



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF M S MAKHANYA
KEYNOTE ADDRESS: PORT ELIZABETH ALUMNI BREAKFAST
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Unisa Alumni, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen

I think it was Julius Nyerere who once said: "If you think education is expensive – try ignorance." For the longest time Africa has suffered the ramifications of educational neglect, and it is incumbent upon us as educators and alumni, to do something about it. You may recall that 25 May was Africa Day, and in acknowledgement of this important day for Africa, Unisa's main campus hosted two significant events.

In the morning we hosted a roundtable discussion and were treated to an inspiring address by Dr Ruth Kagia, World Bank Director- Southern Africa Region on the topic " Africa's Economic Present and Futures – Challenges and Prospects." Fundamental to Dr Kagia's message was the need for us Africans to take back charge of their own destinies and for Universities to contribute to the generation of knowledge and capacity building that is needed to drive grow our economies and make them less dependent on foreign aid and other forms of dependence.

And then in the evening, it was my privilege, together with the Thabo Mbeki leadership Institute, which has its home in the University of South Africa, to host the second Annual Thabo Mbeki Lecture at Unisa's main campus. The guest lecturer was HE Benjamin William Mkapa, former President of the United Republic of Tanzania, who addressed the topic: "Consolidating Political Independence with Economic Transformation."

Guests listened spellbound as an extremely articulate and entertaining former President Mkapa shared his views on a variety of challenges facing Africa. He too spoke of the need for Africans to take their destinies into their own hands and to create their own future, free from dependencies on foreign aid. The

message was unequivocal: “Africa, take back your dignity and your independence and do for yourself what you currently allow, and even expect, others to do for you.”

The audience was electrified as the import of the message sank home. Africans had won their freedom but had subsequently lost their dignity and become nations habitually dependent on foreign aid. Africans need to claim back their voice and their dignity but that would take human capital, and that ladies and gentlemen means appropriately skilled and equipped people and by extension, vibrant and productive universities and a fearless, vocal intelligentsia. As Unisa Alumni, you represent those very people that both speakers referred to.

Time constraints only allowed for two rounds of questions to the former presidents Mbeki and Mkapa, who shared the wisdom of years with an audience who hung onto their every word. But what became as the evening progressed clear ladies and gentlemen, is that there is a rising generation of young people on this continent who are hungry to reclaim the kinds of leadership that guided their countries to freedom. The questions and answers continually reverted to the notion of moral, disciplined and courageous leadership that applied ethical and transparent governance.

For me three issues came very clearly to the fore on Africa Day. Our country and continent desperately need new knowledge (one thinks here of dedicated and focussed research) human capital (that is, skilled and employable citizens) and visionary leadership. And our universities have a fundamental role to play in all of these. Gone are the days when higher education institutions could operate as ivory towers, cherry picking research topics that had little or no relevance or application in broader society. Nowadays universities need to become involved in the communities that they serve. Research needs to focus on projects that will be beneficial to our communities and our country and which involve all stakeholders, including business and government.

Our graduates – and that means you, our alumni - are the human capital, or capacity, that was referred to at both events, and once again, as higher education institutions we need to ensure that the graduates we produce will not only be employable, but that they will have a range of competencies and qualities that will ensure that they become responsible and productive citizens who can contribute to the growth and development of our country and continent.

Unisa believes that as Africans we need to be confident about claiming our space and ascendancy in a global environment that is undergoing a fundamental re-orientation, and in which the voice of the marginalised is sounding ever louder. Unisa aims to make a direct and ongoing contribution to this country and this Continent's intelligentsia, to our thought leaders and to our leadership, and in so doing, to its socio-economic development. We are proud and excited about making that contribution.

The point ladies and gentlemen, is that our Universities and the graduates they produce, can and should form part of broader stakeholder teams, harnessing their capacity in pursuit of the common good – ever conscious of quality and excellence in tuition in all that we do, but equally conscious of our social responsibility. We all need to become more directly involved in claiming back our Africanness and all that it entails.

For Unisa that entails “Africanising” the content of our courseware and generating ethical and socially responsible leaders who embody the notion of a “critical citizenry.” For you our alumni, it means using the qualifications and skills that you have acquired at Unisa not only to further your own careers but also to make a deliberate and purposeful contribution to the common good and the socio-economic development of your communities and our country. It means conducting yourselves in such an ethical manner, and with such integrity that others from your own families, especially your children, will feel inspired and motivated to emulate your example. It means investing your wealth in your name and your reputation more than in monetary terms. It means creating a legacy that others will be so proud to follow.

Ladies and gentlemen it also means that you will aspire to become life long learners and to build on the knowledge foundations that you have already laid. One of the most attractive things about Unisa, is that you are able to learn at any age and in any circumstances and you should always bear that in mind as you travel on your journey of knowledge acquisition.

Unisa also values the kinds of support that you evidence here today. This is tangible support as expressed by your presence and commitment to your alma mater. We intend over the longer term, to grow our alumni into a body that can make a very strong and influential contribution to the University – not only through much needed financial support, but also through the skills that you have, and will acquire over time, and the kinds of capacity that you can plough back into the institution through membership of such bodies as the convocation. Our alumni have a very important role to play, together with all of our other stakeholders, to realise the kind of society and citizenry that our speakers envisioned on Africa day.

So I am pleased and honoured to welcome you here this morning. Thank you for gracing us with your presence. Each of us has a role to play as an important university stakeholder - from our friends in business and the civil service, to our colleagues in government to our staff, students and alumni. We at Unisa believe that a teamwork approach will go a long way to contributing to high quality graduates who will in turn contribute to both their own development and that of society.

I trust that you will enjoy this breakfast with us. I ask that you use this time to get to know us and one another, and to perhaps consider ways in which we can leverage one another's various capacities or the common good – particularly in this region. I thank you.