



Office of the Principal and Vice Chancellor

PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

THE CHANCELLOR'S CALABASH AWARD GALA DINNER

Democratic Education at 25

THE HOUGHTON HOTEL, HOUGHTON, JOHANNESBURG

01 NOVEMBER 2019

Thank you Programme Director: Ms Sedzani Musundwa, College of Accounting Sciences at Unisa

- Our Chancellor, President Thabo Mbeki, and our host of this evening's prestigious Calabash Awards Dinner
- Mrs Zanele Mbeki and co-host of tonight's event
- Members of the Diplomatic Corps
- Mrs Mandu Makhanya
- President Kgalema Motlanthe, our invited guest speaker and an awardee this evening (Robben Island Alumnus Award). In his absence this evening, President Motlanthe will be represented by

Professor Firoz Cachalia Chairperson, of the Kgalema Motlanthe Foundation Trust

- Judge Edwin Cameron, an awardee this evening (PUBLIC SERVANT AWARD)
- Ms Sizwe Nxasana, an awardee this evening (OUTSTANDING ALUMNUS AWARD)
- Prof Azwihangwisi Mavhandu Mudzusi, an awardee this evening (OUTSTANDING EDUCATOR AWARD)
- Mr Maurizio Mariano, a Trustee of the KM Foundation
- Members of Unisa's Executive and extended management
- Unisa Staff, Students and stakeholders
- Our entertainer this evening
- Captains of industry, distinguished guests, friends and alumni of Unisa, ladies and gentlemen

A very good evening to you all and a warm welcome to this Chancellor's Calabash Awards a dinner which, since its inception well over a decade ago, has become *the* pre-eminent event on our institutional calendar.

Tonight represents one of the proud moments in the life of our university. It is a night when we sit back and reflect on our role as an institution of higher learning.

Ours is a society beset by a myriad of challenges; that we need a special dose of inspiration to carry forth. Yet, a look into the future reveals a vista that is full of hope for our young people and generations to come. In the midst of the current morass is a tomorrow that contains sweet melodies.

Programme Director, it is my distinct privilege to address this august occasion. I wish to express my gratitude to the Unisa Foundation for assisting us to put together this beautiful function.

Let me once again thank our Chancellor, Ntate President Mbeki, for being the host of these awards and for always providing us with wisdom as we steer the university towards being *An African University in the service of humanity for the futures.*

It is this goal of serving humanity that compels us to think about those of our students who are less privileged to pay for what is the most affordable university education in our land. I am saying this against the backdrop of a situation where many of our people are still languishing under the strain of the high unemployment rate and exploitation of their labour, thus unable to take their children through higher education. I am also saying this against the backdrop of a situation where we have a state of poverty that is however failing to dim the hopes of many young people who are determined to escape the circle of underprivilege through the door of education.

It is the dreams of young people from all over the country, from the dusty villages to the depressed townships and other urban settings, which forces us sit back as a university and scratch our heads on what we might do to ameliorate the extra burden of having to pay for fees and learning materials.

We understand too well that what we are facing is a problem that is bigger than us. It is a problem that requires all levers of our society to come together and share resources and strategies on how to create opportunities for our young people. It is therefore pleasing to see many of you from the corporate sector being present tonight, raising your hands and indicating your willingness to contribute to the future of our nation. As many people always point out, yours is a sector that has enormous resources that must be pooled together to help build a strong foundation for the continuing reconstruction of our country.

It is therefore my view that tonight is about all of us making a pledge, in this relaxed mood, and to rededicate ourselves to the education of our nation.

Tonight is also about celebrating and encouraging excellence.

It is our daily business as an institution of higher learning to assist people to attain greater heights in their educational endeavours. This we do through teaching and learning, research and innovation and community engagement. We declare to the world, after our students have gone through years of training, that they have acquired a specific level of competence and are therefore ready for the world of work. In a similar vein we recognise those of our compatriots who contribute to the building of our nation.

But why would a university develop an active interest in awards of the kind that we are giving tonight? Why not confine ourselves to the awarding of honorary doctorates and so forth?

Institutions of higher education are but a mirror of, and for, the society within which they operate. They are a window through which we see the world. They are influenced by and in turn influence the society. Some even say institutions of higher learning represent the advanced state of the human endeavour in terms of the development of their consciousness.

It is this endeavour that we seek to acknowledge, saying to those who have contributed to the development of humankind: "Keep up the good work! And, continue to inspire us!"

Awards are also a reflection of the direction, conversations that we have internally as an institution, and the message that we seek to communicate to the nation and the world.

Ours is an institution that is on path to transforming itself, and in turn contributing to the broader transformation of the society.

Embedded in this transformation journey is the hope that we seek to inculcate; that in the midst of all the challenges that we may be facing as a society, there is and must always be hope for a better future.

Embedded in our transformation journey is the ultimate goal to rehumanise ourselves.

Embedded in our transformation journey is the striving for excellence, and demonstration that it is possible to build a society where the potential of women and men, young girls and young boys, the potential of our youth, can all be harnessed to build a united, peaceful and prosperous South Africa.

It is against this background that we have the choice of our awardees tonight.

We are honoured to be in company of these distinguished South Africans; whose lives and achievements demonstrate dedication, focus, and resilience. Their journeys were characterised by determination not only to improve their lives and attain greater heights. Underlying that determination was a commitment to contribute to the betterment of the lives of other human beings.

Not only was determination the only key driver to their achievement. Not only was commitment to improve the lives of others the only key driver to their achievements. Most importantly, they have set high standards of service to humanity. Through their contributions in the fields of education, corporate governance, law and public service, and politics, our awardees set the bar high and demonstrate that the quest to transform society must equally be accompanied by a commitment to excellence.

Programme Director, it gives me great pleasure to welcome amongst us our own Chancellor President Thabo Mbeki and our awardees i.e. Professor Azwinhangwisi Helen Mavhandu-Mudzusi, Mr Sizwe Nxasana, Justice Edwin Cameron and President Kgalema Motlanthe who tonight is represented by Professor Firoz Cachalia (Chairperson of the Kgalema Motlanthe Foundation Trust).

I may not spoil your night ladies and gentlemen by elaborating on the individual contributions, sacrifices and dedication of these distinguished awardees, lest I spoil the moment dedicated for that.

What I do wish to say though, is that please allow us now to have direct bragging rights. All these distinguished awardees are alumni of this great university – the University of South Africa. We are therefore proud as an institution that our mark can be felt in all sectors of the society. That our alumni stand out in the building of our society.

On behalf of the Chancellor, the Council, Management, Staff and Students of this, the University of the Land, the University of South Africa, I wish to welcome you Mr Chancellor, distinguished guests, sponsors and corporate partners, and, most importantly, our awardees.

I hope and wish that you have a wonderful night.

Let's celebrate excellence!

Thank you!