



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

**PROF MANDLA MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA  
WELCOME, SETTING THE SCENE AND CONTEXT ON AMBASSADORS  
ADVANCING HIGHER EDUCATION  
MPHEBATHO FUNCTION ROOM T v WIJK BUILDING, MUCKLENEUK  
CAMPUS  
27 August 2018**

- Programme Director: Dr Somadoda Fikeni, Director: VC Projects and Advisor to the Principal and Vice Chancellor, Unisa
- Members of Executive and Extended Management present
- Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners of
  - The Republic of Ghana
  - The Federal Republic of Somalia
  - The Republic of Mozambique
  - The Republic of Rwanda

- The Republic of Seychelles
- The Republic of Kenya
- The Republic of Malawi
- The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
- The Republic of Namibia
- The Republic of Botswana
- The Republic of Mauritius
- The Republic of Jamaica
- The State of Eritrea
- The Republic of Cuba
- Mrs Elinor Sisulu, Executive Director of the Puku Children's Literature Foundation
- Other Members of the University Community present
- Invited Dignitaries present here today
- Ladies and Gentlemen

A very warm welcome to the University of South Africa. We are honoured that you have come to share in this inaugural session on *Ambassadors Advancing Higher Education*. We trust that this initiative will set the tone for future engagements that will not only deepen our collaborative relationship, but also our commitment to advancing higher education in our various countries, in ways that suit our respective needs and very nuanced contexts.

For those of our excellencies and dignitaries who may not be fully aware of just what this mega University of South Africa comprises, let me just tell you briefly that Unisa is the largest, quality assured and accredited university on the Continent and certainly one of the largest in the world. We are the only dedicated distance education university in South Africa, and while you may have been hearing and seeing Unisa speaking about being an Open Distance and e-Learning University, that simply means that like any innovative and forward looking institution of higher learning, we are moving with the times and ensuring that our business and teaching models make full use of the affordances of technology, so that our students reap the benefits of being appropriately equipped 21st Century graduates. Unisa is a key pillar of South Africa's higher education sector and is state subsidised and accredited in like manner (including in terms of quality) to our full-time public universities. We produce more than one-third of South Africa's graduates and we contribute significantly to the graduate pools of a number of our countries on the Continent and, to a lesser extent, abroad. This is what makes us so unique. We are a well recognised African brand.

Three key factors reside at the genesis of this initiative: Firstly, the global higher education sector is undoubtedly fragmenting and giving

rise to divergent views on the nature and value of the role of the university, and of education itself. Secondly, it is evident that developing nations are increasingly faced with a resurgence of nationalist sentiment as young people in particular, are turning away from what is perceived to be identity and cultural impositions, which are increasingly dissonant with a collective sense of “self,” and proving (in their view) to be of negligible benefit to them or their communities and countries. Thirdly, it is a fact that in the global review of higher education that is currently underway, the focus has, of necessity, turned inward. Growing nationalism, declining socio-economic conditions and volatile politics is making it increasingly evident that older, more traditional dependencies and collaborations are not certain or relevant and that, all things considered, the time has perhaps come to forge new relationships and collaborations with neighbours and friends, whose education strategies and strivings are more closely aligned with our own. Distinguished guests, let me assure you that this view is one shared, for example, by countries such as New Zealand and even Australia whose student body is increasingly drawn from the Pacific Rim and who are consequently turning their gaze and their strategies to accommodate these emerging realities.

It was within this context, and our own institutional strategy 2030, which is already aligned to our Constitution, the National Development Plan, the SADC Protocol, the SDGs, and AU education imperatives, that we decided that the time was ripe to embark in this initiative. *Ambassadors Advancing Higher Education in the Mandela/Sisulu Centenary and Beyond*, is part of our international community engagement, and is aimed at engaging with diplomats primarily from our region and also in the diaspora and we invite you excellencies that you consider collaborating with Unisa in learning about our respective education needs, and seeing what we have to offer one another in terms of support and developmental assistance. Unisa is committed to being *the African University, shaping futures in the service of humanity*, and it is in this spirit that we have opened our doors, our arms and our hearts to you. We are firmly of the view that education is a *common good* , and we want to contribute to its realisation.

Honoured guests, following an Agreement on higher education between the South African Government and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in 2006, Unisa established a Learning Centre in Akaki, Addis Ababa, in 2007. After the predictable start up teething problems the Centre has proven to be most successful and some of Ethiopia's most eminent citizens have earned their post graduate

qualifications through this Centre. With our presence in Ethiopia we are within proximity with Eritrea and let me just say, Your Excellency Ambassador of the State of Eritrea, we are ready and willing to play our part should you choose to engage with us.

Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners of our Continent and the diaspora, this year, 2018, marks Unisa's 145th Birthday. It is also the centenary of two of our most illustrious and iconic struggle heroes: former President Nelson Mandela, and Mrs Albertina Sisulu. Nelson Mandela holds BA Law (1942) and LLB (1988) degrees from Unisa. A degree of Doctor of Laws (*honoris causa*) from Unisa was also bestowed on him in 1995. Unisa also conferred upon Mama Albertina Sisulu the Degree of Doctor of Literature and Philosophy (*honoris causa*) on 07 December 2007. Traditionally Unisa has been the one University in South Africa, which kept its door open to all qualifying citizens during the Apartheid years and you will therefore find a veritable who's who in the ranks of our alumni. That tradition continues even today.

Our guest speaker today is none other than Mrs Elinor Sisulu, the daughter-in-law of Mama Albertina, and she will be sharing some thoughts on the Abridged Memoir of Mama Albertina Sisulu, which was published on July 16 of this year – the annual commemoration

of the Soweto Student uprising, and the symbolic heralding of the struggle for our freedom. Mrs Elinor Sisulu, you are most welcome. Thank you for gracing us with your presence. We look forward to your thoughts on the Sisulu Centenary and beyond.

Distinguished guests, Unisa looks forward to establishing fruitful collaborations and long lasting relationships whose end goal is to grow quality higher education as a public good, and sustain and maintain Unisa's reputation as a university in the service of humanity and bearing in mind that the future does not belong to us. It belongs to those whom we are educating and shaping right now.