



*Office of the Principal and Vice Chancellor*

## **Opening the Discussion of the South African Human Rights Report on Transformation of Public Universities in South Africa.**

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*Principal and Vice-Chancellor*

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Thank you, colleagues, for your participation in this very important discussion around the South African Human Rights Commission Report on Transformation in Public Universities in South Africa.

In opening the meeting, I can do no better than highlight some of the Commission's findings. Its main concern is that *transformation has been very slow* and it lists a number of reasons for this.

I will mention only a few: First, a lack of consensus about what 'transformation' *means*; secondly, a lack of institutional resolve to change university cultures in many cases; thirdly, persistent inequality rooted in a segregated past; fourthly, neglect of our indigenous languages and a monolingual academic engagement which is not inclusive; fifthly, a lack of demographic change in senior academic ranks; sixthly, intractable racial and gender discrimination; seventhly, unacceptably poor student support and success rates; and lastly, dramatic under-funding of higher education.

We have to hope that the Minister of Finance will fix this in his budget speech!

Our intention today is to respond to the Commission's assessment of transformation in terms of Unisa's experience and metrics so that we can offer a positive programme to speed up transformation. We will therefore focus on the recommendations in order to articulate a clear plan which will draw on our existing policies, practices and institutional strategy for 2016-2020, to lead change in the sector.

This means profiling our transformation goals, implementing our human-resource recruitment and retention policies, improving the academic performance of our students, giving substance to our revised language policy through its special Unit, and inculcating multilingualism in our communication.

We also need to respond to recommendations in the report related to curriculum and pedagogical transformation in terms of academic and social justice, as well as graduateness in the context of a developing economy.

Moreover, we need an urgent overhaul of our institutional culture to promote inclusivity, anti-racism and ethical governance. And perhaps most importantly in the present crisis of higher education, we must face head-on the challenge of student funding and the allocation of financial resources within the university.

The Portfolio managers have been asked to report on the Commission's Report and present a transformation plan based on current and future initiatives and targets. Some will make short presentations this morning. Others will respond in a panel discussion. The open discussion that follows will ultimately inform our submission to the Minister of Higher Education and Training.

In leading change in 2017, I have decided on a theme for the year. It is ***'Transforming Unisa: Academic and Social Justice for Development'***. The

discussion today is part of a programme of seminars and roundtables which will open up debate and give direction and content to our transformation strategy and plan.

I therefore ask you to engage as constructively as possible, because if Unisa is to be properly transformed for a great future we have to work together. We have to find common solutions. We have to find a positive way forward for our diverse students, staff and alumni, as well as our donors and sponsors, not to mention the wider South African and continental community which is eager to see us *be* 'the African university shaping futures in the service of humanity'. The time for talk is over. We have to live our vision.