



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

**PROF MANDLA MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR**

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**WELCOME SESSION 1: SEMINAR AND BOOK LAUNCH**

***University of South Africa and South African Universities in  
transition: Making of an African University: Past, Present and  
Future***

**Senate Hall, Unisa Muckleneuk Campus**

**7 September 2018**

- Programme Director, Dr Somadoda Fikeni, Director: Special Projects and Advisor to the Principal and Vice Chancellor
- Prof R Viljoen, Chair of Department of History and Project Leader
- Prof A Manson, Author of the publication
- Members of Unisa's Executive and Extended Management
- Our discussants this morning:

- Prof Z Motsa, Director: Scholarship in the Change Management Unit
- Prof Msila, Director in the Change Management Unit
- NSRC President: Ms Z Sodladla
- Convocation President: Mr S Mhlungu
- NEHAWU Chairperson: Mr L Hontoti
- APSA Chairperson: Mr JJ Jonker
- Unisa Women's Forum Chairperson: Dr S Kumalo
- Black Forum President: Prof H Mogashoa
- Unisa staff and our students
- and Our Unisa choir

A very warm welcome to you all on this lovely spring day. Signs of renewal are everywhere. And as we wait for the beautiful Jacarandas to burst into flower later this month and during October, I thought I'd share some interesting facts and make a few observations.

The Jacaranda trees have quite an interesting history in South Africa. Originally indigenous to South America, their history in South Africa can be traced back to 1880, when they were imported from Argentina and later Brazil. Before the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886, there were several farmers already in the area, who brought with them seeds from the Cape and planted oak,

walnut and - our Jacaranda trees. In fact, tree entrepreneur William Nelson, whose business was known as Nelsonia Nurseries, apparently planted around *106 kilometres* of trees along the streets of the then newly established suburb of Kensington (in JHB). The task took around six months to complete, which is a feat in itself. It is also believed that in the 1880's two Jacaranda trees were originally planted in the garden of *Myrtle Lodge*, which is today the Sunnyside School in Arcadia. There is even a plaque which has been created to commemorate this occasion.

So I guess we could say that we have even been colonised by the Jacarandas! - and if that wasn't enough, in Groenkloof, there are almost 100 *white* Jacaranda trees, which were imported by a local Pretoria resident. Enough said.

So we can safely assume that Jacarandas have been around for about 138 years, and if we think that's a long time, we need to remember that Unisa has been around for *145 years*. We're celebrating that right now! Yes, Unisa even predates the famous Gauteng Jacarandas. And just as the Jacarandas have a fascinating history - just as they have left an indelible botanical footprint on the Gauteng and South African landscape, so Unisa has done the same – but ours is an

*educational footprint* and I would argue that it has had a far greater and more meaningful impact on our country's development.

Just how significant that impact is, and how Unisa's (his)story has unfolded these past 145 years, is the subject of intense interest – now more than ever before. There have been publications in the past that have charted our history, but the prevailing contexts ensured a circumscribed exposition. Unisa was and is, so much more than that. Our history in the years since the last publication by Boucher (1973) has not received the justice that it merits. From being an institution closely woven into the fabric of the apartheid state from 1948 to the early 1990s, Unisa has adapted and changed into a university that now both reflects and promotes the nature and characteristics of a democratised society. Post democracy Unisa has also changed radically in terms of its strategy, its national, continental and global relevance and footprint, its leadership and management and its staff and student demographics. It is a story that needs to be told and the time to tell it is now.

Unisa's history has many chapters, and I know that at some date in the future, as the university continues to evolve, there will be another book launch detailing yet another chapter particularly the one that narrates the role of student leaders and organised labour in

our development. For now, though, let us celebrate the conclusion of this important institutional project and the launch of this exceptional volume.

Colleagues I am delighted to be a part of this book launch and the discussions that will be held in the course of the day. I would like to congratulate everyone involved in its production, from the project managers, to the author, proof readers and the printers.

This morning's session marks the first part of our programme on: "the making of a Distance Learning University." Later today, we will move to the second session focussing on "*South African Universities in Transition: Present and Future*". You are encouraged to remain for the entire proceedings.

I invite you all to sit back, relax and enjoy the feast of history and discussion that awaits us.

I thank you.