



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE ACADMIC YEAR

ZK MATTHEWS HALL, MUCKLENEUK CAMPUS

3 February 2015

Thank you Madame Programme Director, Prof Divya Singh, Vice Principal: Assurance and Advisory Services

- Dr Mathews Phosa, Chairperson of Unisa's Council and other Council members present
- Mrs Makhanya
- Professor Narend Baijnath, Pro Vice Chancellor
- Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, Vice-Principal: Research and Innovation
- Professor Rita Maré, Vice Principal Academic: Teaching and Learning
- Other members of executive and extended management present
- Our Unisa awardees
- Staff and students of Unisa
- Colleagues in our regions
- ladies and gentlemen

Good morning and a very warm welcome to you all.

This weekend our newspapers have been filled with stories of that historic moment in time that changed irrevocably the course of history in South Africa and the lives of its citizens. I speak here of course, of the announcement of the release of former President Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC, PAC, SACP and other liberation movements on 2 February 1990; 25 years ago.

And as I read through the stories I was struck by the commitment, passion and drive of our people, to ensure a better and brighter future for all. In an article entitled “Sharing a toilet with Tutu”, Cheryl Carolus said the following:

We have a Constitution and institutions of democracy that are the best in the world. We have a populace who have opinions and are still prepared to make those heard. We know how to make ourselves ungovernable.

My comrades in government are not happy with me for saying this. I say, thank God for it, because we are not yet fully free. But we could not have started this journey without democracy. *The challenge is whether we will keep walking and how much we will stray from the course.*

Sometimes I am ecstatic and proud. At other times, angry, fearful or despondent. But I am ever mindful that *our generation will shape the quality of our freedom and history will judge us.* The enormity and the complexity of the task of building freedom is overwhelming at times – definitely not for the faint-hearted.....We who fought and won must honour the legacy of those who paid the ultimate price. We must also honour our own legacies; not trample on them..... We need to keep faith in our goal of full freedom. *We need wisdom. We need courage. We need integrity¹*
(End quote)

The contrast of the challenges then and those which are seen as challenges now, are so incongruous as to be - quite frankly – ridiculous, and I asked myself the question, *what on earth has happened?* I found the answer in Carolus’ statement :

(quote) I never thought I would live to see democracy. I had concluded that my life would end in one of three ways, as it had for many: prison, exile or death. And, like many before me, I did not

¹ Cheryl Carolus: Cheryl Carolus is executive chairperson of Peotona Group Holdings, a former United Democratic Front activist and the ANC deputy secretary general from 1994 to 1997: <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-01-29-sharing-a-toilet-with-tutu-thats-a-first>

fear these prospects. Indeed, the formidable apartheid machine lost its power when youths, women and men were no longer afraid to stand up, even if it meant death.....(end quote) ²

The difference colleagues, between then and now, was the collective vision of a brighter future for South Africa and all of its citizens, and an unwavering individual commitment and determination on the part of those who shared the vision - irrespective of the role that they were called to play - to make it happen. Even in the face of death, they put others before themselves in a way that many today would struggle with - or even refuse to emulate. We should be embarrassed about our complacency, I think.

And so I was compelled to ask myself the following question, as an individual, and as the leader of this truly amazing university: Am I “*leading from the front, demonstrating a determination to close the gaps and to show integrity*”?

There can be no denying that as a country, a people and a university, we have made significant and quite radical progress these past 25 years. Have a look at your neighbour. 25 years ago, he or she would not have been sitting next to you and the complexion of the leadership on this stage would have been radically different, not to mention illegal! Let us not forget that. We have made massive strides in the past 25 years to become known as an institution that genuinely is *the African university, shaping futures in the service of humanity*. This is also demonstrated in the massive rise in access and the profile of our students. But colleagues, it will require the same kind of commitment, determination and sacrifice from each and every one of us, irrespective of our role and function, if we intend achieving the goals that we have set for ourselves as a university in the service of its country and its people as well as in the service of the Continent.

And so, as I share with you key challenges and prospects facing Unisa at this historic moment in our own history, let us *all* ask ourselves: Am I “*leading from the front, demonstrating a determination to close the gaps and to show integrity*”, or, am I “*bickering over things that have nothing to do with my work*”.

I would like to believe that the fact that we have so many colleagues in attendance this morning speaks to a university that *is* engaged, and that understands that if we intend to grow and develop as an

² Cheryl Carolus: Cheryl Carolus is executive chairperson of Peotona Group Holdings, a former United Democratic Front activist and the ANC deputy secretary general from 1994 to 1997: <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-01-29-sharing-a-toilet-with-tutu-thats-a-first>

institution, then we need to commit ourselves afresh to those same principles of selflessness, integrity and determination that enabled all of us to be here today. As so I call upon each and every one of you to move forward with confidence and an abiding commitment to *Social Justice and Fairness* and *Excellence with Integrity*, to our collective vision for this university and our country.

In the space of one short year, we have witnessed a fundamental transformation in the higher education sector, which has materially impacted and influenced Unisa's activities and trajectory.

Globally, some 20-years after the advent of the World Wide Web, we are witnessing a more sober assessment of the entire digitization phenomenon and its impact on higher education (both residential and distance). The widely reported and disseminated realities of first-hand experience, and a growing amount of peer reviewed academic research covering scholarship, leadership and management and administration are providing higher education practitioners with much needed benchmarks, reference points and "lessons," which can be drawn upon in crafting institutional business models. This very positive development demonstrates the resilience of higher education in transitioning from one era to another, and affirms the spirit of innovation which has driven humankind and ensured its continuing advancement, since its inception.

Unisa has been, and remains, a very active participant in the global conversation and experience, and we are beginning to reap the rewards in terms of growth in our academic and reputational stature, as well as insights into our capacities and capabilities as a 21st Century ODL institution. This is a valuable, ongoing process. On that note I trust that by now all of you will know that Unisa has been given the honour of hosting the 26th World Conference of the International Council for Open and Distance Education, to be held at Sun City from 14 - 16 October 2015. (The pre-conference begins on 13 October 2015).

This is the first time in its history that the conference will be held on the African Continent and the awarding of the Conference to Unisa, is both a testament to our global standing and stature and our undisputed role as the leading Open and Distance Learning (ODL) University nationally and continentally. Unisa's national and continental footprint and its well-developed infrastructure and capacity have entrenched its strategic value internationally and continentally, as a sought-after partner and collaborator.

The theme of the Conference is "*Building Capacities for Sustainable Open and Distance e-Learning Provision,*" and it was chosen specifically by Unisa, with an eye to the developing world and the opportunities that it could present for growth in scholarship, global networking and the promotion of ODL as a means of access for large numbers of people, to quality higher education. The conference will also offer a wonderful opportunity for international exposure to our commitment to the green economy and sustainability. We are also including our regional and continual Open Distance Learning colleagues to the fullest extent that we are able, so that the development opportunities presented by the conference, are leveraged maximally by the entire continent.

The 26th ICDE World Conference is Unisa's Conference priority for 2015 and you are kindly requested to ensure that every available opportunity is used to communicate, support and promote its success. I will be writing to all Executive Deans, Executive Directors, and Regional Directors similarly requesting their support, including the encouragement of staff and post grad student participation, and I ask that you use your good offices to support their efforts to this end.

The 26th ICDE World Conference offers an unparalleled opportunity for Unisa to showcase its innovation, its scholarship and its cutting edge ODeL practice and I ask that we work together in ensuring that as Unisa's premier ambassadors, we leverage this opportunity to the fullest extent.

Moving on, nationally, Unisa has been subjected to significant changes that have impacted fundamentally on the way in which we conduct our business. New reporting requirements have changed the format and content of our Annual Report and concomitant administration practices, introducing the reality of "auditable evidence," accurate monitoring and evaluation, risk awareness and management, compliance and accountability and of course, annual performance compacts with the Minister of Higher Education and Training and our Unisa Council. All of this we practice, however, not because of the regulated environment but because we understand that they are the right things to be doing. I have always acknowledged that there is a critical difference between doing things right and doing the right things. As an emerging leader in higher education governance, Unisa is committed to always seeking to do the right things - always in the best interest of our students and of course, our country.

The White Paper for Post School Education and Training: *Building an Expanded and Integrated Post School Education System* (2013) which we workshopped across the institution last year introduced us to the realities of a re-visioned national higher education system in which Unisa is no longer the dedicated ODL provider. Also interesting, is that the White Paper now places the TVET (formerly FET) and

Community Colleges at the forefront of higher education growth and development. Unisa is faced with many expectations from the sector in this regard and as we move into our next strategic phase, these will have to be carefully assessed and managed cognizant of our capacities and resources – you will note that this is also referred to in my discussion of our finances.

And colleagues, as we have begun to plumb the implications of the new White Paper for Unisa, we have done so cognizant of the *Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-school System* (2014). A number of aligned and supporting policies are also in the process of being developed by DHET, and these too will have implications for us as an institution as they are formalized and promulgated. And so as we move ahead, the need for us to be an agile institution will remain – in fact increasingly so. One is in fact, reminded of the situation that existed at Unisa with the advent of the merger. We are called on once again to demonstrate the same levels of commitment and sacrifice that made Unisa the most successful merger of all.

As you know, 2015 also marks the final year of our strategic plan – Unisa 2013–2015: Towards a High Performance University. With this in mind, 2014 saw the beginning of the process to prepare the new strategy. The 2016–2030 strategy document has been broadly consulted and is in the final stages of discussion with Council. The dawning of the 2015 academic year thus finds us at a critical juncture of straddling both the old and the new.

As a university it is imperative that we conclude the business of the past 15 years emphatically so that we can move seamlessly and confidently into our new strategic era in 2016. All actions in our compacts with the Minister and Council must be successfully finalized, ensuring that we do not enter our future with cumbersome “baggage” that diverts and dilutes our attention and our capacities unnecessarily. On that note colleagues, I need to say unambiguously that I expect first-time delivery on all of our Annual Performance Plan (APP) commitments. My own - and Council’s - expectations of you in finalizing these successfully, will be accompanied by an equal measure of expectation around your accountability for delivery. We will be reporting back on our performance at the 6-month mark, where all responsible persons will be required to account for their performance – or lack thereof. My advice is quite simply: *“Make it happen.”* A lack of performance in any entity will not be tolerated. Progress on these commitments will thus be vigorously driven and monitored very closely by management and Council, and all necessary resources will reasonably be made available to support the successful achievement of the committed objectives.

Simultaneously this year, we will also be preparing for the implementation of the first phase of our 2016–2030 strategy, that is, the 2016–2020 strategic phase. In line with the national and organizational trajectory sketched above, it will come as no surprise to learn that Council has approved three strategic goals for this period:

GOAL 1: Towards becoming a leading, ODeL, comprehensive university in teaching, learning, research, innovation and community engagement based on scholarship.

GOAL 2: To craft and embed an agile, innovative, sustainable and efficient operational environment.

GOAL 3: To establish innovative technology platforms for a high performing University.

While these goals may seem familiar, I assure you that their conceptualization and articulation are very much in line with, and cognizant of, a fundamentally different higher education environment, as well as our vision to be the African University, *shaping futures* in the service of humanity (which is the new Vision for Unisa approved by Council for the 2016– 2030 Strategic Plan).

I want to urge all Unisans to become actively involved and participate energetically and with unwavering commitment to the demands that will be made upon us in 2015, never forgetting that all is done in the service of our most important stakeholders – our students. As was the case back in 1990 when our country faced a new era, 2015 is an historic and exciting year, and it will be *our* contributions that will ensure that it is also a very successful one, thus laying the foundations for generations to come.

The imperative of the new legislation and policies (and our 2016 – 2030 strategy) is *access with success*, underpinned by quality, relevant education provision - and this is something that Unisa has coded into its DNA. As such we need to renew our energies and our focus on scholarship at Unisa, cognizant of the fact that this is our core business – that which we are mandated to do in terms of the HE Act (1997) and our founding statute.

What is required from each of us is actually very simple – *focus on the vision and make it happen!* However, we will only make it happen by going the extra mile where this is required, and ensuring the highest order of service delivery to *all* of our stakeholders – including one another, *all of the time!* As was the case during the struggle, we are all called on to be dedicated servants of the people, for the people; this of course, is very much in line with our ethos of servant leadership and our 11 Cs plus 1.

However, let me be clear. None of this will happen until we have an optimally efficient operational environment.

We have been engaged for some time in laying the foundations for a systemically efficient and effective institution. 2015 will mark the optimization and implementation of some key institutional systems - including the new student system. I call upon every single staff member to bear with us and to support us as we work through this process. There will be down times and transition periods as we adopt and adapt and we will no doubt experience times of frustration and irritation - including those brought about by external forces over which we have no control. We are also likely to be assailed by irate students who may be similarly impacted and frustrated.

For our part we will ensure that these events are communicated in good time, and I ask staff to keep a very sharp eye on their Intcom and to make it their business to know when and how they are likely to be affected as our institution undergoes its ICT transitions. I have no doubt whatsoever that if we all work together in accommodating one another and ensuring the best interest of our students, we will ensure a far more efficient and less painful process. I have seen evidence of that already, and it has been really heartening to receive letters from grateful students who have been on the receiving end of quick, efficient and courteous service – despite our challenges. Instances such as these affirm my belief in the general goodwill of Unisa staff and their pride in the role that we play in our society.

But while most go above and beyond the call of duty there remains at Unisa a cohort of disgruntled staff who choose to demonstrate their discontent through the withholding of their labour or even the “sabotaging” of the very projects and activities that are calculated to advance the best interest of both staff and students. I urge those staff to desist and advise them to use the many processes that are in place to address their concerns. A service and servant ethos has no place for a “*me first*” mentality. Despite Unisa’s very generous remuneration and incentivization policies and practices, there remain a few who seem to think and act as if Unisa is the worst University in the country. We are not, and we have ample, substantiated evidence to demonstrate conclusively that we are in fact, one of the best. To those who feel we are so bad that they have to withhold their services or do the bare minimum in a begrudging fashion, I would challenge you to test the “greener pastures” of those institutions that you believe are so superior! I am confident you will receive a terrible shock.

Colleagues, much of the benefits and security that we enjoy; much of what we are putting in place for our students - in fact much of Unisa's success - hinges on the ethical stewardship of Unisa's financial and infrastructural resources. And so our institutional strategy going forward has been premised on us being able to find the optimal balance between our strategy and our resource allocation. You will therefore find that this will be an ongoing theme and refrain in all of my communications to you and our other stakeholders, in the year ahead.

When it comes to investing for the success of Unisa, the University invests its resources for the overall benefit/experience of our staff and students. Let me share with you just a few examples of this:

- Our investment in Human Resources (that is, you and me) is the main pillar of our service and takes up approximately 69% of our total operating costs which ran at a staggering R4 billion for 2015.
- To create a conducive physical environment, there is an approved budget of just below R4 billion for infrastructural projects for the period 2014-2019. Some of the projects included are:
 - Renovations to the Library
 - A new academic building on Muckleneuk campus
 - Providing generators to Unisa buildings to counter the risk posed by electricity load shedding (which is a significant driver of that frustration that I have just mentioned!)
 - Refurbishment of aging buildings
 - Infrastructure in regions
- We continue to invest heavily in our ICT resources such as enhancements to our Student System, our new student system, Oracle, etc.
- We have given bursaries to students - this year alone our Council has allocated R90 million for this purpose for the undergraduate students and R55 million for postgraduate students.
- We have invested in secure exam printing facilities to enhance integrity of our assessments (I am very pleased to say that this is really bearing fruit, with zero exam fraud)
- We continue to acquire equipment for our science campus laboratories – also at great cost, but ever mindful of the enormous benefit that this facility will hold for our students and our country.

Overall Unisa continues to sustain itself by generating a surplus. *However*, 2014 has yet to be audited and while we received an unqualified audit in 2013, we have no guarantee that this will continue, especially given the behavior and attitudes of some staff when it comes to the management and

expenditure of our university resources. This is a matter of great concern, which is being carefully monitored by both management and Council.

You will understand that concern when I share with you some of the key challenges that we are facing:

- There has been over reliance on investment income that is not sustainable and that is entirely susceptible to market/economic forces. This is hugely worrying. I see increasing evidence of staff who seem to regard Unisa as an institution whose resources are there for the plundering. This mindset must change or we will all suffer the consequences.
- University's income sources are:
 - Tuition fees - 44%:
 - Government Subsidy – 33%:
 - Investment income - 18%
 - Other – 5%

This scenario has been recurring (by default) due to uncapped growth of students regardless of their performance and in turn not optimising output subsidy which is more sustainable than fee income as there is a guaranteed amount paid for producing graduates. However, as a result of the implementation of enrolment management, the fee growth will slow down in the next few years. Additionally, plans to increase throughput are being implemented to optimise subsidy income. I am pleased to note that there has been some, albeit limited progress in this regard.

The budget committee and the university at large has been making some progress in curbing expenditure with each passing year, but some issues remain stubbornly difficult to tackle.

Overall consumption of the budget is still a challenge - especially DHET funded projects and this may be highlighting the possibility that we could be over-committing ourselves without the necessary capacity to absorb, and/or over-budgeting which leads to inefficiencies and wastage. The call to caution is particularly apposite in regard to the new policy direction that I sketched earlier on in this address.

As an institution we need to ask ourselves - *how are we going to find this crucial equilibrium?* As management and Council we are looking at a number of strategies including:

- Increased throughput to maximise subsidy: The enrolment growth will range between 1.14% and 1.09% over the next 5 years thus indicating a slower rate of growth than previously experienced. However, if the enrolment plan returns the expected improvement in throughput, the trend in enrolments should be compensated for by an increase in output subsidy.
- Resources will be focused on strategic priority areas to fulfil the 2015 Annual Performance Plan requirements and building blocks for the 2016-2030 strategy.
- We need to be more effective and efficient, eliminate wastage and do more with less without compromising the excellent service to the students and other stakeholders. Areas identified for immediate attention include entertainment, makgotla or bosberaade, the use of consultants etc.
- We need optimisation of the total investment into human resources but that optimisation must ensure that service delivery is not sacrificed in the process.
- There will be a concerted institutional strategy on increasing and optimising third-stream income.

Colleagues I am sure that I don't need to add that if we all worked a full working day (and more where necessary) institutional efficiency would rise dramatically as would our levels of service delivery and successful scholarship. Our monitoring of ICT usage indicates for example, that many staff spend inordinate amounts of time on the social media and the internet, during office hours. We all need to manage our time more thoughtfully.

Much of that commitment would involve an equally fundamental commitment to integrity, ethics and good governance – all of which are raised by Cheryl Carolus in her caution to those of us who have taken up the baton for our country's successful growth and development. My plea to you all is that you make your contribution in the same spirit as those who passed that baton to us. As management and Council we will not waver on the need for transparent governance and compliance in all of its forms. It is quite simply, *the right thing to do*.

So, where to Unisa? I have concluded the past two Academic Opening addresses by saying: "I would urge us all not to forget our key mandate: Teaching and Learning, Research and Innovation and Community Engagement. It is Unisa's performance as a graduator of quality graduates that will ensure its continued excellent reputation and its sustainability and longevity and these must be improved upon in a deliberate and planned manner. Let us not falter in ensuring that we build on the wonderful legacy that has been left to us". I would like to remind us of that once more. *Let us never lose sight of our calling and purpose*.

Our new strategy 2016-2030 has at its heart, quality teaching and learning, and the deliberate construction of an operational environment that will facilitate that. We must place our students and their success at the centre of all that we do, ensuring a quality, relevant pedagogical model and framework that will promote increased success and throughput rates, and quality graduates whose skills, ethics and abilities are entirely consonant with workplace requirements.

Colleagues, as we do that, please use the very practical publication that you will be receiving over the next couple of days. The publication is a consolidation of the documents that must be the bedrock of your planning and your conduct at Unisa. I have meticulously filtered the necessary information and hope that you will do me the favour of familiarising yourself with the content. Some of the documents like the Charter on Transformation will be familiar to you: however, the 2015 Annual Performance Plan is new and the 2015 Institutional Strategic Risk Register, whilst repeating the risks of the last year nevertheless indicates a reconfiguration in ranking. It is noteworthy, however, that the risk referring to loss of reputation remains at the number 1 ranking, and the need for improved service must remain uppermost in all of our minds. Please also read the new Enterprise Risk Management Framework – you will be engaged on it in much more detail during the course of the year - as well as the Policy on the Reporting of Fraud, Corruption and Other Irregularities. Your voice is extremely important to me and the sustainability and good management of Unisa.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude by thanking staff, students and organised labour for their respective contributions to this university. Ours is a relationship that is maturing as we begin to appreciate more fully our various roles and responsibilities at Unisa, and the very real challenges that we face and which impact on us all. I trust that the spirit of constructive engagement will grow from strength-to-strength this year.

I would also like to thank our Council under the very professional and supportive guidance of Dr Mathews Phosa, for their ongoing contributions to, and support of, Unisa. I am particularly excited about the maturing focus on ethics and governance and I can tell you (with much pleasure I might add) that amongst our peers and in broader society, Unisa is regarded as the leader in the field.

On that Note, Dr Phosa, Management has taken note of what you have said. You may rest assured that we will also commit to the leadership pledge. ***Unisa's leadership is committed to upholding the principles and values of excellence with integrity and social justice and fairness and commits to the visible demonstration of this commitment through personal conduct and example.***

You will have gathered that this is Dr Phosa's last year at Unisa and I would therefore like to use this platform to thank him publicly on behalf of the management, staff and students (and I am sure his colleagues in Council!), for the seminal role that he has played since his original chairmanship of Techikon Southern Africa's Council, through the very challenging years of the merger, to the amazing institution that is Unisa today. Dr Phosa, your steady hand at the tiller, your unwavering commitment to sound and transparent corporate governance and the role that it must fulfil in our university can be traced back to our very beginning. Your message has been consistent and deliberate and much of the acknowledgement that we receive as a university today, especially when it comes to governance, can be ascribed to your own commitment to that function. We are immensely grateful to you and our other Council members, for always putting Unisa first and for evidencing in word and action, the same ethos that drove our struggle heroes to win freedom that we enjoy as a country today. I have no doubt that we will be using a variety of other forums to express our appreciation to you, but it is appropriate that as an assembly of Unisans, at our most important institutional gathering, we thank you publicly today.

(A round of Applause please!)

Ladies and gentlemen, Unisa has many bright stars and it is really difficult to thank them all at an assembly such as this where matters of strategic importance must take precedence. But I would like to publicly acknowledge every member of staff and every student who has received an accolade during the course of last year for the vital work that they are doing, and the honour that they bring to themselves, their families and our university. You are all ambassadors *par excellence* and we thank you for your contributions.

This morning we will have the opportunity to acknowledge some of you *in the flesh* as they say, and we revel in the opportunity that this presents us, to share in your accomplishment and your joy and celebration.

On that high note it is my pleasure to hand over to Dr Phosa, Prof Phakeng and Prof Maré for the presentation of the various awards, and I extend pre-emptively, our congratulations to all of the awardees!

I thank you.