



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

**MESSAGE OF SUPPORT: NATIONAL LAUNCH OF THE HEAIDS-NACOSA GLOBAL FUND GRANT
PROGRAMME**

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

4 MAY 2015

- Deputy Minister of the Department of Higher Education & Training, Mr. Mduuzi Manana, MP.
- Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

In recent weeks our country has again been shaken by the truly painful and shameful experience of xenophobic violence perpetrated on the metaphorical "other." In fact, it seems that the history of our country and its people has been shaped and formed by an inexplicable antipathy, for the "other". We tend to be inherently suspicious of, and threatened by anyone who is somehow *different* from ourselves, be it skin colour, physical appearance, sexual orientation, disability, race, religion, language, culture or nationality - to name but a few. It seems that in order to justify our inability or disinclination to embrace the *other* as a human being with dignity and worth, we resort to labeling and categorizing people based on generalisations, assumptions and our personal value systems, and anyone who doesn't fit the mould becomes a target for our dislike, contempt, alienation and even violence, as we have seen.

In fact, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, if the history of this country, and apartheid in particular has taught us one thing, it is that we became comfortable with division and separation; comfortable with

being suspicious of the other; comfortable with harassing and harming the other. We were locked into mental silos and a paradigm of enforced separateness for 45 years. But then we fought for, and won our freedom and together we crafted a Constitution that enshrined the freedoms, rights worth and dignity of every single *other* in this country. We moved from being a society which had ordered people where and how to live, to one which bestowed the freedom to choose. But somewhere along the line we seem to have forgotten, and now it seems, we want to mete out punishment for the very things that we fought for. How paradoxical is that?

When we are faced with challenges, when we are faced with situations that we don't know how to deal with, then we tend to revert back to what we know - and that of course, is separation and exclusion – even if we know first-hand, that it is wrong and painful and destructive. Our inability to accept that which is somehow different to our “blueprint of being” lies at the root of it all. And rather than recognizing our difficulties in this regard and dealing with them in constructive ways, we try to exclude and even, eliminate – because then we don't have to deal with the perceived *problem*.

THE LGBTI (Lesbian, Gays, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex) communities have been severely impacted by these mindsets and behaviours. The 2013 United Nations Findings and 2012 HSRC survey has reported that South Africa has regressed in the general protection and recognition of the Human Rights Issues *and* gender based violence, which have additionally becomes a huge HIV infection risk factor within our communities, including our students in the higher education sector. The HEAIDS – NACOSA 2014 survey report findings also reflected the high HIV infection vulnerability rates in this population, which includes a LGBTI community. (The survey that was undertaken in 2014 in 12 Higher Education Institutions including (UNISA), focused on the National Student Sexual Health HIV Knowledge, Attitude, and Behaviour (KAB Survey), and targeted a specific discriminated group of male students - “Men who have Sex with other Men”, (MSM), as part of the HEAIDS flagship programmes on MSM and Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) programme).

Ladies and gentlemen, it is just inconceivable to the majority of folk, that some feel so threatened by someone's “otherness” that they would resort to discrimination or even violence, even as they demand the full use of the same freedoms which we seek to deny others. The University of South Africa has stated categorically that it is totally opposed to discrimination of any kind and that it employs an attitude of Zero Tolerance of discriminatory behaviours on its campuses.

We are therefore pleased to be hosting the National Launch of the HEAIDS-NACOSA Global Fund Grant Programme and we wish to express publicly our support and encouragement for the very important work that you are doing towards ensuring the health, wellness and dignity of these most vulnerable communities in our society.

Prof MS Makhanya
Principal and Vice Chancellor