



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

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

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: GALA DINNER: RESEARCH AWARDS

CEREMONY

4th FLOOR FUNCTION HALL

KGORONG BUILDING

UNISA MUCKLENEUK CAMPUS

2 March 2018

- Programme Director, Dr Meiya Nthoesane
- Chancellor of The University of South Africa, His Excellency
President Thabo Mbeki
- Chairperson of the Unisa Council, Mr Sakhi Simelane (in
absentia)

- Members of Unisa’s Council here present
- Members of the diplomatic community
- Dr Daisy Selematsela, Acting Vice Principal: Research, Postgraduate Studies, Innovation and Commercialization and members of Unisa’s executive and extended management and staff here present
- Ms Janet Remmington, Regional Director: Africa and Editorial Director: Global Arts and Humanities Journals Taylor and Francis
- Members of the business community
- Unisa’s student and labour formations
- Our honoured guests this evening: recipients of our research awards
- Our entertainers this evening, the New Kopano Quartet
- Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

A very good evening to you all. On behalf the Chancellor, Council and Management of Unisa, it is my pleasure and honour to bid you all a very warm welcome to this highlight on our institutional calendar, our annual Unisa Research and Innovation Awards Ceremony.

In 1995, in the first flush of the unleashing of the internet on the world, Evans (1995: 16/2) observed [that] “Globalization presents

nations with a dilemma: they access the world, but the world invades them.”¹ Well, in 2018 we can no longer deny that higher education the world over, is in an unprecedented state of flux. A host of accretive socio-economic and political forces have created a hugely disruptive nexus that is reshaping our world as we know it, prompting a global re-evaluation of the shape and role of education in a very opaque future.

Altbach (UWN: 2018) sums this up succinctly when he says:

The global landscape for higher education internationalisation is changing dramatically. What one might call ‘the era of higher education internationalisation’ over the past 25 years (1990–2015) that has characterised university thinking and action might either be finished or, at least, be on life support. The unlimited growth of internationalisation of all kinds – including massive global student mobility, the expansion of branch campuses, franchised and joint degrees, the use of English as a language for teaching and research worldwide and many other elements – appears to have come to a rather abrupt end, especially in Europe and North America. We have previously argued that Trumpism, Brexit and the rise of nationalist and anti-immigrant politics in

¹ Evans, T. 1995. Globalisation, post-Fordism and open and distance education. *Distance Education*, 16: 2. Australia: Routledge.

Europe were changing the landscape of global higher education. Subsequent events have strengthened our conviction that we are seeing a fundamental shift in higher education internationalisation that will mean rethinking the entire international project of universities worldwide²

Ladies and gentlemen, if we were in any doubt as to the veracity of that statement, just this week, Teresa May the UK Prime Minister announced a year-long review of tertiary education in the UK, and New Zealand has similarly announced a “grand conversation” on education reform. This is the tip of the iceberg. This conversation has been underway in North America and Europe for some time, and in the developing world there is a groundswell of voices articulating a lived experience, challenging perceived hegemonic status quos and setting out visions for higher education futures which differ in many ways from what we have known and practiced to date and which interestingly and increasingly, are demonstrating a shift back towards ethics, social justice and the moral imperative of education as a public (and individual) good.

² The challenge to higher education internationalisation
Philip G Altbach and Hans de Wit 23 February 2018 Issue No:494

While it could be argued that this all began with the IT revolution back in 1990, particularly with the advent of the internet, it has in fact served to bring out into the open the unsustainable, yet growing inequalities of a hugely disparate global society; disparities which are now manifesting in the disintegration and fragmentation of centuries-old western higher education traditions. Ironically globalization might have made our world smaller, but in so doing it appears to have impelled our re-orientation into contextually relevant spaces, in line with resultant forces that have impacted on us all in such fundamental ways.

But what does all of this mean for the university in 2018? More specifically what does it mean for research in our universities?

Well the good news is the *“The major European mobility and collaboration scheme, Erasmus+, remains firmly in place – and might even receive additional funding. The ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations – region is moving in similar directions as the European Union in promoting harmonisation of its academic structures, improving quality assurance and increasing regional mobility and collaboration in its higher education sector. ‘Internationalisation at home’ and comprehensive internationalisation have entered the vocabulary of higher*

*education around the world.*³

For Unisa this is good news at a time when we are engaged in a fundamental phase of transformation towards our vision of being *the African university that is shaping futures in the service of humanity*. We are called to grow our researchers, and our research outputs, and to conduct research that is relevant to our own context, that will produce the developmental benefits of the SDGs (especially SDG 4). But we are also called in line with our strategy and status as an internationally acknowledged ODeL university to engage in cross-national collaborative research and in research that will add in meaningful and impactful ways, to the body of knowledge that is beyond our borders and that will ensure the continued relevance of our researchers as contextually relevant scholars.

Our Research, Postgraduate Studies, Innovation and Commercialisation Portfolio provides a space where innovative thinkers flourish; and the good news is that they reward innovative ideas. Driven by a desire to both explore new worlds and to apply new ideas to real-world problems, research at Unisa is not conducted only by academics and graduate students. Research opportunities are also provided for professional and

³ Altbach *ibid.*

administrative staff, making research a truly university-wide enterprise. Our commitment to advancing women in research, and especially black women, is a matter of pride and is bearing fantastic results. Fundamental to our approach is a commitment to excellence and support for our early career researchers, emerging research leaders and researchers from designated groups. It is quite simply, the right thing to do if we are to meet and overcome the challenges posed by our developmental state, and the imperative for genuine and lasting transformation.

Ladies and gentlemen, judging by the long list of awardees tonight (over 70), and the scope of their interests and accomplishments, I believe I can say with confidence that at Unisa we are getting it right. We are managing to combine the developmental imperative, the contextual relevance, the continental and the international connectedness; and all of us can be really proud of that.

Yet there is much work to be done. Despite quite rapid growth in outputs, research emanating from Africa stands at just over 2% of the global total with approximately 1% of that total emanating from Sub Saharan Africa. This is unfortunately not good enough. We are duty-bound to claim both our voices and our intellectual spaces in national continental and global discourse and practice. The time is now.

Tonight we have gathered to honour our brightest and best for their professionalism, their consistent dedication to research and innovation and the demonstrable success that they have achieved. Well done to you all, for your dedication and your commitment to your scholarship and this explain your consistence in excellence. It is not easy conducting research while teaching. It requires of you to go the extra mile – and this is often at the expense of those at home, and so we thank your families and significant others as well for their support and sacrifice.

To our awardees this evening, thank you for your dedication, your professionalism and your sacrifice. We are honoured to acknowledge your efforts and achievements tonight. We salute you, congratulate you and share in your pleasure and pride.

I thank you