



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

**PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR,  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**FEROZA ADAMS MEMORIAL LECTURE AND UNISA WOMAN OF THE  
YEAR AWARD CEREMONY**

**RECEPTION HALL, KGORONG BUILDING**

**4 August, 2014**

Our most distinguished and most deserving nominees and winners of the Unisa women of the year,

And distinguished audience, greetings to all of you!

What a delight it has been to see so many people gathered here today in celebration. Not only of South African and African women who have shaped and formed this nation and continent, but also of

the women of Unisa who have similarly shaped their own futures and those of our students for the past 140 years.

To our keynote speaker today, Prof Alinah Kelo Segobye, what a gift your address has been to us all! You have provided in word and person, an exemplar most worthy of emulation, and we thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, you must have heard the story about the man who was trying to prove to his wife that women talk more than men. He showed her a study which indicated that men use about 10,000 words per day, whereas women use 20,000 words per day.

His wife thought about this for a while. She then told her husband that women use twice as many words as men because they have to repeat everything they say.

Her husband looked stunned..... and said: “What did you say?”

So you will know that I hold research in very high esteem, and I really don't want to skew anyone's findings, so I will heed the words of Franklin D Roosevelt, 32<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States of America, who said in regard to speeches: *“Be sincere; be brief; and be seated.”*

Last week I was honoured to participate in *Our African Intellectuals, Knowledge Systems and Africa's Futures Breakfast Roundtable* discussion where the conversation centred on the over-arching theme, “Revisiting the Gender Agenda within South Africa's

development Agenda.” We agreed that somewhere along the way post democracy, the women’s agenda had become engulfed by competing priorities, and had been relegated to a rather inglorious position that belied the efforts of those who had marched so bravely in 1955 and who have worked tirelessly for our democracy ever since.

We felt it appropriate that at this important 20-year juncture of our democracy, the University of South Africa, as an engaged partner in South Africa’s developmental agenda, should tackle the women’s agenda with renewed vigour, ensuring that we honour and do justice to the vision that we hold out for the women of our country. As an institution and as individuals, we have a responsibility to ensure the reactivation of that agenda, both in the conduct of our university business, and in the deliberate development and progression of our female staff. Unisa must ultimately reflect visibly, the 52% of the gender ratio which women comprise, while simultaneously creating spaces and developmental opportunities that will unlock and unleash the potential and talent of our female staff.

We have made considerable progress on our women’s agenda at Unisa, and I am extremely proud to be the Principal and Vice Chancellor of a university that is a leader in the empowerment of its female staff. In fact today’s celebration speaks not only to our commitment to that agenda, but also to the fantastic successes that

are achieved when women are empowered and enabled. I am so very, very, proud of each and every one of you and I stand amazed by your achievements and your example.

But you know colleagues, as I have listened to your accomplishments this morning, and as I have enjoyed a quiet sense of pleasure and pride, I have simultaneously been asking myself: *“What more can we do – do we need to do – to ensure that we protect and nurture this wonderful reservoir of talent?”* How can we, for example, manage and ensure the career progression of our female staff whose careers are interrupted by sometimes lengthy periods of child-rearing and other family duties and responsibilities? How do we protect our women - our dynamic women - such as those whom we are celebrating today, from “losing out professionally” as they have in the past, and as they continue to do, for doing what is surely the most important role in the world – child bearing and child rearing? How as a 21<sup>st</sup> Century university can we accommodate or deal with this in a just and equitable manner? That is a challenge which I put to you today, just as I put it to myself. If, as a university, we regard ourselves as incubators and nurturers of a critical and responsible citizenry, then surely we owe it to ourselves as a university, to “incubate and nurture the nurturers” – our Unisa women.

At a time when the few gains that have been made in South Africa’s women’s agenda seem to be under threat; when women and

children in our country and continent are increasingly vulnerable to all manner of evil, I am humbled and yet proud, that Unisa at least, deliberately encourages and provides opportunities and a conducive environment for the flourishing of individual potential and career development. No doubt we can do more. We clearly have a very active Women's Forum which I trust will also hold us to account where they see gaps or injustices in our women's agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen, *International Women's day* was declared by the United Nations in 1975 and is celebrated on 8 March each year. Each year a theme is identified, that speaks to the specific needs and concerns for that year. Over the years the themes have generally had to do with ending violence against women and children; with women as agents of peace; or about striving for gender equality in some form. However, the theme for 2014 was simply stated as: "*Inspiring change.*"

And that is precisely what our Unisa nominees and winners of the Unisa Women of the Year Awards have done. They have inspired change – in their own lives and in the lives of others. Their accomplishments, their achievements and their professionalism set an example for others to follow. Each woman seated here today knows without any doubt that they can achieve if they have a mind to do so. They know that Unisa will walk side-by-side with them to

pave the way, and yes, even acknowledge and celebrate their success.

To our nominees and winners for 2014 let me say: “Congratulations and well done. Savour your well-deserved acknowledgement. Thank you for making us so proud and for bringing honour to Unisa. We salute you. “

And now I will be seated!

I thank you.