



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

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

**WELCOME AND OPENING ADDRESS: LAUNCH OF THE RESEARCH AND  
INNOVATION WEEK**

**26 February – 2 March 2018: “*Research for sustaining our tomorrows*”**

- Programme Director, Dr Meiya Nthoane, Acting Director, Unisa Press
- Dr Daisy Selemetsela, Acting Vice Principal: Research, Post graduate Studies, Innovation and Commercialisation, Unisa
- Our distinguished panelists, guests speakers and presenters:
  - Dr David Green, Director: Digital Resources Programme, Taylor & Francis (Topic) “Advancing South African research and scholarship in the global research environment”

- Prof Ihron Rensburg, Former Vice Chancellor and Principal of the University of Johannesburg (Topic) “The Future - An Academic Perspective”
- Ms Tina Eboka, Group MD: NTP Radioisotopes SOC Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of Necsa (the South African Nuclear Energy Corporation). (Topic) “The less charted path from research to innovation and sustainability”
- Ms Chantell Ilbury, Facilitator, specialist, speaker, lecturer, bestselling author and former entrepreneur (Topic) “Growing Foxes: An education revolution!”
- Ms Dudu Nkosi, Acting Executive Director: Library Services
- Members of Council here present
- Members of executive and extended management here present
- Colleagues from sister institutions
- Unisa academic and non-academic staff
- Unisa Students
- Our institutional stakeholders
- Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

A very warm welcome to Unisa’s annual Research and Innovation week. This year we celebrate our 7<sup>th</sup> R & I week and it is increasingly interesting to see how closely this innovative and groundbreaking annual event has

been mapping and mirroring the events in our sector and our society, particularly as they pertain to its transformation and the crucial role that research must play in directing and driving that agenda.

Over the past 7 years, our research portfolio has been doing a lot of really groundbreaking re-strategizing and incentivisation towards an exceptionally bold vision that aims to grow research and our researchers into a centre of excellence that will contribute in a meaningful - and importantly an *impactful* way - to the research foci and behaviours that will contribute to the sustainability of our tomorrows – those of Unisa, as well as those of our country and our continent; all of which are aligned to our institutional vision of a university that is *shaping futures* in the service of humanity.

Our theme for the research week is “Research for sustaining our tomorrows” and it has built accretively on the previous themes to ensure both the continuity of our research transformation project and the coherence of the conversations that we must have.

This year our guest speakers perhaps provide the strongest evidence yet of the diversity in the research space globally and nationally, which I can assure you is equally reflected in the academic and pedagogical space. I

am aware that these same conversations are being held across the continent and the globe, as the nexus of complex socio-economic and political challenges, massive social inequalities, waves of migration, and the increasing fragmentation of the more traditional higher education space, necessitates research that is not only developmental and /or STEM focused. There is a growing appreciation of the urgent need for social science and humanities research that will help in addressing these growing challenges. It is in fact really interesting - and as a sociologist I must say heartening – to witness this growing research niche which in truth has been neglected globally for some time now. So when you see that the Acronym STEM is now STEAM, you will understand that the A-ARTS, in their broader conceptualization, are now included in the research category. We cannot neglect either.

I must therefore congratulate Dr Selematsela and our colleagues in the Portfolio Research, Post-Graduate Studies, Innovation and Commercialisation, for putting together a comprehensive programme that is guaranteed to cover the diversity of our research environment.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, the evolution of human civilization has been informed and shaped by human curiosity. Our *need to know* has always overridden the fear of the unknown, and our creative

and innovative spirits have equally ensured that much of what we have learnt has been translated into human advancement and prosperity – to our sustainability as humanity and as a planet. At a time when the term “*the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution*” is once again on everyone’s lips and all that it encompasses is gaining traction globally, we here on this furthermost tip of Africa are engaged in our own battles for transformation, growth and development – our own struggle for advancement and prosperity - which may or may not necessarily resonate with all of the dynamics of the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution. We have learnt, and we continue to learn that while “no man or woman is an island,” we are called to work within our own contexts, sometimes advancing research and innovation imperatives which may well be contrary to those in the global arena. We must have confidence to do that and to claim our space.

This is particularly pertinent in terms of the current debates on knowledge hegemonies, and their ongoing influence and domination of our higher education environment and practices, especially our research practices. In engaging in the debates we will be adding to a process of self-discovery and self-determination around issues that go to the very soul of what it means to be African.

In conclusion colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, perhaps a point to ponder - in the current volatile and emotive political environment there is a very real danger of falling into a habit of advancing rhetoric and sloganeering with oftentimes superficial, throwaway references to a variety of luminaries, good or bad. Make no mistake, we fully recognize the need for spaces in our institutions for precisely this kind of outpouring and release and expression. I am confident that Unisa in fact provides them. This R&I week is but one of them!

However, in the meantime let us not lose sight of the truly valuable research being done and produced at this university and at many of our sister institutions here and on the continent, *right now*, which is sometimes “lost” in the cacophony. If we are genuinely aware of our environment and genuinely committed to advancing research in pursuit of transformative decolonized African universities, then our energies should be equally harnessed towards unearthing, showcasing and sharing these articles, publications and other outputs by our own African scholars.

So perhaps one of the challenges I might leave you with as you enjoy this exciting week, is that we think about how Unisa, which has the largest library in the Southern Hemisphere, could begin to gather, catalogue and

showcase the works of our researchers on these vital issues, and how our academic staff can support one another by using and referencing these in their recirculation and in their own research, including when they present at conferences and seminars.

During our academic opening address this year I spoke of the need for us as a university to move from talking about transformation, to doing transformation. Research and innovation could and must be a shining example of that commitment. We should be advancing our own research and supporting our own researchers.

Universities have always been branded as ivory towers, far removed from the realities of the societies that they serve, and we are thus called to demonstrate unequivocally that this is in fact not the case. Research and Innovation must be demystified to allow for broader participation, and knowledge institutions must take bold and concrete steps to influence the developmental and policy agenda for the good of the society and the world.

I wish you successful, thought provoking and inspiring engagements during this week as we celebrate Research and Innovation at Unisa.

I thank you.

