



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: UNISA BRICS INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

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Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

I am absolutely delighted to be here this afternoon, and in such august company! As an academic in heart and in spirit, I derive genuine pleasure and satisfaction from Unisa's BRICS International Symposium, and I would like to add my voice of welcome, and that of Unisa's Council, Executive and extended management, staff and students, to that of Professor Phakeng's earlier on this morning. We are honoured and privileged to be hosting this important event.

The Green Paper for Post School Education and Training (DOHE&T RSA, 2012:44), now a White Paper, states the following:

“The DHET strategic plan identifies the following outputs needed to address the relevant Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) priority:

Increase research, development and innovation in human capital for a growing knowledge economy, with a particular focus on post-graduate degrees, deepening industry and university partnerships, as well as increased investment into research development and innovation, especially in the areas of science, engineering and technology.

Central to our strategy is the objective of ensuring that the country is committed to sustaining and strengthening long-term research that is transformational, generates new knowledge and can work towards strengthening society and the economy. This will require working closely with primary partners like the Department of Science and Technology and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to ensure that there is coherence and synergy in the distribution of funds. “

Then, speaking at a BRICS Academic Forum Banquet dinner at the Durban University of Technology on Monday this week, Minister of Education Hon. Blade Nzimande said:

"Our own future is tied to the economic development of Africa as a whole and to the establishment of stability and peace throughout the continent. We believe that the other BRICS countries can play an important role in achieving these goals and that they (and the rest of the world), in turn, will benefit from the process,"

"One of the most important elements of BRICS cooperation should be in the sphere of knowledge production and academic cooperation. To achieve our goals - both in Africa and the world - we need constantly to strengthen our scientific and technical knowledge in all spheres, to deepen our understanding of our societies and those of the rest of the world.....It's not by accident that Africa's emergence from the morass of stagnation associated with the period of imposed structural adjustment programmes from the mid-70s to the mid-90s has coincided with the emergence of the large BRICS countries as economic giants.....These countries have given African nations the ability to start to escape the clutches of neo-colonial dependence on foreign aid, and the

policies and 'advice' of Western-controlled finance institutions." ¹

There can be no clearer evidence ladies and gentlemen, of this country's deliberate focus and impetus towards collaboration, cooperation and the sharing of knowledge, resources, infrastructure and capacities when comes to growing quality research and innovation in an emerging economy, and a very insecure global environment.

The University of South Africa's views on the issue of research and innovation are closely aligned to those of government. Not as a result of any political allegiance I might add, but as a result of a deep understanding and conviction that to be truly effective as a knowledge and innovation generator, Unisa must *walk the talk*. There is simply no place in today's dynamic higher education environment, for complacency.

Furthermore, academic institutions can no longer afford to be elitist ivory towers. Our social justice mandate requires of us to be accessible and equitable. But perhaps more importantly our moral obligation to the development of our people, our society and this continent, requires of us to use every resource at our disposal to ensure quality, relevant,

¹ Source: SAnews.gov.za

Read more: <http://www.southafrica.info/global/brics/africa-120313.htm#ixzz2NMV5Cqmz>

and one would hope, cutting edge research, that will generate new knowledge and innovation, including of course, African knowledge.

At Unisa we have embarked on a number of initiatives which are located in our newly established Research and Innovation portfolio. We have made our intention clear: We are serious about research and innovation at this institution and we will do whatever ever it takes to leverage all available resources to ensure that Unisa takes pride of place in the research community in this country and abroad. I believe that under the dynamic leadership of Professor Phakeng, we are being really innovative in our approach, and judging by the truly fantastic response and turnout this week, we are succeeding.

I suspect that few of us realised, when South Africa joined BRICS in 2010, the enormous benefits that joint collaboration amongst this group could have for education and more specifically, for research and innovation. But given our collective capacities and resources we should not be surprised.

It is asserted that BRICS members are distinguished by their large, fast-growing economies and significant influence on regional and global affairs. The five BRICS countries represent almost 3 billion people, with

a combined nominal GDP of US\$14.9 trillion, and an estimated US\$4 trillion in combined foreign reserves.²

What one finds so exciting is the tremendous spirit of collaboration and the generosity of sharing amongst the BRICS academic and research community, which I suspect speaks to our understanding of what it means to suffer lacks, and the need to come together – let us say in a spirit of Ubuntu - to work towards mutually beneficial outcomes. It also speaks to the power that resides in the collective intellect of the BRICs community that can be harnessed in pursuit of the resolution of common concerns.

We know for example, that BRICS countries are marching ahead in the energy sector, with new energy strategies. There is rapid development in industry, which has seen energy consumption escalating to a point of critical breakdown in these countries. However research & innovation is also happening in a massive way in the energy sector to counter such a criticality. This is happening in the context of sharing ideas and strategies - ‘energy innovation’ - in the BRICS countries.

This Unisa symposium is providing a platform for scientists from the BRICS countries to get together to present new results and share ideas. As such it validates the existence and the mission of BRICS. The

² Wikipedia - BRICS

conference focuses on innovation in energy and materials that are associated with these new emerging energy technologies in the areas of :

1. Renewable energy and strategies
2. Superconductivity and Energy Applications
3. Nanotechnology and Energy applications
4. Biotechnology for energy, Biofuels and Waste-Energy conversion
5. Hydrogen Energy, Fuel cells & Batteries
6. Nuclear energy and Environmental issues.

We are deeply honoured that scientists from BRAZIL, RUSSIA, INDIA, CHINA and SA are participating in this symposium and we are equally pleased with the tremendous support that is being shown by the BRICS countries via their ambassadorial staff amongst others.

I am honoured to inaugurate this landmark symposium that is taking place at a historical juncture in our University's life. 2013 marks Unisa's 140th year of existence. The lamp which we are about to light is a universal symbol of the illuminating power of knowledge; it is a representation of energy; and it is lamp to light the way forward. In many traditions when a couple gets married they hold two candles

together until the two flames become one, symbolising their unity. I trust that as we light this lamp, its flame will symbolise our unity and common purpose towards bright and productive Research and Innovations futures.

I thank you.