



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

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INTRODUCTION TO THE 2ND PUBLIC DIALOGUE ON THE FREEDOM CHARTER
The Freedom Charter as a Cultural Text
FREEDOM PARK
20 JULY 2013

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

This year, 2013, marks the 140th year of the University of South Africa's existence. Our celebratory preparations have impelled us to reflect on our past and the fascinating journey that has brought us to this point, and on the remarkable contribution that Unisa has made over the years, to South African higher education and culture.

And in that reflection we have been reminded of the diverse contributions that have been made by the vast numbers of students that Unisa has educated, as well as the quality staff who have served them and the institution so professionally over the past 14 decades. Their collective contributions and impact on our society and our country's growth and development are difficult to quantify and so in our celebrations this year, we have sought to share and honour those contributions in a manner which we trust, will do them some justice.

South Africa continues to transform in line with the vision of our forebears. A key part of that vision was beautifully articulated in the Freedom Charter: *“The Door of Learning and Culture shall be opened”*.

In partnering with Pina Ya Thari on the oratorio CREDO: a musical testament to the Freedom Charter, upon the commemoration of the University of South Africa’s 140th birthday, we are celebrating the cultural, historical and social impact of the Freedom Charter in South Africa’s struggle for liberation, and the role that it continues to play in our vision as a nation for the future.

The Freedom Charter asserts that it is our obligation to, and I quote, “develop and encourage national talent for the enhancement of our cultural life”. With the CREDO project, Unisa has participated not only in enhancing our understanding of that seminal document and the vision that it enshrines, through the accessible medium of the creative arts, but we have gone still further – we have acted upon the very letter of the Charter itself. True to its spirit, with Credo we are encouraging our national talent and further enhancing the rich cultural life of our country.

Unisa has an illustrious and proud history of promoting original South African music, and that is a strategy that we are building upon continuously. We see Credo as a considerable contribution to that goal, in that it supports a diverse group of artists - not only musicians and singers, but also composers, writers, and visual artists. Playing with the Johannesburg Philharmonic Orchestra is a talented group of student musicians representing the best of our music students, and, if you have seen the production, you would have seen that our cultural heritage is also celebrated within its visual showcase.

The Freedom Charter which was adopted in Kliptown on 26 June 1955 by a congress of the people with over 3000 delegates, including members of the South African Congress Alliance, which included the African National Congress, the South African Congress of Democrats, the South African Indian Congress and the Coloured Peoples’ Congress, spelt out a bold vision for future generations, and now, those “future generations” are seeing it come to fruition.

At the first public dialogue we discussed the Freedom Charter as a living document. Professor Raymond Suttner homed in on the words “*we the people*” and made the point that our success depends upon the ability of our country and government to make “*the people*” present through a participative democracy.

Jabulani Sithole described the Charter as an “evergreen document” – a benchmark which we must live up to.

Bridget Mabandla, former Minister of Justice, said the Charter set out a vision of a society to which we still subscribe, one that is egalitarian, and free of racism, sexism, and inequality. It was under the influence of the Charter that we saw the inclusion of full socio-economic rights into our Constitution.

Dr Essop Pahad, editor-in-chief of *The Thinker* magazine, who was present at the Congress of the People in 1955, reminded the audience that the historic occasion was held in the face of a massive, heavily armed police presence. He also commented on the internationalism in the document, how forward looking it was, and how it called for world peace - looking way beyond the borders of this country.

Today, at our second public dialogue we draw together those thoughts on the Freedom Charter within the context of our experience of Credo. Our topic is: *The Freedom Charter as a Cultural Text*. We will discuss what the Freedom Charter has to say about culture, what its relevance is in our cultural life, and how the Charter itself has become a cultural artefact. This is endorsed by Raymond Suttner and Jeremy Cronin in their book, *50 Years of the Freedom Charter*, published by our own UNISA PRESS in 2006. I quote: “The Freedom Charter was not only a political event, it was a major cultural milestone. The Freedom Charter recognises both the desire for unity and the rich, cultural diversity of our country.”

I trust that our discussion today will amplify the dialogue. With that, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, allow me introduce our esteemed panel.

We are honoured to welcome Professor Keorapetse Kgositsile, South Africa's National Poet Laureate and Special Adviser to the Minister of Arts and Culture. In exile Professor Kgositsile was a founding member of the ANC's Department of Arts and Culture and that of Education. He is one of the most internationally acclaimed and widely published South African poets. His work has been translated into many languages. He has been the recipient of a numerous literary awards including the Gwendolyn Brooks Poetry Prize, the Harlem Cultural Council Poetry Award, the Conrad Kent Rivers Memorial Poetry Award, and the Herman Charles Bosman Prize. In 2008 he was awarded the National Order of Ikhamanga: Silver (OIS), and in 2012 he was awarded the degree Doctor of Literature and Philosophy (DLitt et Phil) (honoris causa) by UNISA.

Alongside Professor Kgositsile is Ms Ncebakazi Mnukwana, musicologist and lecturer in music education. She co-ordinates the advanced certificate in education (ACE/GOS) for arts and culture at the Conservatorium. She also chairs the reference team "Shades of Belonging" in the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation - a project aiming at preserving African indigenous instruments.

Gwen Ansell is a very well-known freelance arts writer and media trainer. She writes a regular weekly music column in *Business Day*, contributes to many other publications, and is the author of *Soweto Blues: jazz, politics & popular music: a history of South African popular music in the struggle*. She runs the country's oldest arts journalism training programme, now in its 11th year, at the Cape Town International Jazz Festival. Most recently Ms Ansell was a member of the judging panel for the inaugural National Arts Festival/BASA Arts Journalism Awards.

Finally, allow me to introduce the composer of Credo, Bongani Ndodana-Breen. He has written a wide range of music encompassing symphonic work, opera, chamber music and vocal music. He was awarded the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Music in 1998. Performers around the world have performed his music; including the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, Belgian National Orchestra, Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra, Vancouver Opera Orchestra, Symphony Nova Scotia, KwaZulu-Natal Philharmonic, Johannesburg Festival Orchestra, New York City's Vox Vocal Ensemble, MusicaNoir, Chicago's Cube Ensemble, and

Ossia. He has composed several operas, including Winnie, the Opera, which premiered in April 2011 at the State Theatre in Pretoria, the children's chamber opera Themba & Seliba, the chamber monodrama Umuntu –Threnody, and the short opera Hani commissioned by University of Cape Town and Cape Town Opera.

To our panellists, we thank you most sincerely for your preparedness to participate in this important dialogue.

I will now hand over to the Director of the programme, Mr Brent Merman, who will chair the discussion. Mr Merman is the librettist of Credo, author of several books, a professional journalist, and a highly regarded theatre critic and performing arts writer.

I thank you.