

Media Advisory

Unisa to celebrate the International Mother Language Day

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The Language Unit together with the College of Human Sciences and the Library and Information Services at the University of South Africa (UNISA) in collaboration with Puku Children's Literature Foundation and Indigenous Languages Initiative for Advancement will be celebrating the 2024 International Mother Language Day at the University's Muckleneuk Campus, Pretoria, under the theme: *"Multilingual education: a pillar of learning and intergenerational learning."*

The International Mother Language Day is observed annually on 21 February, and it is part of a broader initiative to promote the preservation and protection of all languages used by the people of the world. In alignment with the UNESCO theme for the year 2024, which focuses on multilingual education, we aim to encourage linguistic diversity and fuller awareness of cultural traditions in over 215 countries around the world.

The key item on the programme is the private screening of a 30-minute documentary titled 'Language of my soul'. The film documents the N|uu language, starring Ouma Katrina Esau, a nonagenarian and the last remaining mother tongue speaker of the critically endangered N|uu language and one of South Africa's living legends. Affectionately known as "Ouma Katrina", Esau is a Language Activist, a teacher of ancient knowledge and the last surviving member of the !Ui branch of the Tuu language family, with all other members of this branch - /Xam, #Ungkue and //Xegwi. Unisa is delighted to announce that Ouma Katrina Esau will also be part of the audience on the day of the event and will share her reflections on lessons learnt in her life journey.

The International Mother Language Day was the initiative of Bangladesh and was approved at the 1999 UNESCO General Conference and has been observed throughout the world since 2000. UNESCO believes in the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity for sustainable societies. It is within its mandate for peace that it works to preserve the differences in cultures and languages that foster tolerance and respect for others. Multilingual and multicultural societies exist through their languages which transmit and preserve traditional knowledge and cultures in a sustainable way.

Linguistic diversity is increasingly threatened as more and more languages disappear. In the next century, 50% of the world's current 7,000 languages will be extinct, unless we do something about it. Globally 40 percent of the population does not have access to an education in a language they speak or understand. Nevertheless, progress is being made in multilingual education with growing understanding of its importance, particularly in early schooling, and more commitment to its development in public life.

Unisa and its partners saw it fit that the day be observed to revitalize and preserve mother languages in South Africa and to engage as scholars on what role can the higher education institutions play in ensuring that indigenous languages are promoted.



Members of the media are invited to attend and cover the event as follows:

Date : Wednesday, 21 February 2024

Venue : 4th Floor Function Hall, Kgorong Building, Unisa Muckleneuk Campus in Pretoria.

Time : 08:30 for 09:00

/Ends.

ISSUED BY UNISA MEDIA AFFAIRS

For enquiries, please contact Senior Media Officers Tommy Huma on 072 218 6197 / 012 429

3981 / humatm@unisa.ac.za OR Edgar Rathelele on 063 731 5456 / 012 429 3981 /

ratheme@unisa.ac.za

