

**ADDRESS**

**Makerere University**

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*Karen Lillethun*

It is with mixed feelings that stand here on this very special occasion, when Makerere University wants to honour my husband, Professor Endre Lillethun, University of Bergen, with an honorary doctorate.

I feel joy ,– and also sadness.  
pride, - and also humility.  
contentment, - and also impatience.

I have come in place of my dear husband who – as some of you will know - for some time has been staying in a nursing home close to our own home in Bergen, suffering from Alzheimer's Disease. That means that both his physical and mental condition is strongly impaired. However, to a remarkable degree his old characteristic nature is still there, his ever-present kindness and his dignity seem to suppress and go beyond the effects of this serious and incurable illness.

I came with him to Makerere University on that decisive visit in 1988, when he was sent by Professor Abdus Salaam, at the Trieste International Centre for Theoretical Physics, on a fact-finding mission to four African universities, one of them Makerere, primarily to look at the situation for the field of Physics.

1988, - that was after the ruinous wars in your country, - 22 years ago, - for the youngest of you: a part of history only, for the older persons: a part of your own painful experience and stark reality.

What did Endre see that first day?

He saw a chaotic country and a totally devastated university. The former honourable “Harvard of Africa” - with its administrative and scientific functions - was in many ways “out of order”, in urgent need of a total restoration. In 1988 some would have described Makerere as “a hopeless case”.

What else did Endre see that first day?

He saw a fertile, luxuriant, green country, welcoming and inviting. And most important: he saw you, - the staff, showing him that you had a substance corresponding to your proud history. He could see that in spite of the destruction of buildings and equipment you continued your duties, based on your competence and experience. He admired you greatly for your endurance and the way you were able to keep up *more* than a mere pretence of daily activities. Already on that first day he saw your potential.

This is not the time, - and I am certainly not the right person – to recall the history of the project that 3 years later, in 1991, was given the name: “***Basic science for technological development in Uganda***”. But I would like to recall one point from the very beginning:

Faced with the extensive need for rehabilitation at *several* of the departments in the Faculty of Science, Endre quickly saw that his initial concern, Physics, was only one field needing attention. Soon Chemistry and Mathematics, as well as Science Education, were included in the discussions between the two collaborating partners at Makerere and University of Bergen.

In 1991, together, you presented NUFU with an unusual, visionary, ambitious, even bold application. And a costly one.

While a project usually covers one subject only, here was a plan for three fields, as well as Science Education. Your arguments stressed that in addition to the obvious profit for each institute, the Faculty of Science as a whole would benefit by having

all the programmes in operation simultaneously. A positive development could gain momentum at Makerere.

But the application in total was turned down, for financial reasons. A positive reply was given for Physics, and NUFU asked for a revised application for Physics only.

I am sure there must have been intense discussions between you, the collaboration partners at this critical point. But you did not follow NUFU's suggestion to concentrate on Physics only. You upheld your first application, - stubborn, persistent partners both here and in Bergen.

And you won. The original project was later accepted.

In preparing for this event I have asked myself:

What would have happened if you had not been so stubborn and so ambitious back in 1991? What if you had really started out with physics only? Difficult to say, but progress would have come to Makerere, of course, without NUFU. But in my unscientific evaluation, I don't hesitate to call your bold decision at that time "a stroke of genius".

I have felt right from the start of this project that there has been more than a professional cooperation between you, - I feel it is more like a bond between human beings sharing common values and commitment, with family members included.

If Endre had been able to be here today, he would have praised all his good partners and colleagues, who have enriched the last ten years of his professional career. He would have thanked you for the privilege of being part of a great team. And he would have talked about the satisfaction it has been to see the great achievements you have reached together, probably far beyond the most optimistic dreams. And then he would have shared the great honour shown him today with all of you.

Now I try to convey to him that Makerere University wants to thank him for his contributions in this glorious way. I strongly believe that in small glimpses he understands that something great is happening. I thank you on behalf of my husband, Endre Lillethun.