



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

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ACADEMIC OPENING ASSEMBLY  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**17 FEBRUARY 2011**

- **Chairperson of Council Dr Mathews Phosa**
- **Members of the Unisa Council**
- **Prof Vice Chancellor, Professor Narend Baijnath**
- **Members of Unisa's Executive and extended management**
- **Staff and students of Unisa**
- **Members of the Unisa unions**
- **Members of the SRC**

Thank you Mr Chair of Council for your very warm and encouraging words of welcome – I take careful note of your words of wisdom, support and advice.

Last night was a truly joyous celebration for myself and of course, my family. My formal inauguration as Principal and Vice Chancellor of the University of South Africa was undoubtedly the highlight of my career, and I would like to start this address by thanking all who contributed

to making it such a memorable occasion. In particular Mr Chair of Council, I would like to say a personal word of thanks to you and to our Unisa council members for taking the time out of their very busy schedules to spend two consecutive days at our institution. It is I believe, a testament to your collective commitment to Unisa and you are to be commended for that. Similarly I would like to thank Unisa's extended and executive management and the large number of Unisa staff who came to share in the celebrations last night and who are here again this morning. It is sincerely appreciated and for me, an example of the kind of unity and loyalty that I trust will become a hallmark of our institution.

Ladies and gentlemen, last night I delivered an address to the higher education community at large, in which I shared my views on the state of higher education in a globalised world; the challenges that higher education institutions face in a very dynamic, neo-liberal knowledge economy; and the role that higher education institutions, and more particularly African Universities and Unisa must play in meeting those challenges and asserting a new, truly African identity. Such an identity would be undergirded and framed by endogenous expressions of our own indigenous knowledges to the extent that they assume an ascendancy in Africa and ultimately, take their rightful place - as equals - amongst the canons of the rest of the world.

Experience has shown us that we do not simply "fall" into new ways of knowing and being. By far the majority of people find it extremely difficult to change – to consider and acknowledge different paradigms as having equal legitimacy to that which they already know, and which, it must be added, have served them well as academics. In the current global higher education domain, the knowledge hegemony of the so-called "north" is self-perpetuating, driven by the very same socio-economic and political systems that fuel the relentless engine of power and acquisition. The developing nations, especially those in the so-called 'South', and Africa in particular, must therefore carve their own competitive niches in an environment that is currently not conducive to, or particularly friendly, towards attempts to assert new paradigms that might threaten the status quo. Former President Mbeki understood this when he asserted:

“our entire continent remains at risk until the African university, in the context of a continental reawakening, regains its soul.”<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, it is incumbent upon us to initiate and institute our own regeneration and rebirth into truly African institutions. There can be no better place to start, than right here, at our very own Unisa. Unisa has the potential to become a globally recognised African institution of innovation and excellence in its own right, and in partnership with like minded African institutions, be at the vanguard of a burgeoning, blossoming movement that impels Africans to regain their soul.

In May of 2010, I presented my vision for Unisa to the university community. In referring to Unisa and its history, I used the analogy of a mosaic, reflecting that the brokenness, beauty or brilliance of the various mosaic pieces, together contribute to the richness and essence of the mosaic, and that while close scrutiny will reveal its flaws, a little distance affords the opportunity to see its beauty in all of its facets. That analogy remains true. Those of us mired in the daily grind of institutional matters tend to lose sight of the beauty and potential of the institution and its people. So while we must face up to the multitude of challenges that confront us on a daily basis, both in the internal and external higher education environments, we should never lose sight to the endless potential that resides within. Because it is that potential, and that potential only, that will drive Unisa to ever greater heights.

The question of course, is how one unlocks that potential. Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues. Unlocking that potential requires *people power*. In my ‘mosaic’ presentation and in subsequent presentations to the Unisa community, I said what I believed needed to be done:

Together we will construct ***a new DNA for Unisa that is fundamentally about a revolution in thinking with openness as an epistemological value***; the kind of university that is African with a global reach. And we will retain the best of our past and insert these precious values, these beautiful shiny pieces of our mosaic, into a significantly

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<sup>1</sup> Mbeki quoted by Zeleza 2006: 14.

different context. ***This new Unisa will combine scholarly tradition, critical self-evaluation with the values of African cultures – openness, warmth, inclusiveness and community...***

In support of that statement I then shared with the University community how we would go about constructing a new DNA, the first and most fundamental phase being the development of a new paradigm of leadership. As the leaders of this institution we need to lead by example and in so doing, develop the kind of social cohesion that will inform, and lend impetus to all of our efforts.

This can only be done by creating an environment that is marked by what we now refer to as the 10 Cs (plus one):

- Communication
- Conversation
- Conservation
- Community
- Connection
- Care
- Collegiality
- Commitment
- Cooperation
- Creativity plus.... Courage

This, for most at Unisa ladies and gentlemen entails *a revolution in thinking*. It requires deep, introspective assessment of our own attitudes and behaviours and the way in which we relate to one another. It requires looking into the mirror of our souls and acknowledging the need to transform. For some the transformation will be more painful than others, but it is not the kind of transformation that cannot be imposed externally. It is a willingness to open the mind and to change mindsets; a willingness to acknowledge that we are all part of the problem, so we must all surely be part of the solution. It is a willingness to commit to cultivating consensus

around the same goals and a common vision for this African university in the service of University, by paying particular attention to institutional culture issues, promoting dialogue and seeking consensus on contentious issues.

It goes without saying that management must lead the way. And so as a start, our first management lekgotla this year, which begins next Tuesday 22 February, will be a leadership lekgotla at which extended management themselves will be embarking on a rigorous process of self reflection and introspection. They will be working through the 10 C's with the aim of arriving at concrete ways in which they can infuse them into all aspects of their working environments and functions. I have asked that the outcome of the lekgotla should be some kind of a manifesto that provides concrete evidence of extended management's support for and their commitment to the kind of environment that I have just sketched. I have every confidence that just as they have accepted the challenges that they have faced these past years, they will embrace the new ones and work together in leading this institution into its new, people-focused dispensation.

Ladies and gentlemen at my side in the management and leadership of this institution, I will have Professor Narend Baijnath, our new Pro Vice Chancellor. As the person responsible for the academic project of the university, Professor Baijnath brings impeccable academic and leadership credentials to the position, and these are bolstered by an incisive intellect and deep commitment to higher education and education in general. So I look forward with much anticipation to kind of innovation that he will bring to the position and I know that in the true spirit of collegialism you will embrace him as you did me, and move forward confidently in the knowledge that the academic project is in good hands.

Finally ladies and gentlemen I have the most pleasant duty of sharing some good news with you. I am happy to announce that the following colleagues are recipients of the 2010 APEX awards. You know, it gives me so much pleasure to acknowledge colleagues in this way because it is a manifestation of what we aim to achieve both as management and staff. The recipients of the 2010 APEX awards then, are:

Prof TA Dube	CSET	Mathematical Sciences
Prof MW de Witt	CHS	Teacher Education
Prof J Heaton	CLAW	Private Law
Prof RA Kelbrick	CLAW	Mercantile Law
Prof A de V Minnaar	CLAW	Criminology and Security Science
Prof MJ Mphahlele	CSET	Chemistry
Prof PJ van Dyk	CHS	Old Testament and ANES

Please join with me in giving them a round of applause.

All that remains is for me to thank you ladies and gentlemen, colleagues for your loyalty and support. I face 2011 not with trepidation but with much hope and excitement for great things to come. I thank you.