



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MANDLA MAKHANYA

GRADUATION ADDRESS

UNISA Muckleneuk Campus

6 March 2017

- Ladies and gentlemen, family, guardians and friends of our graduates this evening, and most importantly, our Unisa graduates tonight

It is my great pleasure to congratulate our graduates this evening, at this, our first graduation ceremony of 2017.

This is the first of *many* ceremonies for the year. I can tell you that in 2016, Unisa has hosted 116 graduation ceremonies, during which we awarded a total of 47 777 degrees, diplomas and certificates. This number included 243 doctorates and 1 011 master's degrees. I have every reason to believe that we will exceed that total this year.

What this should tell you ladies and gentlemen and graduates, is that the University of South Africa is quite unique when it comes to the contribution it makes to the country and to our continent. The figures for 2015 indicate that:

- 20.9 percent of all South Africa Graduates come from Unisa – that is one-fifth of all South African graduates.
- Unisa produces nearly 21% of all South African Education Doctoral degrees (which includes 56% of all Foundations of Education qualification, 23.4% of all Teaching, Leading and Researching in School Contexts [grade R and Foundation Phase], and 73.5% of Teaching and Learning Support).
- We produce nearly 25% of all Business and Commerce degrees (which includes 29.1% of all accounting and related service degrees, 41.9% of all Business Administration, Management and Operations Degrees, 21.5% of hospitality administration/management, and 18% of Business Economics and Management studies).
- We produce 21.5% of Communication, Journalism and related studies graduates; 22.25% of Language Linguistics and Literature graduates; 27% of Philosophy, Religion and Theology graduates; 18.4% of Public Management and Services graduates, and 26.6% of Social Services students.
- Unisa has also developed a bespoke programme of contact and online supervision, which is unique and which has become increasingly sophisticated in providing theoretical and research support in quantitative and qualitative fields as well as access to the biggest online research library on the continent. In fact Unisa's library repository has just been voted the 13th largest in the world.

We enrol more than one-third of all higher education students in South Africa, as well as the majority of African graduates from outside of Southern Africa, and so I'm sure that you will agree that we are justifiably proud of our record and history of providing quality, accredited formal learning qualifications.

In successfully completing your studies Unisa graduates, you have done us - and yourselves – proud. You are continuing in the footsteps of a long line of very illustrious alumni who are to be

found in the top echelons of business and society – not to mention the academe – all over the world. You have every reason to be proud and I trust that as you move on – either into a career, or further studies, you will carry the torch of Unisa with you and demonstrate those characteristics by which our graduates have become known: Independent thinking, proactiveness, resilience, self-discipline, determination, diligence and hard work.

At a time when our higher education sector is undergoing a very fundamental transformation, you have every reason to feel proud of the fact that you managed to complete your studies in 2016 – possibly one of the most disruptive years in our higher education history. I know that your demonstrated ability to persevere will stand you in good stead as you move on in your respective life journeys.

In congratulating you this evening, I also want to be more personal. As I look around at the red gowns (and for those who are not there yet, I would encourage you to aspire for a red gown), at the black gowns, and at the single and multiple hoods, I'm struck by how important advanced education and skills are in the economy and how socio-economic development rests on your shoulders. This is a huge responsibility. We talk a lot about accountability and responsible citizenship these days but this is compounded when you have a qualification – more so when you have an advanced qualification. Society has great expectations of us and our higher education is only credible if we live up to them

We are expected to give informed intellectual guidance, to come up with innovative solutions to complex problems, to provide ethical leadership, to exemplify African Humanism and to coach and mentor young people. Sometimes expectations are unrealistic, especially in developing countries, because educated people have to be generalists as well as specialists. We have to do ordinary things but also extraordinary things.

Students also have expectations – we witnessed that in 2016 and we experienced first-hand the disruption and reorientation that accompanies challenges to assumptions around the idea of a university. Students want greater access to higher education and this call has been accompanied by protests about what is being taught, which knowledge is recognized and what teaching and research is relevant.

As we navigate these dynamics in a careful and thoughtful manner, we have a responsibility to ensure the kind of quality and relevance that will ensure that when these protesting students graduate, they too will be an asset – not only to themselves and their families, but also to our society. That is not always easy – or simple.

Now that you have graduated, this rethinking and reorienting becomes your responsibility as well. As our societies' intellectuals you have a responsibility to engage in the public debate and to make your contribution to shaping the future of our country, our continent and its people. I feel confident that your experience at Unisa has opened your mind and heart to different ways of seeing the world, which you will draw on in your own sense-making processes.

I wish to convey the congratulations of your lecturers and supervisors at Unisa, who have worked with you to co-create knowledge and learning in an increasingly uncertain world. They are represented by the senior academic managers on the stage at this ceremony.

Ladies and gentlemen, Unisa graduates. We are proud of our university and we believe that you can be proud of it too. We are also proud of *you* and know that you will make a difference in your community and country. We recognize the sacrifices that have been made by family and friends who are here to honour you this evening. I am sure that they are so proud of you for honouring those sacrifices with your success.

Our warm congratulations go to you all, along with our best wishes for your future. I invite you to join our Alumni Foundation in the interests of promoting Unisa and supporting its wide transformational agenda.

Graduates of 2017 we congratulate you and salute you!

I thank you.