



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MANDLA MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

WELCOME ADDRESS: FOUNDERS LECTURE

ZK MATTHEWS HALL

31 OCTOBER 2012

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

It is my signal honour to welcome you to the University of South Africa's 2012 Founders Lecture.

Upon hearing from her publisher that her novel *The Waves* was a masterpiece, novelist Virginia Woolf diarised the following:

Monday, October 5th

A note to say I am trembling with pleasure – can't go on with my Letter – because Harold Nicholson has rung up to say *The Waves* is a masterpiece. Ah hah – so it wasn't all wasted then. I mean this vision I had here *has some force upon other minds*. Now for a cigarette and then a return to sober composition."¹

¹ The Diaries of Virginia Woolf in five volumes (Chatto and Windus: the Hogarth press). Quoted in a speech by Prof NB Pityana, former Vice Chancellor of the University of South Africa during a keynote address delivered

It is only once a vision is shared and validated by others that its value is realised and it begins to exert “*some force upon other minds.*” Generally, because of our own constrained thinking and imagination, we tend to limit our understanding of the power of this force to our individual circumstance and experience, but over the centuries, the *force* has wielded immense power and influence. It has quite literally changed the course of history several times. And that has happened when our *collective* imaginations and minds have been swayed and then guided onto a new path of thinking, doing or being – all by the power of someone’s vision. Once we have absorbed the change and we live it, we perpetuate it and extend its influence. And it is this lesson that one can apply to South Africa’s intelligentsia, and particularly in regard to the State of the Nation.

We can assume that our public commentators and intellectuals have, through their intellectual gifts and skills, the potential to exercise *some force on other minds*, and I speak here of the force that guides us onto a new path of thinking, doing and being - once our imaginations have been captured.

How is all of this linked to the state of our nation, you may ask? The Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility (1990) states the following:

Members of the intellectual community have a responsibility to promote the spirit of tolerance towards different views and positions and enhance democratic debate and discussion (Article 20)

and

The intellectual community is obliged to encourage and contribute to affirmative actions to redress historical and contemporary inequalities based on gender, nationality or any other social advantage.” (Article 25)²

There is broad acknowledgement of the role which the intellectual community can and must play, not only in participating in teaching and learning, research and publishing, innovation

at the Wordfest 2007, held in the Red Lecture Theatre, Eden Grove Building, Rhodes University Campus, on Monday 2 July 2007.

² <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/africa/KAMDOK.htm> pg 5

and community engagement, but also in promoting intellectual exchange; both nationally and internationally, and in contributing to social advancement.³ However, it is not always a welcome role and it is therefore incumbent upon all higher education practitioners to guard their freedoms and responsibilities jealously and to keep the intellectual voice alive and public.

Unisa's Founder's lecture aims to do precisely that – to promote intellectual exchange both nationally and internationally, and contribute to social advancement. The Founders Lecture is aimed at encouraging the University and the broader academic community to focus on critical issues in higher education and in so doing, promote African scholarship and contribute to critical debate, nationally and continentally.

At this challenging juncture in our country's socio-economic and political history, this evening's lecture will undoubtedly add to the multiplicity of voices and diversity in thought, and in so doing, it will contribute in a very meaningful way, to the level and quality of intellectual engagement in South Africa and on the continent.

The inaugural Founder' Lecture was held on 24 June 2003. Since then our distinguished speakers have included such eminent persons as Lord Sutherland of Houndwood, Professor George Ellis, Professor Paul Zeleza, Professor Barney Pitso, Dr T. Karunakaran and Dr Phil Mjwara. The calibre and intellectual standing of these speakers attests to the status of this very important lecture on our institutional calendar.

This evening ladies and gentlemen we are extremely honoured to have as our guest lecturer, Dr Mamphela Ramphele, founder of the Citizens Movement. (A very special word of welcome to you Dr Ramphele.)

I believe that the insights that Dr Ramphele will be sharing with us this evening, will add a new and important dimension to our national and international debate on higher education issues, and from a vantage point that in my view, is equally important to those deemed purely academic. In today's higher education environment multi-stakeholder engagement and contribution are fundamental to progress and success. Judging by the diverse stakeholder representation here this evening, it seems that you support that sentiment. It is

³ Ibid

my sincere hope and belief that Dr Ramphela's address will have "*some force upon other minds*" and that it will focus our *collective* thinking on new ways of thinking and doing – to the benefit of our people and our country.

It gives me great pleasure then distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, to say a very warm and sincere word of welcome to you all. Thank you for gracing us with your presence. In so doing you have aligned yourselves with those public and private intellectuals who seek enlightenment and solutions through the time honoured practices of critical engagement and debate.

I thank you.