



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

WELCOME ADDRESS

Cocktail Function and Launch of the SAC-IAWJ

Themed

“Chronicles of a Decade.”

Kgorong Function Hall, UNISA

7 August 2015

 Programme director and Deputy Dean of the College of Law,

Professor Slabbert

⚖️ Our keynote speaker and the honourable Minister of the Department of Women in the Presidency, Minister Susan Shabangu.

⚖️ Judge President of the Gauteng Division of the High Court, Judge Mlambo and your esteemed colleagues from the judiciary.

⚖️ A special recognition goes to the former President of the International Association of Women Judges and the entire leadership of this esteemed organization.

⚖️ I also recognize the leadership and representatives of the South African chapter of the International Association of Women Judges.

⚖️ Organizing committee of this auspicious event

⚖️ Unisa management and staff members

⚖️ Students in attendance

⚖️ Distinguished guests

⚖️ Ladies and gentlemen

It is with great joy and humility that I welcome you to our University this evening that marks a commencement of your comprehensive programme. We welcome you in the spirit of African essence, Ubuntu/botho and in the warm embrace of motherhood of the African continent which is the cradle of humankind. We are honoured and humbled by your choice of Unisa to host your event and wish you a productive, impactful and memorable International Association of Women Judges' African Regional Conference. To our sisters and brothers from all over the continent and those from beyond our continental shores we say welcome home to the house of the late President Nelson Mandela and the home of remains of the early Homo erectus in the cave of Sterkfontein and Taung.

The symbolic and practical significance of this historic international conference focused on women's role in the judiciary being held during the Women's Month in South Africa is not lost in my mind as I have been participating in a range of programmes on women

empowerment. These programmes often serve as reminders of the web of visible and not so obvious obstacles that women have to contend with in their lives and in the professional world. It is also a poignant reminder of the struggles that have been waged to make women's rights to be taken seriously as human rights.

Let me state upfront that legal matters have always fascinated me from my early years as a student. As an academic I later became intrigued by legal philosophy and jurisprudence in general. In my interest I have always quizzed my mind on social construction of power, values, norms, standards and laws which sometimes serve or challenge the interest of the powerful in our society. More specifically, women, in a patriarchal society, are often at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder in many respects and they are the main victims of injustices of our political, economic and social systems, and yet very few are in senior positions in the structures that administer justice or those which make policies. It is for that reason

that I think your conference is an important intervention. Since the wave of democratization that swept across Africa and many regions of the world in the early 1990s, the embrace of constitutional democracies has become a conventionally accepted norm. *The rule of law and not rule by law* is an ideal that many societies strive for and at the heart of that is the role of the judiciary and the affirmation of the role of women in that arrangement. In the South African context I am heartened by the ongoing discourse within the legal field and within the Judicial Service Commission on the need to transform the gender of our judges and affirm the role of women. But this conference, I hope, will address the yawning gap between the promises of beautifully worded constitutions, legislations on women's rights and human rights in general and the harsh realities of a pervasive patriarchal systems in our region and across the world. It is this gap and the institutional culture of our democratic institutions that needs a careful examination to understand why they have not delivered on their promise. What has been the progress, stagnation or regression on women emancipation issues since the 1995 global

conference on women in Beijing? On a lighter note, even the names or words or nomenclature embedded in our language such as cocktail, chairman, workman, statesman and many others may have a sub-conscious gender bias. Perhaps we need to examine and purify our lexicon or make it gender sensitive.

The University of South Africa, with its national, continental and global footprint as well as a track record of producing some of the finest and prominent legal minds, is ready and willing to collaborate in efforts of advancing your course or women empowerment in the legal field. I am certain that the forum you have created will also provide helpful networks and mentorship for emerging legal scholars and practitioners from those who have already shattered the glass ceiling. The words of Kevin Spacey ring true and are instructive in this instance as he **said “I feel it’s a responsibility for anyone who breaks through a certain ceiling... to send the elevator back down and give others a helpful lift.”**

Before I slide into our habitual tendency as an academic to analyse and reflect on the subject, let me stop here to allow our honourable Minister who is the most capable person to speak on the subject of this evening given her long experience of championing the struggle for women emancipation.

It is appropriate for me at this point to acknowledge and appreciate that the collaboration between Unisa and the International Association of Women Judges was the initiative of the Office of the Dean of Students and has now grown to include a collaboration that brings together three Unisa units ie the College of Law, Institutional Development and Student Affairs. Let me thank Judge Connie Mocumie who together with the Dean of Students conceptualised the idea of Unisa's collaboration with the Judges.

Let me take this time to wish you a productive and ground-breaking conference on a subject that is at the heart of our struggle for justice. I also wish you a Happy Women's month but I think every day and every month should be dedicated to the issue of gender justice in all spheres of our society then we can realize a just world.

I thank you

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