
**WELCOME ADDRESS:
Prof Mandla Makhanya
Principal and Vice Chancellor: Unisa**

**COMMONWEALTH CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING
OF YOUTH WORKERS**

KGORONG BUILDING: UNISA

17 FEBRUARY 2013

1. Introduction

- The Programme Director – Dr Joseph Diescho
- Honourable Minister Collins Chabane, Minister in the Presidency for Performance, Monitoring and Evaluation
- Her Excellency Ms Katherine Ellis, Director and Head: Youth Affairs Division, Commonwealth Secretariat
- Honourable Deputy Minister Obed Bapela, Deputy Minister in the Presidency
- Honourable Deputy Minister Andries Nel, Deputy Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development
- Mr James Odit, The Regional Director of the Commonwealth Youth Programme
- The CEO of the National Youth Development Agency – Mr Steven Ngubeni
- The Executive Dean of the College of Education – Professor Kuzvinetsa Dzvimbo and other members of Executive and Extended management
- Members of the Diplomatic Community
- Members of the Conference Organizing Committee
- Delegates from all Member States of the Commonwealth of Nations represented here tonight
- Colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen

It is with heartfelt gratitude and warmth that I welcome you all to the University of South Africa.

I particularly would like to thank the Office of the Presidency of South Africa, the National Youth Development Agency of South Africa and the Commonwealth Regional Secretariat for identifying UNISA as a fitting and strategic partner to host the 2013 Commonwealth Conference on Education and Training of the Youth.

Minister Chabane, I would like to believe that it was not a coincidence that UNISA was identified as the appropriate strategic partner to advance the noble and critical cause of education and training of the youth in South Africa and in the broader Commonwealth region. As you may be aware, UNISA is the largest university on the African continent, with a student enrolment of more than 350,000. We cater for one-third of all students in South Africa's universities. We attract students from 130 countries. This makes us a unique university as few universities can claim this status.

UNISA is also a comprehensive Open Distance Learning (ODL) university offering both vocational and academic programmes and qualifications. In addition to our main campus in Tshwane, we also have a dedicated science campus in Florida, Johannesburg, regional learning centres across the country, and a campus in Akaki, Addis Ababa. Minister and colleagues, we believe the University has a duty and responsibility of continuing to play a major role in providing opportunities for university study in our country and continent as well as in the world.

In this regard, we pride ourselves as an institution that provides opportunities to students in and out of employment, and support them to qualify in their chosen programmes of study in a flexible and effective manner. As Africa's most productive university, UNISA accounts for 12.8% of all degrees conferred in South Africa. Currently 8% of our students are from the rest of the Continent, with the majority coming from SADC. In this regard, UNISA supports the African Union's Human Resources Development strategy and the goals of the plan of action on the second decade of education. We also work closely with the Association of Commonwealth Universities and support the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat, having developed qualifications in Youth Development.

This year, UNISA is turning 140 years old and it is a feat that the UNISA community is indeed very proud of. Over the past years, UNISA has been at the forefront of providing education to those who could not easily access higher education training and those coming from underprivileged communities and backgrounds. We provided opportunities and hope to many political prisoners during the dark days of apartheid. These individuals sacrificed their freedom and families for the liberation of our country and today, they are amongst the ranks of international icons, leaders of government, civil society and business and industry. We currently have over 400,000 alumni, including Dr Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, the former President of South Africa.

We are thus particularly pleased that the Presidency of the Republic of South Africa, the National Youth Development Agency and the Commonwealth Regional Secretariat decided that the 2013 Commonwealth Conference on Education and Training of Youth Workers be held at UNISA, under the leadership of our newest College, the College of Education. The College houses the Institute of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET), which was established in 1994. One of the flagship programmes of the ABET Institute is Youth Development. UNISA is also one of the privileged universities to offer the Commonwealth Diploma that seeks to advance scholarship, especially amongst the youth in the Commonwealth region. The Commonwealth Diploma has been offered by UNISA for over a decade and it currently has an enrolment of about 3,711 students.

Minister, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, as a university we are investing substantially in youth education and skills development because our future and prosperity as a nation is dependent on a well educated and skilled youth. In South Africa, approximately 50% of the youth in the 18-24 age group are considered as NEETs: not Employed, not Educated and not Training (Spaul, 2012). We are also faced with the socio-economic realities where 80% of the youth come from economically depressed backgrounds and that prevents them from attaining a degree or a diploma. Consequently, they end up in low productivity jobs and in low income bracket (Spaul).

It is, therefore, with these realities in mind that UNISA would like to strengthen the partnership with the Commonwealth Community and with government to improve the youth education and their employability. We are also appreciative of the efforts of the South African government to improve on the employability of the youth by offering tax incentives to the companies that employ the youth.

UNISA therefore hopes that this conference will realise one of its objectives, that being to propose very practical solutions of assisting the youth in their education, training and employment. We hope the conference will also be able to offer solutions that will influence policy change and policy improvement for the benefit of the youth in the Commonwealth.

Once again I welcome you to UNISA and would like to leave you with a Chinese proverb that says, *'If you are planning for a year, sow rice; if you are planning for a decade, plant trees; if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people'*.

May you have a productive conference!

I thank you.