospheric pollution. The mechanical harvesting of ‘green’ cane, leaving a trash blanket, is still a problem which technologists have to solve in the future.

In looking to the future, I feel that there is a real danger which we must guard against — that research into all aspects of sugar production can become
too applied or short-term to achieve the real breakthroughs which will open new avenues for economic progress. In other words, I pose the question, “Are we, as sugar technologists, really giving enough time and effort to basic research, or are we too pre-occupied with the day-to-day technological problems?” The International Sugar Research Foundation, with limited finance, has, in my opinion, investigated an impressive list of projects with quite encouraging results. Perhaps individual industries and research organisations should pay more heed to this aspect?

On the subject of research, I referred earlier to the aims and objectives of the International Society which are entrenched in its Constitution. Perhaps the degree to which we have supported and promoted worthy research projects could disappoint the far-seeing pioneers who formed the ISSCT in 1924, notwithstanding the fact that important contributions have been made.

I really wonder if we have fully discharged our responsibilities in this direction. I believe a great deal can be achieved by the co-operative investigation of specific problems related to the growing and processing of sugarcane.

In this regard I would like to quote from a paper presented by the Chairman of the International Sugar Research Foundation to members of the Sugar Club in New York in October, 1973:

“We are convinced that individual companies must undertake individual research. We are still more convinced that the ‘do it yourself’ method is not enough and that co-operative research is necessary for the survival and progress of our industry, where even the mightiest company would not, and could not, get the results and the audience an organisation like ours can.”

I believe our Society could also act more effectively in the promotion and co-ordination of this type of research. Research is increasingly expensive and highly trained specialist scientists and technologists are increasingly in demand. We must, therefore, avoid overlapping in sugar research by a greater degree of co-ordinated effort, and in this regard the publication of our Proceedings is particularly valuable.

The continued growth of the International Society is not only encouraging but also a matter of considerable pride; however, today we should perhaps be asking the question, “How can the International Society best accommodate and satisfy its growing membership in the future?”

It has been suggested from time to time that the International Society should have a permanent secretariat, and quite a number of people have subscribed to this idea. It has also been suggested, and indeed a resolution was passed at the last congress, that the Society should investigate having its own research journal as distinct from its Proceedings.

With regard to a permanent secretariat, I am personally convinced that this would be impractical from a financial point of view and, what is even more important, it would detract from the present character, and therefore effectiveness, of the International Society which relies so much on the individuality of the host country. I firmly believe that the responsibility for the affairs of the International Society should remain that of the country which is to host the next congress. However, the Society should give consideration to precisely what it expects the host country to do for the Society between congresses. In other words, the Society should define its goals and objectives more
clearly in terms of its Constitution, and make it the duty of the host country to carry these out in its own way and on behalf of the Society.

As hosts to the XVth Congress we perhaps realise better than anybody the problems of administering a Society the size of ours, and organising a congress on this scale. We have, however, paid particular attention to two important aspects: a general Newsletter to keep members informed between congresses, and the standard of papers accepted. The 278 papers submitted for the XVth Congress far exceed the number which can be dealt with in a reasonable time, and on the recommendation of Section Chairmen, over 60 were withdrawn or rejected. Even so, 208 papers have been accepted and the majority will be read at the congress. If the Society so decides, the standard can be further improved at future congresses, either by more rigorous selection or, alternatively, by specifying the number of papers to be presented.

We have also, for the first time, provided limited simultaneous translation into Spanish and French, but the need for this aid at future conferences will definitely grow. In this regard I am sure our overseas delegates will appreciate that South Africa is a multilingual country, and English and Afrikaans rank equally as the two official languages.

However we try to mould the future of the international Society we must, above everything, preserve and foster the great brotherhood of international sugar technologists which has been built up over the past 50 years. We must strive for greater technological excellence and, as an example, set our own standards high. We must not deviate from our greatest attribute, namely, the free exchange of technical information.

In conclusion, I would be failing in my duty as General Chairman if I did not, on your behalf, say thank you to the large number of organisations and people who have made it possible to hold the XVth Congress in South Africa. The South African Sugar Association has generously provided the people and the finance which is essential to organise and hold a conference of this size. The sugar companies, estates and farms which will be visited, and those which would have liked to be visited, form an integral part of this congress. The cooperation we have received from many Government Departments, particularly the Departments of Industries, Transport, and Interior, has been a major factor in the organisation of the congress. A large number of people have given their time and served on committees concerned with the detailed planning. In particular, a great deal has fallen on the shoulders of the Secretary-Treasurer of the International Society, Mr. J. L. du Toit, and his many able assistants, especially Mr Alec Hammond. I cannot speak too highly of the enormous amount of work which has been undertaken by all these people. I would also like to thank Mrs Rosemary Ladlau and all the ladies who have done the delightful flower arrangements in the City Hall. They really are magnificent.

I would like to say again how honoured and delighted we are to have the Prime Minister and Mrs Vorster with us and all our very distinguished guests. My task is nearly over, so I can say with even greater conviction and a smile on my face, “Welcome again to you all”. You are here to enjoy yourselves, as well as learn, and if you really do this, then I know everybody concerned with the organisation will be well rewarded.

Thank you for listening to me so patiently.