



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

OPENING AND WELCOME

AT THE 8TH THABO MBEKI AFRICA DAY LECTURE-2017

PRESENTED BY PROFESSOR MAHMOOD MAMDANI

Theme "Africa and the Changing world. The World of Africa."

ZK MATTHEWS GREAT HALL

26 MAY 2017

- Programme Director and the CEO of the Thabo Mbeki Foundation, Mr Max Boqwana
- Patron of the Thabo Mbeki Foundation and our former President, Your Excellency, President Thabo Mbeki
- Minister Blade Nzimande, Minister of Higher education and Training and all leaders of Government
- Chairperson of the Thabo Mbeki Foundation, Dr Brigalia Bam and all the members of the Board of the Thabo Mbeki Foundation

- Mr Sakhi Simelane, Chairperson of the Unisa Council and Unisa Council members in attendance
- Members of the Diplomatic Corps
- Our keynote speaker and eminent guest for the 8th Thabo Mbeki Africa Day Lecture, Professor Mahmood Mamdani
- Members of Unisa’s executive and extended management
- Our international guests with special recognition of those from the rest of our Continent
- Staff members of the Thabo Mbeki Foundation
- Members of Unisa family including staff, students and alumni
- Leadership, staff and students of the Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute
- Representatives of the civil society, the public sector and the private sector as well as the international donor community
- Members of the Media covering this historic event
- Distinguished audience in this ZK Matthews Great Hall at Unisa and those viewing and listening to this Thabo Mbeki Africa Day Lecture

A very warm welcome to you all. It is a signal honour and a pleasure for the University of South Africa and the Thabo Mbeki Foundation to be hosting this, 8th Thabo Mbeki Africa Day Lecture, in celebration of Africa day (which was yesterday, 25 May) and Africa month in 2017. It is always so rewarding to be in such esteemed and informed company and to experience both the atmosphere and the engagement that characterizes this much anticipated Lecture.

At the Inaugural Annual Thabo Mbeki Lecture at the University of South Africa on 27 May 2010, former President of the Republic of South Africa and patron of TMALI, President Thabo Mbeki, addressed the provocative question posed by the World Bank in 2000 “*Can Africa Claim the 21st Century?*”

He proposed six practical steps that Africa must undertake if it is to claim the 21 Century, asserting that the first step would be to build and nurture the native intellectual cadre committed

to the transformation of Africa, as envisaged by leading African patriots and thinkers in a period spanning some 150 years.

He said:

“An urgent task in this regard is to rebuild and sustain our Universities and other centres of learning, attract back to Africa intellectuals who have migrated to the developed North, build strong links with the intelligentsia in the African Diaspora, and give them the time and space they need to help determine the future of Africa.”

And then, at the official launch of the Thabo Mbeki Foundation and the Thabo Mbeki Africa Leadership Institute: during an International Conference themed *Investing in thought leaders for Africa’s renewal*, held in Johannesburg from 11- 13 October 2010, retired Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Unisa, Professor N Barney Pitso, stated the following:

The partnership and collaboration between the Thabo Mbeki Foundation and the University of South Africa in the establishment of the Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute should marshal these intellectual forces and critical voices to Africa’s betterment. This International Conference should set an agenda that will draw Africa’s intellectual resources, stimulate young Africans to become achievers bristling with new ideas and set the tone for a new positive inclination for Africa that honours its past, engages the present and shapes the future.

Ladies and gentlemen, that is what we at Unisa, are committed to doing.

I thought it apposite to remind us this evening, of the rationale for the establishment of TMLI, and for UNISA’s commitment to partner with TMLI in shaping futures – both in our own country and on the continent, from a platform of critical and intellectual engagement, and of training Africans for the political, economic, social and cultural renewal of the African Continent and its people. TMLI is a vehicle for Africa’s timely response to new developments, which impact on the Continent, which would also help to ensure that Africa’s voice is heard in both the local and global contexts. This evening we grow that tradition.

That commitment, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, is more important than ever before. I'm sure you will agree that in the short space of five months, 2017 has provided us with an endless supply of global, continental and national drama, intrigue and conflict – from Brexit, Trumpism, Russia, China, North Korea and Syria; reluctant or overly zealous regime change on the Continent; fake news, post truth and downright lies; to our own soap operas right here at home, where citizens go to sleep every evening knowing that they are likely to wake up to a new and confounding episode every morning. The time and need, for straight talking, for clarity of thought, for rigorous and informed engagement and action, has never been greater. And, inasmuch as we acknowledge that our world, Continent and nation are in a state of flux - marching determinedly into a very opaque future, and that our citizens have never been so unsure and on edge as they are at this time in history, so we acknowledge that closer to home and, to a growing extent on the Continent, there are clarion calls and demands from an array of stakeholders, for the urgent reclamation and reassertion of the African voice and identity – as peers - in global conversations and power relations.

In fact distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, this is nothing new. WEB du Bois described his book *"The World and Africa,"* (published in 1947 and alluded to in the theme of this lecture) as "an inquiry into the part which Africa has played in world history." He was recasting a book he had published in 1939, and the *new circumstance* gave added significance to his insistence that Africa's part in world history was and would continue to be important. That "new circumstance" was described by du Bois as follows: *Europe was in a catastrophic state; colonial business as usual would not be resumed. Here was an opportunity for Africans to redefine their place in the world.* But the main topic of his book was what Africa had brought to world history.¹

Seventy years later, we find ourselves here this evening, expressing the very same sentiments. So perhaps a part of our conversations, of the work that needs to be done, is also to focus on why that is? Have we dropped, or picked up, the baton that was carried by the likes of du Bois

¹ Africa in the World. FREDERICK COOPER. Copyright Date: 2014. Published by: [Harvard University Press](http://www.harvard.edu/press/)
Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wpm4k>

and other eminent (Africa) scholars? Are du Bois' sentiments still relevant or have they found new interpretation and meaning in a drastically changed world?

We are particularly honoured distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, to have as our keynote speaker this evening, one of our most illustrious scholars and possibly one of the foremost experts and commentators on the works of WEB du Bois, Professor Mahmood Mamdani, whose voice, I know, has added some much needed *gravitas* and wisdom to many of the contestations and engagement that have taken place in our institutions of higher learning over the past 18 months or so. One has a sneaking suspicion in fact, that Professor Mamdani has been quite invigorated by this emerging dynamic and that he has discovered a new-found enthusiasm and relevance for the work that he does, which for too long, has not been given the acknowledgement and status that it deserves. We are very pleased to be playing our part in its resurgence.

We are honoured to have you as our Keynote Speaker this evening Professor. I will leave it to our honourable Patron, to introduce you formally. I am certain everyone here and those joining us from various viewing points and listening posts will be enriched by your intellectual engagement.

With these few words, allow me to introduce H.E, our TMALI Patron and Unisa Chancellor, President Thabo Mbeki who will in turn introduce our Keynote Speaker, Professor Mahmood Mamdani.

Our Chancellor does not like lengthy introductions – he says that long introductions often sound like an obituary. We also know that he often questions the notion of “Keynote Speaker”. So, without delay, and given what I have just highlighted, let me welcome the relentless champion of the African Renaissance, the Patron of the Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute, and the Chancellor of Unisa, President Thabo Mbeki, to introduce Prof Mahmood Mamdani.

I thank you