



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MANDLA MAKHANYA

PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR: UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

WELCOME ADDRESS: 2012 CHANCELLORS DINNER AND CALABASH AWARDS

RECEPTION HALL, 4TH FLOOR, KGORONG BUILDING

11 OCTOBER 2012

- Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

The University of South Africa must have one of the most inspiring and memorable visions of all higher education institutions: “To be *the* African university in the Service of Humanity”. But what does this actually mean in practice? Perhaps that question is what prompted the crafters of our vision to contextualise it with a framework of our values: *Social Justice and Fairness*, and *Excellence with Integrity*. All of Unisa’s operations and activities are informed and underpinned by those values.

The 21st Century has brought home the relentless pace of transformation in our knowledge society. It has also brought into our living rooms the global turmoil that is rendering our futures very uncertain. Every day we listen with growing apprehension to a litany of international woes whose impact will most surely be felt on this most Southernmost tip of Africa. Nationally it is scarcely different, and we seem to be caught up in a worrying cycles of crises which we struggle to resolve. But this is nothing new, as one discerns from that famous passage in Charles Dickens' very famous *Tale of Two Cities*.

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness; it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity; it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness; it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair; we had everything before us, we had nothing before us; we were all going directly to Heaven, we were all going the other way."

There seems to be a growing sentiment that "the other way" will be our lot as South Africans if we can't get our act together. I would suggest that our dilemma has something to do with the fact that *social justice and fairness*, and *excellence with integrity* are conspicuous by their absence in our national dialogue right now. Rather, we seem to be mired in a destructive paradigm that places self interest at the top of

our individual and collective agendas, although this often comes wrapped in a patently manipulative veneer of caring about the “other”.

We would do well, I think, to heed the words of Marcus Garvey who said: “The ends you serve that are selfish will take you no further than yourself, but the ends you serve that are for all, in common, will take you into eternity.”

Genuine growth and development can only be driven by leadership that is patently ethical, that consistently exhibits integrity and that is driven not by self-interest or the satisfaction of personal hierarchies of needs, but by the wholesome values that underpin social justice and by an abiding commitment to the greater good. This is the kind of leadership that is the hallmark of our Robben Island alumni and our other awardees whom we have come to honour this evening.

The Unisa Robben Island Alumnus Award is being introduced at this evening’s Chancellor’s Calabash Awards as a way of acknowledging the role played by Unisa in shaping present-day South Africa. Unisa and the then Technikon South Africa were the only institutions that could allow the Freedom Fighters who were incarcerated at Robben Island to study –because of their open distance study mode. This award seeks to acknowledge the steadfast desire of these freedom fighters at Robben Island to be educated, and their commitment to their studies. That they

achieved their desire is indisputable. They are now world acknowledged and respected leaders and it is fitting that as we launch the Unisa Robben Island Alumnus Award in 2012, the theme for the Chancellor's Calabash Awards is *"The Role of an African University in the Development of African Leadership"*.

While the awards will speak to their accomplishments and their contributions to this Country's journey to freedom and democracy, none of that would have been achievable had they not simultaneously demonstrated leadership that puts others before the self; that understands the sacrifices and discipline that must be exercised if the end goal is to be achieved; that sees *far* beyond the "here and now" to a future that is uncertain, yet clearly envisioned.

These are leaders ladies and gentlemen whose commitment to social justice is embedded deep within the fabric of our Constitution which enshrines the rights and dignity of every singly South African - in perpetuity. Theirs is a legacy from which we benefit as individuals *and* a society. And still these stalwarts and pillars of our society continue to serve South Africa and her people, fiercely committed to their ideal and their ethos'. For them, social justice is more than a theory or a professional practice – it is a lived reality.

Tonight the University of South Africa wishes to affirm and acknowledge formally, the contributions of these outstanding leaders to South Africa's transformation and progress. And as we do so we are asserting that Unisa not only shares their commitment to social justice and ethical leadership, but that we also hold them up as qualities and practices which we strive to inculcate in both our staff and our students.

Unisa believes that universities are crucibles of knowledge, where ideas and thoughts are tested "severely" in the process of creating new knowledge that drives socio-economic development. In this view universities are partners in the development of healthy and productive societies and citizens. Universities must confront new ideas and new "truths" with honesty and impartiality, accepting that knowledge can never be static and that its development is integral to the healthy evolution of humankind, even where such development is deemed to be "disruptive." Unisa's infrastructure, teaching mode, reach and reputation allow us to move beyond the confines of place and time to extend that developmental influence to the furthest reaches of our country and Continent. That is a responsibility that we take very seriously, and which we guard jealously.

At a time when global and national tensions seem to render circumstance beyond our control; when we feel powerless against the “winter of our discontent” (to paraphrase Shakespeare), let us heed the wise words of Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn in *the Gulag Archipelago* (1918-1956):

“In keeping silent about evil, in burying it so deep within us that no sign of it appears on the surface, we are *implanting* it, and it will rise up a thousand fold in the future. When we neither punish nor reproach evildoers, we are not simply protecting their trivial old age, we are thereby ripping the foundations of justice from beneath new generations.”

Powerful words indeed.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, those of us who genuinely embrace and espouse human dignity, democracy, freedom and social justice as enshrined in our Constitution, cannot afford to keep silent for fear of consequences that may be a bit uncomfortable. As a university we are ideally positioned to contribute to public discourse on the state of our nation and we shall endeavour by all means to do so. Ultimately, that is what “*The Role of an African University in the Development of African Leadership*” is all about. I thank you.