



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

WELCOME ADDRESS

VICE CHANCELLOR'S WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

GALA DINNER

"Women Empowerment and Challenges to the implementation of AU

Agenda 2063"

Kgorong Building, UNISA

6 August 2015

- ⚖️ Programme facilitator, Ms Lebohang Liepollo Pheko
- ⚖️ Our Chancellor, the honourable Judge Bernard Ngoepe and Dr Ngoepe
- ⚖️ The Chairperson of our council, Dr Mathews Phosa and council members of Unisa
- ⚖️ Our keynote speaker and the veteran of our struggle and democracy, the honourable Dr Frene Ginwala

- ⚖️ Mrs Makhanya
- ⚖️ Members of Unisa Foundation
- ⚖️ A special recognition of women who are the winners of this year's Unisa Woman of the Year Award.
- ⚖️ Unisa Management and staff
- ⚖️ Leaders from government and the business sector
- ⚖️ Members of the diplomatic corps
- ⚖️ Leaders representing various community organizations and institutions of the civil society.
- ⚖️ Members of the media
- ⚖️ Representatives of our sister institutions
- ⚖️ Student leadership and Unisa students
- ⚖️ Distinguished audience
- ⚖️ Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me a great joy to extend a warm motherly Ubuntu/botho welcome to you all on this special occasion that is meant to celebrate womanhood whilst also reminding us of the struggles towards emancipation of women. It is equally appropriate to preface my short remarks with what has become a popular slogan in recognition of women: “Igama Lamakhosikazi malibongwe”.

As we gather here today I am reminded of several milestones that have defined our journey of liberation in general and struggle for

emancipation in particular. It is just over two decades since South Africa embraced a democratic system, it is 25 years since the global icon, the late President Nelson Mandela walked out of prison and liberation organizations were unbanned, it is 60 years since the Freedom Charter was adopted in Kliptown and it is 52 years since the Organization of African Unity was formed to assist with decolonization struggles and unity of Africa. All these are milestones of our struggle for emancipation and social justice, and they all came with a promise for gender equality and justice. 59 years may have passed but the march of more than twenty thousand women on the Union Buildings in Pretoria is still etched in our memory of the struggle for women's rights and the struggle against oppression in general. It was on this historic event that the struggle slogan, "Wathinta abafazi wathinta imbokodo", or translated as "You strike a woman, you strike a rock," gained currency and reverberating resonance. On occasions like this we often invoke the contribution and the spirit of the doyens of women liberation struggle in our country and abroad. We invoke heroines and giants such as Charlotte

Maxeke, Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Fatima Meer, Sophie de Bruin, Albertina Sisulu and many others. We cast our eyes further into the diaspora and invoke Maya Angelou, Angela Davis, Sojourner Truth, Rosa Parks, Nina Simone, Alice Walker, Harriet Tubman, the list is endless. I cast my eyes to the dim mist of the pre-colonial past when African women, in some notable kingdoms, reigned supreme. Here I think of Makeda, The Queen of Sheba, Ana Nzinga of Angola, Queen Labotsibeni of the Swati kingdom, Queen Manthantisi of Batlokwa, Queen Nonesi of amaXhosa, Mkabayi and Nandi of amaZulu and many others who rose and made an impact against immense odds. I also recognize the fact that the African Union Commission has managed to appoint a woman, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, as the first woman to chair after almost five decades.

It is against this backdrop that we often use the occasion of the Unisa Vice Chancellor's Women Month Gala to reflect on the road travelled

towards the total emancipation of women and also to track progress, stagnation and regression in this regard.

The beautiful assuring words of our world-acclaimed Constitution, a plethora of legislations on women's rights and gender equality, as well as a range of institutional architecture of our democracy are commended. The increase of women representation in the public sector and some incremental improvement of women representation in the upper echelons of the corporate world are all to be commended together with various programmes that are meant to bring relief to women suffering and burden that they have endured through the ages.

We, however, are confronted by the harsh reality of the condition of women in South Africa, in Africa and in the rest of the world. Hardly a day passes without the mass media reporting on violent crimes against women and girls. In less than 15 years into the 21st century

we have witnessed some of the unthinkable regressive incidents against women. The Taliban banning girls from schools in Afghanistan, the shooting of Malala for merely campaigning for girls to go to school in northern region of Pakistan, the rape of a medical student in a bus in India, kidnapping of more than a thousand girls and women by the Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, trafficking and enslavement of women and girls in many parts of the world including the western countries. Wars raging in many regions of the world and natural disasters often afflict women and children more even though they are often absent from the meetings that sanction such wars. Africa only has one female elected president in Liberia out of 54 countries even though women constitute a majority of the continental population.

Here at home the reports and statistics on rapes, killing of women by men, most of whom are partners or spouses, ukuthwala or forced arranged marriage of young girls in some parts of our country are

some of the grotesque and horrifying display of violent oppression of women despite more progressive policies and programmes. In addressing the launch of the “Kwanele Enuf-is-Enuf” campaign against gender-based violence I stated that behind these statistics and news coverage of abuse against women is a human experience of excruciating pain and scarred psychology. Women have always been the backbone of our economies and yet they still languish at the bottom of the economic and social ladder of our societies. I then wonder if the Africa Rising narrative will ever gain traction if women’s role and empowerment is not the centrepiece of the implementation of the AU Agenda 2063.

Tonight our keynote speaker, Dr Frene Ginwala, is a seasoned veteran of our liberation struggle and of women’s liberation movement as well as a thought leader who can assist in clinically dissecting some of these perplexing issues afflicting women. She

comes with both local and global experience and perspectives to tackle the subject.

Unisa, as an institution of higher learning, will spare no effort in addressing the issue of obvious and subtle biases against women. It is my commitment and that of my colleagues to ensure that we do not only shatter the glass ceiling that often limits capable women from ascending into higher echelons of our institutions and society but also endeavour to lift the floor on which they stand for them to be nearer that proverbial ceiling. The task is upon us as a knowledge institution with a national, continental and global footprint to create spaces that liberate the voices of women and to give narrative dignity to their experiences. As Gloria Steinem eloquently articulate it, ***“The problem for all of us, men and women, is not to learn, but to unlearn.”*** Indeed undoing centuries of patriarchal social constructions of power and values will take serious unlearning on the part of our society particularly among men.

Let me take this time to congratulate Unisa staff members who are the winners of Unisa Woman of the Year Award for this year. They are the shining example of what a high performing institution ought to be and they are indeed a source of inspiration to all of us.

Let me end my remarks with Susan Anthony's aspirational quote when she declared that ***"The day will come when men will recognize woman as his peer, not only at the fireside, but in councils of the nation. Then, and not until then, will there be the perfect comradeship, the ideal union between sexes that shall result in the highest development of the race"***.

Again let me take this opportunity to wish all of you a happy, productive, fulfilling and redemptive women's month. But I think every day and every month should focus on the injustices against

women and then we will succeed to lift the yoke of gender injustice
wherever it manifests itself.

I thank you

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