



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

**PROF MANDLA MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR**

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**WELCOME, SESSION 2 : SEMINAR AND BOOK LAUNCH**

***University of South Africa and South African Universities in  
transition: Making of an African University: Past, Present and  
Future***

**Senate Hall, Unisa Muckleneuk Campus**

**7 September 2018**

- Programme Director: Dr Somadoda Fikeni, Director: Special Projects and Advisor to the Principal and Vice Chancellor
- Prof R Viljoen, Chair: Department of History and Project Leader
- Prof A Manson, author of the publication
- Prof A Bawa, our keynote speaker today (*Title: UNISA and our National Development Trajectory*).
- Members of Unisa's Executive and Extended Management

- Our discussants this afternoon:
  - Prof A Keet, Chairperson: Ministerial Oversight Committee on Higher Education Transformation
  - Prof N Baijnath, CEO: Council on Higher Education
- Unisa staff
- Unisa students
- Unisa stakeholders and members of our institutional formations
- and our Unisa choir

Greetings to you all, and welcome to this second part of our Seminar and Book Launch. A special word of welcome to those guests and panel members who have just joined us, and who will be sharing their collective wisdom and insights with us.

In this morning's session we shared a variety of perspectives and insights on Unisa's epic journey over the past 145 years, and we touched on its role and impact in South Africa over that period. I think we all agree that it was a really interesting session. This afternoon our focus will be more forward looking as we contemplate *futures*: Our students' futures; the role that Unisa will play in shaping those futures; and of course, Unisa's impact on, and contribution to, our national development.

The past 50 years plus, have been tumultuous ones in the unfolding saga of South Africa's political development, and this is reflected in the trajectory of its higher education system. From being an institution closely woven into the fabric of the apartheid state from 1948 to the early 1990s, Unisa has adapted and changed into a university that reflects and promotes the nature of a democratised society and fulfils a seminal role in the widening of access to higher education in the sector. More than one third of South Africa's students are now registered with Unisa, and this seems set to increase even with the burgeoning of private providers. I was just reading yesterday for example, that Stadio now has 29 000 students who are following their "multiversity" concept that offers both contact and distance learning in a variety of existing and planned courses that range from fashion design to engineering, and performing arts to commerce.

Our journey though, has been characterised with the ongoing struggle to transform the academic content of our courses and re-orientate our public image and persona to accommodate the needs and realities of South Africa and the African continent at large. This has ensured that Unisa remains unique both in character and in our offerings and we should capitalise on that. We have a firmly established footprint on the African continent and further afield and

a brand that is globally recognised and acknowledged. We need to leverage that more concertededly.

Anyone reading about Unisa's history over the last century cannot but fail to be struck by the complexity of this mega institution and its regular uneasy and contentious role with the state and higher education in South Africa. Like most long-standing institutions, Unisa has been shaped by the good and the bad, and ironically, while uncomfortable legacies continue to impede desired levels of rapid transformation, they nevertheless provide a semblance of stability that facilitates the accretive growth of the institution.

Unisa is undoubtedly Africa's iconic Distance Learning University. How then, will we ensure its continued flourishing and seminal contribution to our national development? We all know the saying: *Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.* Ours has never been, nor will it be an easy journey. The so-called 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution with its massive potential for national development – particularly through ODeL – compels us to deal with some really thorny challenges: around transformation, collaboration and sourcing the kinds of capacity that we need to ensure that we remain relevant and effective and that our graduates are identifiable as critical and responsible global citizens. This official history of the

University of South Africa provides a solid platform and enumeration of lessons learned, on which future narratives around Unisa can be constructed as we enter an ever more critical and complex period in the development of higher education in South Africa.

This is something that is close to the heart of our keynote speaker this afternoon, Professor Ahmed Bawa, who is the current CEO of Universities South Africa, the organization that represents all 26 public universities in South Africa. Universities' South Africa develops policy, engages policy initiatives of the State, and the addresses advocacy needs of the sector. Prior to that Prof Bawa was the Vice-Chancellor and Principal at DUT; Associate Provost, Hunter College, City University of New York; and Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal; amongst many other important positions. He has a PhD from Durham University in the field of Theoretical Physics. And of course, like so many of South Africa's social and political "elites" Prof Bawa is a Unisa Alumnus, having been awarded his BSc in 1982 (majoring in Mathematics and Physics). Prof Bawa was a student activist. Interestingly, he recalls being taught by a lecturer with the surname of Verwoerd. To the historians among us, it might be worth delving into history to see if the lecturer was in fact related to Dr Verwoed who pioneered Bantu

Education. If so, it adds to the richness, complexity and contradictory nature of our fantastic university!

Prof Bawa, you are most welcome. This brief introduction does not do justice to your enormous and impressive contribution to higher education in South Africa, but it does offer a snapshot and an affirmation of your commitment to higher education, which you are again demonstrating this afternoon. We look forward to hearing what you have to share with us this afternoon.