



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

15 February 2016

- Thank you Mesdames Programme Directors, Professor Gugu Moche, Executive Dean: College of Science, Engineering and Technology and Professor Rosemary Moeketsi, Executive Dean: College of Human Sciences
- Mr Sakhi Simelane, Chairperson of Unisa's Council and other Council members present
- Mrs Makhanya
- Members of executive and extended management present
- Our Unisa awardees in the various categories

- Staff and Students of Unisa
- Leaders and members of Organised Labour, NSRC and RSRCs
- Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

Good morning and a very warm welcome to you all, to our 2016 academic opening ceremony.

Last year, when I addressed this assembly on 3 February, I reflected on the historic 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 - a moment that changed the course of history in South Africa and the lives of its citizens. Given that this was the 25th year anniversary of that moment, our media was of course filled with reflection and opinions from a whole variety of commentators. This morning I am going to repeat the passage that I quoted last year colleagues, because in our current higher education context, it has gained even greater significance.

In an article entitled “Sharing a toilet with Tutu”, Cheryl Carolus said the following:

Quote: 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)

While our common goal as citizens of this country no doubt remains “full freedom”, the *nature* of that freedom and the means of getting these are currently under quite radical *reconceptualization and*

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>

reconstruction, with a variety of ideologies competing for expression and space in the higher education domain in particular, even though their impetus may have been generated external to that sphere. For example, both the student protests and the more recent strike and protest action are, in many respects, part of unprecedented nationally organized campaigns for relieving the financial burden on students and the improvement of their study conditions as well as a call for the end of outsourcing that is associated with poor conditions of workers contracted under these services. As we tackle some of these issues we must be mindful of their national character and institutional context and manifestation.

So, while as citizens we can take great comfort in the independence and integrity of our judiciary, as demonstrated for example in the work of the Concourt last week, as members of the academic community we are confronted with serious challenges in the socio-economic and political environments, with education and more specifically higher education, being caught squarely in the middle and I would suggest, being used as the foremost “vehicle” for transformation, in ways that we as educators, have not experienced before. We consequently find ourselves facing new and complex challenges that are breaking new ground and that require in abundant measure, the *wisdom, courage*

and integrity that Carolus so aptly invokes. We are crafting in real time, new business and leadership models without the benefits of any precedents or experience. It is both exhilarating and sobering and yet, given the innovative spirit of South African and Unisans in particular, I am confident we can do it.

Colleagues, how Carolus's words resonated as we commenced our 2016 academic year – I am sure that you will all agree. The delays in the commencement of our academic activities exacerbated existing lacks in our service delivery and contributed to the reputational damage that we suffered during this time of upheaval. The financial toll arising from lost working hours and delays - not to mention damage to property and reputation, etc, - is but the tip of the iceberg. I am painfully reminded every day, of the knock-on impact, which has manifested in damaged relationships, broken trust and a debilitating loss of confidence in the university and what it means to our staff, our students and our nation. Our staff is apprehensive and many are confused about what is expected of them. Our focus is diluted. In fact, I don't think it would be untrue to suggest that Unisa is hurting - and we are collectively responsible for ensuring that we rally together and ensure that we refocus on that which we are mandated to do. We have to fix this.

Now more than ever before, as educators and as the foremost higher education institution on the continent, responsible for the greatest proportion of South Africa's graduates, we are called to focus on our core business of *education*. For those who may have felt confused, intimidated, apprehensive or unsure about what is expected of them, let me state unambiguously: *focus on the jobs that you were appointed to do and do them to the best of your ability*. There is an adage that states pertinently: "Stick you your knitting"! At Unisa our "knitting" is teaching and learning, research and innovation and community engagement: that is our legislated mandate and it is that to which you must devote your time and your energies. Our students must and will remain at the centre.

On that note colleagues, I am in fact so passionate about this that I have established the *Principal's Bursary Fund*, which is an initiative of the Principal and Vice Chancellor of the University of South Africa to mobilise staff and friends of the University to voluntarily contribute to a bursary fund that will complement the efforts of Government, the University of South Africa and the donor community in supporting the financially needy students at Unisa who have the potential to succeed. The Principal's Bursary Fund will be mostly driven and supported by the Unisa community firstly to support the students, and secondly to

demonstrate to the national and international community that Unisa is a caring University. It recognises the plight of students and the hard realities that face the South African economy, which are placing a huge demand on government funding. Some staff has already begun contributing to the fund, but all members of the Unisa community will soon be receiving an invitation to contribute. It must be noted that the contributions are entirely voluntary, tax deductible and can be in any affordable amount. All contributions will be equally welcomed and acknowledged, bearing in mind that we would like to embed a culture of philanthropism at Unisa. The Principal's Bursary Fund is my way of leading the University community and encouraging them to support the students who cannot afford the fees at Unisa.

Returning to the need for us to focus on our mandated tasks, all other activities, especially those that have been added to our responsibilities over the past few months (and I speak here in particular of the fees, insourcing and other transformation initiatives) are being taken care of via several teams and activities which have been set up with the express purpose of their advancement and resolution. At the special assembly which I called in January this year, I explained all of these comprehensively. I outlined Unisa's official position on them and I shared my plan for the future of Unisa that will ensure that we deal

with the current and anticipated challenges in an effective, creative and proactive manner for our long-term sustainability. Firm and bold steps have been taken as stipulated in the agreement of the 22 of January 2016, which were endorsed by Council on 23 January and communicated to the university community thereafter. I also gave you the assurance that you would be updated on their progress and development on a regular basis, to ensure that we have a single, agreed source of official communication and information. We are keeping to that undertaking. There is no need therefore, for you to listen to, or propagate corridor gossip, which can be quite inventive and mostly wrong - as we all know.

Unisa, like many other institutions, is facing a “peripitea” – a pivotal moment and turning point in our history and our practice, and we are called to create a conducive environment and generate a positive spirit that will define this moment as a positive and productive impetus towards a better Unisa – one that lives up to its promise of being “The African University Shaping Futures in the Service of Humanity” as proclaimed in our Vision Statement.

Negative energy, inter- and intra-stakeholder conflicts, and perennial tensions between management and staff or stakeholders will only achieve the opposite and the university will always be the net loser.

Let us engage openly, honestly and in a robust manner on the issues: however, I want to stress that these engagements must always be conducted constructively and in a manner that is sensitive to human dignity and acknowledges the rights of every person. I will do all that I can to create this positive and conducive environment as we reposition ourselves to deal with our challenges and the concomitant opportunities for Unisa.

Turning to our core business colleagues, I must say that in this sphere as well, we are seeing some fundamental transformation, marked by the continued march and impact of technology and the growing blurring of the divides between public and private education and between residential and ODeL learning. What has become clear to me, especially through my involvement in the ICDE and the hosting of the 26th World conference at Sun City, is that education is acquiring broader and broader interpretations and meanings, many of which are context-based or profit-driven. This is an inescapable reality, and it is my view that inasmuch as we cannot and indeed have no desire to, discount or diminish the global focus on internalization, for example, we need to be sufficiently confident of our own voice and our own character and typology to locate ourselves in that context in such a manner and to the extent that we ensure that our own best interests

and those of our students and our country are served. We simply cannot continue to service an agenda that does not have Africa's interest, or Unisa's interest at heart. It is unfortunately true that the African voice on the global stage is often tolerated - humoured even – with little evidence of genuine uptake of African epistemology or ideas. That must change and I intend ensuring that Unisa plays a key role in advancing our cause globally.

I have just been appointed as president of the ICDE (I would like to believe that the spectacular success of the ICDE world conference had something to do with that), and I intend amongst others, to use that space to not only grow Unisa's presence globally, but also to assert very firmly the African voice as a force to be reckoned with in the global ODeL arena. It is my hope that as this happens, our influence and impact will find resonance in other spheres of higher education. Unisa is already seen as a trendsetter in teaching and learning, research and innovation and community engagement, and this is something that I would like to see grown very deliberately going forward, amongst our peers nationally and internationally.

Nationally we face crucial and pressing demands. As I have mentioned, our students are the primary stakeholders – residing at the very heart of the academic enterprise. The greatness or weakness

of any university is judged on its performance in academic support services, the calibre and quality of its academics as evidenced in the quality of teaching, learning, research, innovation and community engagement, and of course, the calibre of its graduates and its performance as measured in its success and throughput rates.

The last decade of higher education in South Africa has been marked by a dramatic increase in enrolments which has placed a huge additional burden on all higher education institutions across all areas of their operations. Yet we are cognizant of the moral and social imperative to provide access to higher education. As you know, this increase in numbers has not been accompanied by a commensurate increase in resources and facilities, requiring an innovative way of working and managing our resources if we are to succeed. Moreover, at Unisa we have noted a continuing shift in the profile and demography of an average Unisa student from the traditional mature, working part-time learner to a growing percentage of young full-time learners who have different needs, demands and expectations. We are called on to service these different cohorts with equal levels of quality and professionalism, mindful of the fact that *all* are entitled to the best possible quality of academic experience at Unisa. These are all dynamics that have to be balanced and resourced appropriately.

A solid IT platform is crucial for any university support services and operations profoundly more so for a mega Open Distance Education institution like ours. Last year we identified some concerning weaknesses in some of our vital IT platforms handling applications and enrolments, which created a challenge that has impacted on our ability to effectively handle applications and general registration. Disruption of registration process further compounded this problem. An emergency task team made up of different affected units was therefore established to effect a recovery plan to deal with the backlog and resolve outstanding issues. This team is led by Prof Peter Havenga, the Academic Planner. Our registration period has been extended to ensure that our students are not disadvantaged by this and we are putting extra resources in place and opening support and enquiry services for an extended period to allow for students to register and receive support within the shortest possible time. We are also putting extra efforts in making sure that study material is dispatched to students and the material that was damaged during the recent strike is reprinted and dispatched. Unisa will spare no effort in resolving these challenges which, as I mentioned earlier, have been exacerbated by the disruptions to our admin and operations at the beginning of the year.

There are also longstanding problems that have impacted negatively on our academic enterprise and student support services. These have been raised year after year, but seemingly without the desired levels of improvement. I am hopeful that the multi-stakeholder task team headed by Prof Rushiela Songca, the Executive Dean of the College of Law, will make deliberate inroads into these challenges. However without the commitment and action of every single Unisa staff member, we will continue to disappoint ourselves and our students and I appeal to you once again this morning to give this matter the attention that it deserves.

We are now immersed in the new regulatory environment and the demands of the reporting requirements - including our annual performance compacts with the Minister of Higher Education and Training and our Unisa Council. All of this we practice not merely in order to comply, 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.

These commitments assume a greater urgency and importance as we move into the first year of our 2016 – 2020 strategy, and I trust that they will be given the dedicated attention that is required to ensure that we achieve the desired levels of performance. We must and we will improve on our success and throughput rates (which will only happen through improved service levels!) We also have to ensure that the quality of our teaching is such that our graduates are acknowledged as being well educated and trained, quality and responsible employees, business people and citizens.

The 2016 plan will be rolled out across the institution and the regions more comprehensively very shortly, to ensure that there is complete understanding of our respective roles and responsibilities in its implementation. You will all be given a copy of the Strategy booklet so that you have a thorough idea of the context in which we will be operating and what is required of you over the coming strategic and operational period, to ensure its complete implementation.

Colleagues, my advice is quite simply: *“Make it happen.”* A lack of performance in any entity will not be countenanced. 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.

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 2016, never forgetting that all is done in the service of our most important stakeholders – our students. As was the case back in 2003 when we forged the new merged Unisa, 2016 is going to be an historic and exciting year: one that builds on the shape and character of Unisa as a truly African university, and that brings a new depth and dimension to our understanding and practice of what it really means to be a university that has its students at the centre. Colleagues, it will be *our* contributions that will ensure our success or our failure and whether the foundation we are laying now will be strong enough to serve the generations to come.

The imperative underlying all of the activity that is taking place at Unisa right now, both academic and social – economic, is *access with success*, underpinned by quality, relevant education provision. Let us work together to make that happen. 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 some evidence of that already, and it has

been 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. Some of our staff are working exceptionally hard and I would like to acknowledge them this morning. We thank you your colleagues, for your loyalty and commitment.

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. The new financial demands facing us will be carefully managed to ensure the sustainability of our university but it will require a commonsense approach to the way in which we expend and allocate our resources. We will all need to make sacrifices and adjustments – no-one will be exempt. In fact you should already have noticed a distinct scaling down on the financial spend on food, as well as the number of conferences, seminars and magotla that he hold at Unisa. We will continue whittling away any superfluous expenditure to ensure that the resources we do have are directed to where they are needed most. Our institutional strategy going forward has been premised on us being able to find the optimal balance between our strategy and our resource allocation, and you will therefore find that

this will be an ongoing consideration and refrain in all of my communications to you and our other stakeholders, in the year ahead. I have every confidence that we can rely on your support and cooperation as we enter this critical phase of our operations.

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 is the main pillar of our service and takes up approximately 69% of our total operating costs which ran at a staggering R4,069 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 R102 million for this purpose for the undergraduate students and R68 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.

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 2016 Annual Performance Plan requirements. 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, travelling 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. I have told you this before but it bears repeating. Our monitoring of ICT usage indicates 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*.

I leave us all with three statements from the passage I quoted at the commencement of this address:

- 1. The challenge is whether we will keep walking and how much we will stray from the course.*
- 2. Our generation will shape the quality of our freedom and history will judge us.*
- 3. 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 integrity²*

Ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude by thanking staff, students, student leaders 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,

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>

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 our new Chairperson of Council Mr Sakhi Simelane for their ongoing contributions to, and support of, Unisa. We have a number of new Council members and I would like to take this opportunity to introduce to our Unisa community, both the few that remain from the old membership, as well as the new members. These are: Dr Boni Mehlomakulu, Deputy Chairperson of Council; Prof S Dube; Prof N Eccles; Mr OM Galane; Ms BS Khumalo; Mr OSM Lebese; Ms FE Letlape; Mr M Mabuza; Mr P Maharaj; Ms SP Malema; Mr FCS Marupen; Mr S Mhlungu; Prof IOG Moche; Ms NV Mokoka; Dr PJA Mphafudi; Mr B Ngcaweni; Mr BM Njokweni; Prof GM Nkondo; Mr TG Ramasike; Mr Thlabanelo; Dr I Tufvesson; Prof FJ Van Staden; and Ms TIM Wentzel. Colleagues, we welcome you warmly to the University of South Africa. We look forward to working with you as we grow this wonderful institution into its full potential.

Mr Simelane, Management has taken note of what you have said. In fact you will note that I have re-emphasized much of it in this address.

You may rest assured that we will commit the various issues and imperatives that you have raised.

Before we move on to the business of acknowledging individual members of staff, I would also like to welcome our new members of executive management. These are Mr GM Letsoalo: VP: ICT/Chief Information Officer; Dr MM Socikwa, Vice-Principal: Operations and Facilities; and Mr P Zwane, Chief Financial Officer. Colleagues we welcome you warmly and trust that you are already feeling an integral part of the Unisa family.

Before we move on to our next order of business colleagues, I think it only appropriate that I mention that this year has also had a very sad beginning for many. I am aware that a number of staff members have passed on since the beginning of the year, some of who were just so young. I would like to mention the names of those of whom I am aware. As a Council and University we extend our heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of the following colleagues: Professor Gerrie Lubbe, formerly of the Department of Religious Studies; Mr Petrus Mokoena from the Division of Assessment and Assignments; Dr Johan Brinders from the Registrar's Office; Prof Moses Montesh from the College of Law and most recently last week, Mr Billy Tupper from the

Department of Tuition and Facilitation of Learning. May their souls rest in peace.

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 Mr Simelane and Professor Phakeng for the presentation of the various awards, and I extend pre-emptively, our congratulations to all of the awardees!

I thank you.