



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

**PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR**

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**KEYNOTE: OPENING OF THE RUSTENBURG HUB**

**UNISA RUSTENBURG HUB, CNR STEEN STREET AND OR TAMBO DRIVE**

**16 April 2015**

***Higher education: changing mindsets and shaping futures***

- Hon Justice BM Ngoepe, Chancellor of Unisa and Dr D Ngoepe
- Mrs H Makhanya
- members of Unisa Executive and extended Management present
- Cllr M Khunou, Executive Mayor of Rustenburg Local Municipality and other members of Northwest Provincial and Local Government present
- Mmemogolo, Her Royal Majesty SB Molotlegi, Queen Mother of Royal Bafokeng
- Members of the House of Traditional Leadership present:
  - Kgosi LM Mogale, Bapollo/ Bultfontein
  - Kgosi Pilane, Bakgatla ba Kgafela
  - Kgosi GZ Shongoane, Batlhalerwa/ Tweelaagte
- Members of Unisa DTFL and Regional Directors present
- Members of Unisa National and Midlands Students Representative Council present

- Members of the Business community present
- Representatives from various Political parties present
- Representatives from various institutions of higher learning present
- Representatives from various NGO's present
- Members of Ecclesiastical Community present
- Representatives from various media houses present
- Leaders of Organised Labour
- Other members of Unisa community present
- Members of the Serala Tribal Entertainment group
- Distinguished Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

The star beautifully punctuated African skies in this platinum belt of our country not too far from The Cradle of Humankind which is the world heritage site, all these celestial and terrestrial iconic objects create a special ambience and atmosphere for celebrating a significant historical milestone in the rich heritage and development of the University of South Africa. We gather here today to launch one of our most important regional hubs of Unisa with the aim not only of improving service delivery for our students and clientele but also being a catalyst for development for the communities around this asset. When we purchased this property after many years of renting as tenants, this was a vote of confidence for the social, economic and educational prospect of this important and strategic region and province of our country. This iconic hub is a concrete manifestation of Unisa's strategic intent to transform its regional centres from just being administrative offices for processing applications and submitting assignments into resource centres well-equipped to support our students and clients to access resources for learning and research as well as a range of administrative support for high performance, and for the regional centres to be successful sites for teaching and learning. Unisa is the largest university in South Africa, Africa and the Southern Hemisphere as well as one of a handful of mega universities in the world, and it has unparalleled footprint across South Africa and in the rest of the African continent. We have come today to affirm the imprint of that

footprint for greater success. We are here today to affirm Unisa as the beacon light of hope and a lighthouse on the shores for an African Child who dare to dream and want to realize that dream through education. Only two days ago, Unisa hosted the launch of a Mandela Coin series that commemorate his contribution to and love of education. That occasion reminded me of the fact that this University has a great proud legacy of producing icons and giants who have shaped our society, our continent and the world, and such giants are part of close to 600,000 students who have distinct honour of having graduated from Unisa.

There is no expression that can properly apprehend my deep sense of humbling gratitude on realizing the range of important stakeholders and eminent dignitaries present here tonight. I have noted with great appreciation University and community stakeholders, the public and private sectors, and staff and students who have joined us this evening to demonstrate what I trust, is an equal fervour for, and commitment to, the education of the students in this region. So I am absolutely delighted to add my welcome to that which has already been extended to you by the Regional Director and also by the Executive Mayor.

On an occasion like this one it is easy to proclaim, as our former president Thabo Mbeki once said, that “I am an African”. Indeed these achievements and moments make us to be proud as Africans. These projects, although they may look small and relatively insignificant on a larger global scale, are the quilted pieces that form the Africa Rising Narrative, these are building blocks of the AU Agenda 2063. Things we do may look small but Mother Teresa quipped us with the most perceptive observation when she says:

***“We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.”***

But this joy is rudely disturbed by the excruciating realization of some of the most disturbing things happening in our midst and in our beloved country and continent. The current wave of xenophobic or more appropriately Afro-phobic attacks in and around the cities of our country

are shameful, unjustifiable and an unsightly blemish in our history and democracy. We must join hands in condemning this with all the force our words can command. Even if there may be genuine grievances Africans ought to find a constructive and civil way of addressing issues without loss of life, looting and violence. Our joy tonight is scarred by the memory of more than 2000 girls and women who are reported to have been abducted without trace in northern Nigeria. Our joy tonight is rudely disturbed by the 148 university students of Garrisa University in Kenya who were murdered in a cold-blooded and heartless manner. My consciousness is disturbed by the wailing screams of affliction as Mediterranean Sea boats and ships sink and drown hundreds of refugees escaping Libya hoping for a better life in Europe. It is in the midst of these flamed ashes of despair that Unisa must live up to its vision of being “The African University Shaping Futures in the Service of Humanity.” We gather tonight in one concrete and yet symbolic step of shaping our futures and servicing humanity. It is our modest contribution in our timeless quest for social justice through educational empowerment. Ubuntu/botho is the core defining value of the soul of Unisa, and it is within this canvass that we roll-out our service.

I have entitled my address: *“Higher education: changing mindsets and shaping futures”* because if recent events in our universities and in our country at large, have taught anything, it is that a complacent acceptance of the status quo or false hope that transformation of universities was a passing phase is a recipe for disaster. Equally, we have become starkly aware that ignorance – and please note I refer here to a lack of knowledge and of not being properly informed about the environment and context in which one operates - does not serve our transformation agenda in any constructive, measurable sense either.

Unisa has embraced and continue to implement transformation agenda because we believe that this is an imperative of any university that has to deal with the legacy of the past and reposition our institution in a manner that is rooted in our African environment whilst being globally competitive. Colonial and apartheid education system often recognized the physical

location in the African soil whereas it was deeply alienated from and disdainful of Africa and its people. All that mattered then was western or European paradigms and viewpoints with little regard for the accumulated African knowledge systems and experiences hence these institutions struggled to find solutions to the African problems. Our transformation project is meant to redeem African knowledge systems and create space for African voices and experiences to dialogue with other knowledge systems in a meaningful way that breeds cognitive justice and narrative dignity. We relentlessly pursue transformation at Unisa because we are convinced that any university that seeks to provide solutions to African problems ought to be rooted in Africa and use Africa as the point of departure as well as a point of reference. This does not, as some have argued, mean discarding existing mainstream knowledge but create a dialogic plurality of epistemologies.

Now, it is not my intention this evening, to add my voice to the current debates. What I want to do, is share with you Unisa's approach to deep and meaningful transformation and how we as a university are managing that process in a way that we believe will achieve broad legitimacy and buy-in and perhaps more importantly, measurable impact.

Just after I took up Office in 2011, I tasked the entire university to contribute to a Unisa Charter on Transformation, which would set out our joint understanding of the kind of institution to which we all aspire. In addition, having shared my Leadership ethos of *Servant Leadership* with the university community, I similarly invited everyone to workshop the values which we as an institution would espouse in our dealings with one another, our stakeholders and our students. The outcome of that, was the now institutionalized 11C's plus 1, which forms part of the Charter. So we now have a Charter on Transformation that is of Unisans, for Unisans and which states with clarity, the kind of institution that we aim for. In the preamble, we declared [that]:

Transformation is fundamental and purposeful advancement towards specified goals: individual, collective, cultural and institutional, aimed at high performance, effectiveness and excellence. It entails improvement and continuous renewal guided by justice and ethical action, and achievement of a state that is demonstrably beyond the original.

I am proud to say we have been steadily putting our Charter into practice. Unisa is committed to providing safe spaces for open and frank engagement. For example, we have regular roundtable discussions (including ethics roundtables) that cover many topical issues. Staff members are encouraged to share their views freely and frankly, but always upholding the dignity of others. Nowhere is this commitment more evident than in our Senate, which has traditionally been to sole preserve of the academe.

In terms of legislation and Unisa's statute our students are represented on all institutional forums, including Senate and Council and we believe their voices should be heard. To their credit they take that role seriously and responsibly. From our side, to ensure that the levels of debate are informed and therefore constructive and productive, we offer our SRC (and NSRC) members (and incidentally our Labour leaders) leadership training that covers all aspects of higher education functioning - from policy to management, finances and other operational and management aspects. So at Unisa we take our students seriously. But we also expect our students to take us, and the mandate that we have been given by the State, seriously as well.

Our current HE environment is highly complex and we are called to deal on a daily basis, with many, many competing interests and demands – most of them justifiable, but some, such as NSFAS, out of our bounds and our control. In fact, what may seem perfectly logical and feasible in theory, or ideology, is rarely a simple matter practically. In the words of Huxley, *"Reality is the murder of a beautiful theory by a gang of ugly facts."*<sup>1</sup> It is unfortunately true, that most of the time, university management is constrained to try to juggle competing "ugly facts" in pursuit of the "beautiful theory" hoping and trusting that the outcome will be beneficial to all.

But having said that distinguished guests, I believe we are doing a good job when it comes to this vital part of our educational development and transformation.

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<sup>1</sup> Quote ascribed to author Aldous Huxley

I would however, be less than honest if I were to say that I am happy with all aspects of our key mandate of teaching and learning, research and innovation and of course community engagement. We have made excellent progress with our research, innovation and community engagement agendas, but we remain challenged by our teaching and learning agenda, more specifically in regard to the quality of the service which we accord to our students. Some of that challenge and lack may be ascribed to the *systemic* transformation which we are undergoing towards a more efficient transactional and increasingly online environment. We are dealing with that in a very concerted manner and I am confident that we are achieving incremental, measurable progress. ICT facilitation is in fact one of our three key strategic goals for the next 5-year strategic phase. So I am confident that our systemic challenges will be resolved surely and steadily.

What does concern me though, is that somewhat ironically, that which we do have in our own hands to change, that is, our service to students on an individual, personal level, leaves much to be desired. It is a source of ongoing frustration and let me tell you, quite forceful endeavour. Unpinning it all I believe, is the failure by some, to adopt the mind-set change that is embedded in our Charter on Transformation. Some individuals find it very unsettling to open their minds to additional ways of thinking and doing and as such they really struggle with the notion of creating a new institutional DNA and their struggle manifests in a number of negative ways.

As we try to deal with this, our students are suffering from *our* lack in this regard, and it is for that reason that I have now introduced additional measures that will for example, compel managers to report on their staff's performance and to accept greater accountability for poor service (or a lack of service) in their areas of responsibility. Believe me, they will be held to account, I can guarantee that. I also intend establishing a Change Management Unit under the auspices of my office, which will manage and direct institutional change management in a more concerted and *measurable* manner. I am confident that this will go a long way to achieving the desired results, but it would be naive to assume that that will be sufficient. We also need to bring our facilities and our capacities into the equation, and ensure that we can back up our

assertions of a quality education, with quality facilities and of course, quality service. These three provide the *quality student experience* that we all strive for.

This wonderful new, multi-million rand state-of-the-art facility building contributes to precisely such a quality student experience through improved access to critical educational facilities for Unisa students in the Rustenburg area. Indeed, this is its primary focus. We will be serving students in the areas in Rustenburg and its vicinity, such as Koster, Swartruggens, Mogwase, Madikwe and Brits, amongst others, and we believe that these students will be receiving all services offered to Unisa students elsewhere in the country. The new building is the result of the renovation and refurbishment after its purchase by the university in 2010, with the intention to turn it into a fully-fledged regional hub. Unisa invested a total of R57 million rand towards the project. We are confident that it is money well-spent.

As we move towards a more efficient transactional and online environment at Unisa, the high-technology facilities such as computer laboratories, video conferencing rooms, library, lecture rooms as well as an assessment centre, will offer much needed and I'm sure, valued, capacity to our students towards success in their studies. Learning will truly become "without limits."

Distinguished guests, allow me to conclude by saying that none of this would have been possible without the support of each and every one of you here this evening. Education is not the sole preserve of government. It is a multi-stakeholder endeavor that relies significantly on community support and encouragement.

Rustenburg is richly blessed in this regard and I would like to use this opportunity to publicly acknowledge and thank Mmemogolo, Her Royal Majesty SB Molotlegi, Queen Mother of Royal Bafokeng, and Members of the House of Traditional Leadership present: Kgosi LM Mogale, Bapollo/Bultfontein; Kgosi Pilane, Bakgatla ba Kgafela and Kgosi GZ Shongoane, Batlhalerwa/Tweelaagte for honouring us with their presence at this important launch. MaKgosi your presence here not only signifies your support and commitment to your communities, but also your encouragement and commitment to higher education and importantly for us, the



University of South Africa. We are deeply honoured by your presence and your commitment to the students of South Africa and we thank you most sincerely.

It would be remiss of me not to thank *all* stakeholders present here this evening who have had a hand in seeing this project through to its completion. We acknowledge you assure you of our deep gratitude.

Allow me to end with this quote from our Charter on Transformation:

Transformational leaders are to be found at all levels and in all sectors of the organization, not necessarily dependent on positional power. They are distinguished from mere actors by their insight into how things are in comparison to where they need to be, with the resolve and capability to act catalytically in pursuit of institutional and societal change imperatives, in the face of opposition, resistance and limited resources.

Transformation keeps us at the front as pathfinders: to find ever better and innovative ways of enriching the student experience, elaborating and building upon African epistemologies and philosophies, developing alternative knowledge canons, and advancing indigenous knowledge systems that ground us on the African continent, without averting our gaze from the global horizon.

Distinguished guests, in demonstrating your support for Unisa and this region and its students you have identified yourselves as *transformational leaders* and *champions*. We are deeply grateful and we salute you.

The Regional Hub we are launching today is meant to enhance service delivery and improve access to critical educational facilities for Unisa students and staff utilizing the latest advanced technologies and facilities. The future of this investment or regional hub depends on each one of you as our key partners and it also depends on your belief in its potential. As Unisa we will do

our best to make this an important resource for you and we believe that you will do the rest to complement our efforts.

I thank you.

Ke a leboga

Ngiyabonga

Enkosi

Ndo livhuwa

Ngiyathokoza

Asante

Dankie