



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

ACADEMIC ASSEMBLY: ZK MATTHEWS HALL

MUCKLENEUK CAMPUS

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Good morning and a very warm welcome to you all. It's hard to believe that we have already reached the year's half way mark! For some it feels as if the year has hardly begun while for others January feels like a vague memory. Our surprise at the swift passage of time, I believe, speaks to the large volume of work that is afoot in the university: some in the form of projects that are being finalised in line with the end of the current strategic cycle and our compact with the Minister and Council; some which are the culmination of initiatives that were begun years ago and which are now coming to fruition; and some in their

preparatory phase for the inception of the first phase of our 2030 strategy, and that is of course, the 2016 – 2020 Strategic Phase. I suspect that some of us might be feeling a little bit overwhelmed but I am feeling excited, because this hive of activity speaks to the concrete operationalisation of the vision that I have for this university.

At our academic opening at the beginning of this year, it was announced that I had been granted a second term of office by the university Council. I accepted the second term with deep humility and with the same commitment to service to our students and our country, as that which underpinned my inauguration as Vice Chancellor of Unisa on 16 February 2011. The vision that I held for the role of Unisa in higher education, was clearly spelt out in my inaugural address, when I stated:

“In the fullest and truest sense therefore, higher education is essential in deepening knowledge and expanding people’s horizons and efforts to be fully human. *It enables and nurtures learning and creativity and the ability to live and relate well with others, in harmony with creation. It is central to socio-economic development, and it is invaluable for the formation of human and moral agency of peoples and societies.* Higher education is without

doubt, fundamental and integral to the development of all societies and peoples. “ⁱ

Colleagues, as I prepare for my second term of office I have been reflecting back on Unisa’s growth and development in the past five years and I asked myself the question: “How far have we come along the road to realising the vision that I espoused five years ago?”

Well, if one goes back and reads my inaugural address, then I must say that we have made very real progress on a number of the challenges that needed to be addressed towards the institution that we all aspire to. I asked: “..... what are the challenges, prospects and or opportunities that UNISA faces today, which we need to attend to? How do we position UNISA as an ODL higher education institution, for success? For UNISA to claim that it aspires to be *the* African university in the service of humanity in the 21st century, it will need to address challenges that include:

- Developing Human Capital and Improving African Intellectual Output
- Promoting Infrastructural Deliverability
- New Strategies for Advancing ODL on the Continent
- ICTs and ODL

- Our Research Agenda.”¹

Well I think we can tick a few of those boxes.

- We now have a very vibrant research and innovation agenda, including increased research outputs and very significant improvements in our infrastructure – look around you!
- We have a "living" IPMS that is planned to become simpler and more efficient, and to be linked to the talent management strategy. On Monday this week we workshopped the outcome of the IPMS review report and concluded the day with an implementation plan, with time frames for the actioning of the identified improvements. One of those improvements will be the development of a Behaviour-based Competency Framework that is aimed at assisting staff to integrate more effectively into our culture and ethos.
- Similarly we have a dynamic stakeholder engagement agenda that is consonant with our aim to be an integral part of, and player in, national and continental education development and to leverage and maximise all available resources to that end. For example, last year, we entered into some very strategic partnerships, including with the African Union, all of which are firmly aligned with our vision to be a truly African university shaping futures in the service of humanity.

¹ Prof MS Makhanya. Inaugural Address. 11 February 2011.

- Insofar as advancing ODL on the *Continent* is concerned, I think we can say that we have gone beyond that to include the *world*. If ever we needed proof of that, we need look no further than the fact that we will be hosting the 26th World ICDE Conference in October, together with the SCOP and UNESCO ODL policy meetings – all of which are calculated to shape and inform global ODeL into the future. This is a first for the African Continent. On my travels it has been confirmed over and over that Unisa is a much sought-after partner in ODL and not only in terms of its business model, but also because of the experience and reputation that it has accrued over more than 142 years; its quality regime; and its innovative and creative approach to ODL. I can assure you that this is something that is quite unique – and we are the envy of many.
- We have also embarked on a systematic infrastructure development plan which is aimed at realising our strategic agenda and growing the university to its full potential. This is an ongoing process that is being rolled out in line with the availability of resources. Sustainability must, and does, inform the stewardship of our resources. If we do not guard against wasteful expenditure then wonderful facilities such as this very campus, will not be available for the generation to come.

- Our ICT infrastructure programme remains a very complex process that is being rolled out incrementally and in line with the implementation plan. I am so excited that after years of preparation and planning and very significant expense, we will shortly be going live with the initial phases of two key systems, our SRM and SITS systems. This is just the beginning of our journey to a more efficient and effective university and service excellence. I must say I look forward to a time where we are fully online transactionally as this will undoubtedly contribute towards our goal of high performance but at the same time we need to be realistic and appreciate that this will take time and also, equally importantly colleagues, a lot of adjustment and transformation in thinking and doing, from each and every one of us. We still have some way to go with our ICT strategy, but we have realised that this core function is one which cannot be dealt with in a superficial manner. Progress must be incremental, solid and sustainable.
- We have been piloting an innovative assessment model and by all accounts it has been very successful. As you know we are busy revisiting our assessment practices to improve efficiency while maintaining quality and we are seeing some encouraging results. We are also discovering that many of our assumptions about our students are not as accurate as we thought, and we are learning to

adjust our operations in line with these new understandings. It does however remain a concern that we still tend to think of our Unisa students as youngsters just out of school when in fact more than 75% of our students are in fact over the age of 25. So, as we plan, innovate, create, revise, design and conduct our Teaching and Learning and Community Engagement, we need to ensure that what we do will offer *all of our students* the quality learning experience for which they have paid.

- We are implementing a governance structure that has made the world sit up and take notice. Governance, Leadership, Management and Sustainability have surged to the forefront of global higher education, as the realisation that we are dealing with very different higher education contexts and practices has begun to sink in. Globally, policy environments are being revised and adapted to incorporate these realities and Unisa is regarded as an innovative leader in the field. And while many of you find issues of controls and compliance and following process bothersome, let me assure you that that attitude is what has resulted in Unisa getting an extensive management letter which has highlighted instant after instant of flouting of processes and procedures. We are taking a very tough stand on this colleagues and each and every one of us will be held to account where we do not follow due process. Council expect staff to

appreciate the compliance driven regulatory context in which we operate and to ensure that they do not impact on the sustainability of the university by being neglectful. I trust that you will give this matter the attention it deserves.

Colleagues these are but a few of the initiatives that are currently underway. All that we do must happen within the context of our transforming higher education sector and system. You will know that 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. Recently the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande formally welcomed the TVET sector into the higher education fold. This has some significant implications for us as a university and if we intend to remain a key, efficient and effective role player in the system, we must ensure that we are an agile, quality, high performance institution.

2015 also marks the final year of our strategic plan – Unisa Strategic Plan 2015, An Agenda for Transformation and Unisa 2013–2015: Towards a High Performance University. The Unisa 2016–2030 Strategy has been approved by Council. In line with the national and

organizational trajectory sketched above, 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.* We are focused on quality and have adopted an incremental and carefully considered approach to online delivery. For Unisa quality cannot be sacrificed on the altar of mass, mediocre *bang-for-bucks* programmes. And here I refer back to the example of the assessment project, which is looking at ways of conducting quality secure assessments online – amongst others. We are being deliberately methodical and pragmatic in our approach, bearing in mind that being innovative *can* happen in a structured and informed way. We are in the business of quality education. Our reputation is at stake.

GOAL 2: *To craft and embed an agile, innovative, sustainable and efficient operational environment.* In line with the need for us to be rooted in our context, Unisa is currently undergoing a fundamental process of restructuring and re-alignment to ensure consonance with our policy and leadership context and our transformational imperatives. In addition we are ensuring that sound and transparent governance, including ethics, risk and co-operative governance form the bedrock of our institutional culture and operations. We are of the

view that this will provide a natural and necessary filter for irresponsible decisions around expenditure, the quality of our offerings and decisions that might impact on institutional sustainability.

GOAL 3: *Harness ICTs to support the transformation of the core business to enable high performance, service and quality to all its communities.* We are focusing on our support/operational infrastructure to ensure institutional efficiency and effectiveness and service excellence in line with our available capacity. This includes the current and incremental implementation of a brand new student system and a number of other very significant IT platforms. Our academics will simultaneously be given the space to create and innovate with technologically supported courseware. We are making the necessary investments that will catapult us into that space of being an ODeL university within this time horizon.

A revised institutional structure has also been approved by Council and this too will be implemented from the beginning of next year. So this year finds marks a critical juncture of both the old and the new and we have a lot of hard work ahead to ensure a seamless transition into the new strategic phase. I want to urge all of you to become actively involved and participate energetically and with unwavering commitment to the demands being made on you this year, never

forgetting that all is done in the service of our most important stakeholders – our students.

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!* 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.

That dedication, colleagues, must take the form of diligence in service. In cases where there is ongoing lack of caring for our students, this is driving some of them to depression and frustration. It is simply intolerable. And inasmuch as we may be making wonderful progress on the challenges I identified 5 years ago, some of us continue to falter and fail when it comes to our service delivery. Unisa will never realise its full potential as long as we have people who just don't care; yet who ironically, demand to be treated with consideration which they are not prepared to extend to our students.

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, which I have just mentioned.

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.

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 want to end this address by quoting extensively, the words of one of the leading African intellectuals of our time, Tiyambe Paul Zeleza. He

articulates the dreams of so many in regard to African universities, when he says:

I dream of truly decolonised, democratized, and decentralized African universities that are autonomous yet accountable, committed to the pursuit of intellectual excellence yet rooted in their communities, effectively managed internally yet working closely with all stakeholders; universities that are Africanised in their staffing, values, pedagogy, epistemologies, and instructional languages yet are capable of competing globally, contributing to the global pool of knowledge, and responding quickly and effectively to global changes and emerging local needs; universities that attract students and faculty from across the continent and the diasporas, and that participate in extensive academic exchanges with universities in other parts of the world; universities that provide inclusive education , where access is open regardless of physical or class disabilities or various cultural and social affiliations ; universities with ample and up to-date learning facilities, instructional technologies , and well equipped libraries and laboratories, manageable student teacher ratios, that provide multiple entry and exit points as well as individual and group enrolments for lifelong flexible learning; universities

with vibrant communities of scholars where public seminars ,
lecture and debate flourish, research and publishing are valued
... universities where gender is mainstreamed, curricular are
innovative and not trapped in the old parochial disciplinary
divisions or the current faddish interdisciplinary fields and
which produce students who are literate in the major fields of
knowledge, innovative and entrepreneurial , as well as critical
thinkers and citizens; universities where the professors are
highly trained and motivated and productive but also include
practitioners' from other sectors; universities, in short , that
are the spearhead for the African renaissance.²”

How are we faring? How are you faring?

I thank you.

¹ Prof MS Makhanya . Inaugural address. 16 February 2011. University of South Africa.

² Zeleza, Tiyambe Paul 2006 Critical Issues in Higher Education and Intellectual Developments in Africa
Unpublished Paper—A paper read at the University of South Africa’s Founder’s Lecture, Senate Hall, August 7th
2006.