



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MANDLA MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

**WELCOME: LAUNCH OF THE UNESCO AFRICA CHAIR IN NANOSCIENCE
AND NANOTECHNOLOGY**

SENATE HALL, MUCKLENEUK CAMPUS

15 MAY 2013

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

It is a signal honour and pleasure to bid you all a very warm welcome to the University of South Africa, and to this exciting and important launch of the Unesco Africa Chair in Nanoscience and Nanotechnology – the culmination of a long and interesting journey.

The dual function of the UNESCO Chairs and the UNITWIN Networks as think tanks and bridge-builders between the academic world, civil

society, local communities, research and policy making, resonates and dovetails perfectly with Unisa strategic institutional imperative: “CO-OPERATIVE GOVERNANCE AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS” whose goal is to “Cultivate external stakeholders and stakeholder relationships:” this in pursuit of institutional high performance, which of course includes research and innovation as a fundamental pillar.

In fact distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, if one looks at the functions of the Chairs more closely, one will find virtually every one of them echoed in our own strategy. We too seek to produce and grow new “indigenous” knowledge that will contribute to a more healthy balance between North South Canon; we too seek to develop South-South and North South-South co-operation in the generation of such knowledge; and we too seek to establish Unisa and this region as a hub of scientific innovation and production.

Fundamental to this model of knowledge sharing and production is co-operation, as well as the mutually beneficial harnessing and leveraging of our respective capacities, in order to generate benefits such as Human Development in Africa; Human Capital Mobility in Africa; E-learning and e-Scientific Literature Access in Africa; International Partnership and Access to Large R&D Facilities; and, Entrepreneurship

Training in Emerging Technologies. The Chair that is being launched today, encapsulates all of the above.

The Chair is a trilateral partnership between UNESCO, Unisa and iThemba LABS – NRF, and is part of the Nanosciences African Network. Unisa and iThemba LABS will be offering financial support for the Chair, which is the first of its type on the Continent in the field of nanoscience and nanotechnology.

What is perhaps the most exciting aspect of this Chair is that its focus and outcomes will have direct social benefits which are of particular relevance to the Continent, namely: cost effective nanotechnologies for solar /photonics energy, and water treatment related applications. I would suggest that over and above these obvious benefits, the Chair represents a triumph of continental and global co-operation – something which in our view is not only long overdue, but most welcome indeed. It also forms an important pillar of the South African Nanotechnology initiative (SANi), whose focus on nanotechnology is very much a part of bilateral and multilateral cooperation programmes.

Unisa recently hosted a very successful International BRICS Symposium, with representatives from the BRICS countries, thus underscoring its commitment to this model of co-operation and collaboration. The symposium provided a platform for scientists from the BRICS countries

to get together to present new results and share ideas, with a focus on innovation in energy and materials that are associated with new emerging energy technologies.

The impetus behind this initiative and Unisa's strategic thrust, was affirmed by Minister of Education Hon. Blade Nzimande, who, speaking at a BRICS Academic Forum Banquet dinner at the Durban University of Technology, held in the same week, 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

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, Unisa is taking up this opportunity with enthusiasm, excitement and commitment. We look forward to playing a pivotal role, not only in exciting new and innovative scientific knowledge production, but also as an interface between the various institutional, national and continental key actors in the field. In that process and in the outcomes I am confident that the voices and reputations of Unisa, iThemba LABS-NRF and Africa, will be held high, and that they will emerge as a force to be reckoned with.

¹ Source: SAnews.gov.za

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

On behalf of the Council, Management, Staff and Students of Unisa, we wish you well with your future endeavours and we assure you of our ongoing support.

I thank you.