



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MANDLA MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

ADDRESS: LONG SERVICE CERTIFICATE AWARDS CEREMONY

ZK MATTHEWS HALL

6 April 2016

- Madame Chair, Ms Kissoonduth, Director: Remuneration and Administration, HR
- Dr SP Zulu, Acting Vice Principal: Institutional Development and Transformation
- Our speaker today, Mr Veli Ndaba: motivational speaker, life coach, author and MC
- Our entertainer this morning, Mr Pierre Vigoreux
- Esteemed colleagues

- And our VIP guests this morning – our long service awardees

At Unisa we are so often involved in managing and operating the institution to ensure that we are able to overcome its present and future challenges, that we tend to forget the past - upon which all that is achievable in the future - rests.

So our ceremony today is important - not only because we will be celebrating your contribution to Unisa, our students and our country, but because it also gives us an opportunity to reflect on those who have gone before us and the legacy that they have left; and the responsibility that we have, to ensure that the flame of quality higher education is still burning brightly, when we pass on that torch to the next generation of Unisans.

I was watching a televised debate for the 2015 Nobel Prize week, during which a very eminent panel of economists and leaders in their fields, were debating the future of work. In general they agreed that much of the automation happening about us today, including robotics would put large segments of the populations out of work, although employment in certain sectors – such as the maintenance of technology for example, would increase. Generally though, they agreed that it was *fait accompli* and that there would be, as one panellist confidently proclaimed, “winners” (who would be doing

work) and “losers” who would be unemployable. They agreed that current economic models in the Western World, more especially the USA would not accommodate these drastic societal changes and that governments would have to revisit their policies as a matter of urgency if the world aimed to prevent massive social upheaval. One panellist even suggested that they should just consider giving the unemployed people cash, rather than trying to implement more complex systems of support. Another said that it is only those with Calvinistic mind-sets, who felt that *not* working was somehow morally wrong and that the unemployed people could visit any country in the world, through their computer screens, at the press of a button. In that way they would be on a permanent holiday. There was an assumption colleagues, that the “losers” would simply accept their lot and become passive, law abiding, state funded humans on the fringes of society, serving no useful purpose at all.

Only one of the panellists, and the only woman on the panel, spoke of the “losers”, as people who had the potential to wreak havoc should they not be catered for in this near future scenario. It seemed that only she and one other panellist, acknowledged the “humanity” of the so-called “losers.”

I was dismayed at the arrogance of these people whose “world” comprised the highly affluent western bloc and who made no

mention at all, of Asia, India, Africa, South America, the Middle East – in fact, the rest of the world. I was not shocked that they presumed that their perceived reality was somehow the reality for the whole world – that has been, and continues to be the dominant discourse in higher education as well. But we know colleagues, that ours is a different reality, and while we are undoubtedly affected by what happens in the West, it does not define our lived experience as South Africans whose ethos of Ubuntu/Botho puts people and caring at the centre. I also suspect that the rest of the world has very different views and strategies around their futures and the flourishing of their peoples as well.

Of course our world has changed quite drastically and it will continue to do so. That is the nature of humankind after all. Things are being done differently in line with different expectations from our modern-day citizens. However, while our students want us to move with the times, and while we are called to produce confident and competent 21st Century graduates, there is one aspect that remains unchanged – and that of course, is the expectation of a quality education and a satisfying educational experience. Needless to say, the quality of the education and experience that our students receive rests on the shoulders of our Unisa staff - that is, you and me. Quality staff ensures quality education, and it is our responsibility as Council and

management to ensure by all means possible that we have a workforce who are able to accomplish that.

So we are building a University that recognises staff members for who they are and what they bring to the table, while ensuring that staff feels valued at our institution, through amongst others, the growth and development of their potential. I don't see robots in that scenario any time soon colleagues! We have a responsibility to build a University where those who work at Unisa in years to come will appreciate what we have bequeathed to them, just as we are able to appreciate the legacy of those who shaped Unisa over the past 143 years.

Having said that, many of you are facing your retirements with some trepidation – afraid of being able to cope financially and perhaps, even being lonely and uninvolved. Perhaps you are not sure what you need to do. Colleagues, Unisa is aware of this and we are working hard at ensuring that our staff will be well prepared for their retirements. Our conditions of service and the implications of the various retirement funds and policies in place are being widely shared throughout the university. This information and communication process, which I hope you are all accessing on the intranet, is being backed up with seminars on how to manage your finances in preparation for the big “R” day – I'm sure that you will

see these being announced shortly. I am really pleased that these have been well attended – clearly an indication of an engaged institution, but they also serve as a stark reminder of the challenges around continuity, which I mentioned at the beginning of this address.

Colleagues, change is inevitable and actually, it is mostly for the better. You need to bear in mind though, that your attitude to life will impact significantly on your quality of life. It is occasions such as these that provide the space for us to look back and to see the improvements in our lives in terms of opportunities and experiences and to reassess our attitudes towards our futures. We forget that far too often. South Africa offers so many opportunities to continue to grow and develop and to enjoy very fulfilling retirements - especially through mentoring and service to others. Co-incidentally one of the most rewarding aspects of growing in age and maturity is the desire to pass on the knowledge and experience that we have acquired in our lives. Retirement offers a wonderful opportunity to do just that.

As an institution that is 143 years old, we are standing and building on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. We owe our success to their efforts. You too will be remembered in the same way. Through your years of loyalty and commitment you are continuing and building on the legacy of those who have gone before

you, and as an institution we are deeply appreciative of, and thankful for your service and contributions to Unisa, our students present and past, to South Africa, our Continent and the rest of the world. On behalf of the Council and Management of Unisa, please accept our very sincere thanks and appreciation for your contributions to our institution. Well done!

I thank you.