



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

## **IS IT TIME FOR AN ECONOMIC CODESA? UNISA-SOWETAN DIALOGUE SERIES**

**PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR**

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**WELCOME REMARKS**

14 May 2015

- Facilitator of the dialogue series and a prominent public figure in the media, Mr Tim Modise
- The honourable Premier of Gauteng Province and keynote speaker, Mr David Makhura
- The honourable former minister and one of the midwives of our negotiated transition and director of In Transformation who is also a panellist, Mr Roelf Meyer
- The Chairperson of Afropulse, Ms Phumzile Langeni

- The Executive Director of the Institute for Global Dialogue based at Unisa and a panellist, Dr Siphamandla Zondi
- Director of Unisa Vice Chancellor Special Projects and panellist, Dr Somadoda Fikeni
- The editor of our partner newspaper, The Sowetan, and the chairperson of the South African Editors' Forum, Mr Mpumelelo Mkabela
- Sowetan Dialogues' Coordinator, Ms Nompumelelo Runji
- The head of Unisa-hosted South African Democracy Education Trust, Dr Sifiso Ndlovu
- Members of Unisa Executive and Extended Management
- Our distinguished guests representing different sectors of our society
- Representatives of the media
- Academic and administrative staff members of Unisa and sister institutions
- Organised Labour
- National Student Representative Council and all our students
- Distinguished audience, ladies and gentlemen

It is an honour and a great pleasure to welcome you to the inaugural Unisa-Sowetan Dialogue Series being hosted by this great historic institution. This series is designed to provide a platform to

intelligently engage on topical issues of our country and indeed those of our continent of Africa. It also represents an iconic convergence of two distinct and yet related institutions that are important players in the knowledge production and dissemination space. Unisa, as a university and institution of higher education, is a theatre for knowledge production and dissemination. It is an intellectual space whose core-business is a meaningful and impactful dialogue between ideas and facts, between theory and practise as well as between the past and present in our quest for a positive future. Nothing apprehends the essence of this than our vision statement which is “The African University Shaping Futures in the service of Humanity.” Unisa was the institution of choice for many political prisoners during the dark days of apartheid and it continues to be an African university creating space for ideas that will shape our future in the service of South Africa, Africa and humanity at large. The launch of this dialogue is also full of symbolism. The very hall we are gathered in is aptly named after a great freedom fighter, a towering scholar and one of the architects of the Magna Carta of

our democracy, the Freedom Charter, the late Professor Zacharia Keodirelang Matthews. We also bear in mind that it is exactly 60 years since that historic document was adopted in Kliptown.

On the other hand, in The Information Age of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the role of the mass media to generate, transmit and provide interpretive meaning to information is unrivalled. It is for this reason that we joined hands with our iconic newspaper, Sowetan, which has a national footprint as well as historical significance. Indeed, it is as if we have come to listen to the doyen of South African activist journalism and community builder, Mr Aggrey Klaaste debating with ZK Matthews, indeed their spirit reverberates throughout this hall and beyond. This is a fitting tribute to these icons. It is this symbiotic relationship that has given birth to this dialogue series that we all are confident will stimulate a meaningful national conversation on issues that matter.

I also welcome participation of the South African Education Trust as a partner as it has a credible track record of providing a wealth of information on our past and current history of liberation and transition which is now documented in the published series of volumes. Truism that South Africa is an argumentative and a noisy democracy is accepted as a fact, but we need to provide space for a focused and intelligent dialogue about national issues in order to shape the policy space.

As I reflected on the theme of this inaugural dialogue as well as the concept notes on the rationale for this theme I could not find a more fitting illustrative stanza that depicts the current South African paradoxical condition than the opening words of Charles Dickens' classic novel, *Tale of Two Cities*:

***“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,***

***it was the age of foolishness,***

***it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity,***

*it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope,  
it was the winter of despair,  
we had everything before us, we had nothing before us,  
we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going  
direct the other way.  
In short, the period was so far like the present  
period...”(Charles Dickens: Tale of Two Cities)*

As we enter our 21<sup>st</sup> year of South Africa’s transition to democracy we are grappling with a vexing paradox of a world-acclaimed democratic experiment that has produced some of the best institutions of democracy and reconciliation programmes and yet we face resilient and stubborn legacy of colonial and apartheid geography in the socio-economic sphere. We face economic hardships of intergenerational poverty, unacceptably high levels of unemployment felt most acutely and excruciatingly by the youth, wealth distribution has not changed in any significant manner. Reaction to the aforementioned socio-economic challenges is

manifesting itself in so many ways, from violent strikes and service delivery protests to xenophobic attacks and sometimes violent reaction to protests with tragic consequences as we, and the world, witnessed in Marikana.

There is an almost universal acceptance of the diagnostics of problems facing our country across political parties, policy makers and opinion makers as well as policy documents such as the National Development Plan. Lacking, though, is the national consensus on the prescription medicine to the socio-economic disease afflicting our nation. It is fair to assume that it is for this reason that the theme of this dialogue tonight is more suggestive with the aim of provoking a dialogue on the critical issue of “where do we go from here?” Or given the challenges highlighted, “What is to be done.”

As we settle down to listen, absorb, engage and reflect on this dialogue tonight and beyond, I challenge each one of us in our various sectors of our society, in our homes and communities, in our

institutions, from our townships to leafy suburbs and to our villages, **to accept the reality that with freedom comes responsibility. Nation-building, societal transformation and consolidation of democracy is not a spectator sport where some cheer on the sidelines whereas others labour to produce results.** A sense of agency and ownership of responsibility is required as government alone or business sector alone cannot change the course of history as our struggle history has shown.

This massive response is heartening and profoundly encouraging. Again for this much publicised dialogue series that has attracted so much of our national attention I would like to acknowledge and thank our partner, Sowetan and its leadership as well as our own Unisa Marketing and Communication for spreading the word in the most creative and effective manner. We have just begun, there are great things in store for this dialogue, just watch the space. I would also like to express our appreciation for the outstanding panel of prominent opinion makers who are surely going to give us nuggets

for our intellectual contemplative reflection. Such a powerful commencement of this programme will surely give a boost and energy for a sustained trajectory of national dialogue.

As I invite all of you into what promises to be a cerebral and cognitive stimulus on the great subject of our time I leave you with that famous quote of the Chinese leader, Mao Tse Tung, “Letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend is the policy for promoting progress in the arts and the sciences...” (Mao Tse Tung’s address to Chinese intelligentsia in Peking, February 1957)

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen let a thousand flowers bloom and ideas proliferate. As we embark on these dialogue series I am also reminded of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s instructive observation when he asserted the “Daring ideas are like chessmen moved forward. They may be beaten, but they may start a winning game.”

I invite you to listen, reflect and engage in this dialogue and carry it like a pollen on the feet of bees to cross-pollinate in your institutions and community forums.

I thank you.