UNISA
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

OPENING REMARKS: OPENING OF UNISA SCIENCE CAMPUS DURING THE NATIONAL SCIENCE WEEK

UNISA FLORIDA CAMPUS

30 JULY 2013

- Programme Director and Vice Principal: Research & Innovation, Prof Mamokgethi Phakeng
- The Honourable Minister of Science and Technology, Mr Derek Hanekom
- Members of Unisa Council
- Prof Narend Baijnath, Pro Vice Chancellor
- Members of the government, the diplomatic corps and Unisa stakeholders
- Members of Unisa's executive and extended management
- Prof Gugu Moche, Executive Dean of the College of Science, Engineering and Technology
- Prof Maggie Linington, Executive Dean of the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences
- Prof Malose Mphahlele, Unisa Research Chair in Ecotoxicology
- Prof Tshepo Matjila, Professor of Parasitology
- Colleagues from sister institutions

- Ms Keneilwe Peloakgosi, Masters student in Life Science
- Ms Marole Maluleke, Honours Student, Department of Chemistry
- Unisa staff and students
- Distinguished guests, ladies and

A very good afternoon to you all.

Our world is in an unparalleled state of flux. No matter in which direction we cast our gaze, we see clear evidence of citizens, societies and governments reorienting and reorganising themselves along new and different lines. Time honoured cultural principles and practices are being tested and even cast aside, while traditional economic and political models and ideologies are being called into question as the ordinary citizen seems to be becoming increasingly redundant in terms of the skills and capacities that he or she can contribute to the world of work. Unemployment is rife globally, and given the lack of clarity and certainty around our global futures, everyone seems to be cutting back on expenditure, and limiting their longer term financial commitment.

Unisa has been very blessed. Our leadership has not only exercised sound stewardship over the institution's finances, but they have also had the vision and the courage to build infrastructure, in good time, to meet the needs of our developmental state, as articulated in our national agenda and developmental goals and in line with our institutional vision, to be *the* African university in the service of humanity. Our decisions have not always been popular, but they have shown repeatedly, that they were correct. History has taught us, distinguished guests ladies and gentlemen, that it is those with vision and foresight, and the courage to follow through, whose legacy triumphs over the test of time to serve future generations.

So, thanks to visionary leadership, and sound and transparent governance and financial management, Unisa has been able to forge ahead, bringing to fruition their vision and dream – part of which you see around you today. And you will understand my delight, excitement and pleasure, on behalf of the University of South Africa and the Department of Science and Technology, to have the honour of welcoming you here today, to share in this truly historic moment in Unisa – and South Africa's – history: the official opening of the UNISA Science Campus – which most fittingly, coincides with the launch of our National Science Week.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, this year marks the Unisa's 140th year of existence and we have dedicated 2013 to remembering and celebrating the achievements and contributions of this

remarkable grand lady of South Africa, in shaping futures. Unisa's contributions to the growth and development of South Africa, the Continent and the world over this period, are incalculable, especially in terms of our graduates and their impact and influence throughout the world.

And I think that it would be remiss of me at this very sad time, not to mention two of our finest alumni: the remarkable former Chief Justice of the Republic of South Africa, Judge Pius Langa who passed away last week and who has left such an indelible mark on our country and its development; and of course our beloved former President Nelson Rohihlahla Mandela also comes to mind at this time and whose birthday we also celebrated recently. Former President Mandela is also a Unisa alumnus whose contributions to South Africa and the world still resonate strongly with everyone.

Much of the reason for our longevity has been prescient leadership that has been able to see a future unimagined by most, and position the University strategically and in a timely manner, as to ensure that it will be able to meet current demands and future realities.

Science, technology and innovation continue to be at the vanguard of socio-economic development nationally and globally, and since I took up office at Unisa, the positioning and advancement of these, particularly through research, has been a key strategic institutional goal. Beginning with the establishment of a dedicated Research and Innovation portfolio under the inspired leadership of Prof Mamokgethi Phakeng, we have systematically promoted research and innovation, especially in science and technology, institutionally and through partnership and engagement with a broad array of stakeholders nationally and globally; including for example, our Ministry of Science and Technology and BRICS.

Today you see the results. We have invested heavily in this campus, which is dedicated to advancing science, engineering technology and research at a national level. The campus is intended to grow research capacity and support research in the fields of science, engineering and technology, and in the agricultural and environmental sciences.

I have spoken repeatedly about the need for our academics and our students to "claim their space" and indeed, they are now able to do so. These cutting-edge facilities will provide the space for our staff and students to grow and develop – to match theory and practice and to translate theory into practice, for example, in molecular biology, engineering, physics and chemistry, to name but a few. I should also mention our recently launched horticultural centre, which is poised to play a leading role in this field. This centre is a multi-purpose research and training facility designed to meet the education and research needs of students in a range of programmes including agriculture,

ornamental horticulture and nature conservation. By also offering short learning programmes and conducting industry-centred research, the centre ensures its relevance to the broader community and green industry.

The Unisa Science Campus is set to become a true home to researchers and scientists, a centre for innovation where boundaries are tested and new thinking is sparked, and we look forward with much anticipation, to the wonderful outcomes that will be facilitated by its facilities.

The Science Centre is a conglomeration of buildings and facilities, comprising 12 different buildings, a library, two auditoriums and a large study area. Each has been given a name, which has been arrived at after a thorough process of consultation, and which I am delighted to say, reflects the diversity and richness of the sciences and those who have influenced its course and shape since its genesis. The names are also symbolic of our commitment to inclusiveness – to the embracing of our diversity and our collective heritage as Africans. We are proud of what has been achieved and we look forward to their launch later on in the programme.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, Unisa is aware that this is not an investment that one would consider typical for and ODL institution, but in our view it makes perfect sense in that these facilities, combined with our ODeL business model and our strategy going forward, will take all of the benefits inherent in ODeL to a new level. We will be able to harness and marry our reach, our technological and HR capacities and capabilities, our infrastructure, and our resources to the benefit of the hundreds of thousands of students who choose Unisa as their alma mater and who have never before had the opportunity to study the sciences - precisely because of limitations around facilities. It is our belief that this facility will in fact contribute to growing the numbers of science and technology students, scientists and researchers South Africa, and on the Continent and abroad.

That process has already begun as evidenced in our nanotechnology initiative and our newly forged partnerships and collaborations. We have many more of these envisaged for the future as we commit to greater sharing and co-operation of these resources in line with the draft White Paper on Post School Education and Training. Indeed, we look forward to that, and we trust that future partners and collaborators know that Unisa is accessible and receptive to their approaches.

So welcome once more distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen and enjoy the rest of the programme with us.