



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

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

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**OPENING OF THE 2<sup>ND</sup> COMMONWEALTH CONFERENCE ON THE  
EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF YOUTH WORKERS**

**8 MARCH 2016**

Honourable Minister Jeff Radebe (MP), Minister in the Presidency for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation and Chairperson of the National Planning Commission;

Honourable Deputy Minister Buti Manamela (MP), Deputy Minister in the Presidency for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation;

Mr Deodat Maharaj, Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth;

Members of the diplomatic corps;

Members of the media;

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is my privilege to welcome you to the opening of the 2nd Commonwealth Conference on the Education and Training of Youth Workers.

It is fitting that the University of South Africa (UNISA), hosts the 2nd Commonwealth Conference on Youth Work, here in Pretoria, as a sequel to our hosting the inaugural Commonwealth Conference on Education and Training in 2013.

This 2016 conference is guided by the theme ‘Engaging Young People in Nation Building: The Youth Worker’s Role’, and will focus on the need to promote youth work in South Africa and beyond by exploring best practices from around the globe – with a view to professionalising youth work.

We know that the task of the youth worker is a complex one, compounded by the fact that “the youth” does not constitute a homogeneous group; their socio-economic, demographic, and geographical situations vary widely both within and between regions. The vast majority of the world’s youth – some 87 per cent – live in developing countries and face challenges such as limited access to resources, more especially education, training, employment, and broader economic development opportunities (WYC 2014 Media).

In South Africa we have conceptualised this constituency as the “NEETS” (**n**ot in **e**mployment, **e**ducation or **t**raining). The approximately 3 million NEETS are youth aged between 18 and 24, make it imperative that we, as a nation, address the challenges of this constituency with a view to expanding opportunities and ensuring that youth work is

mainstreamed across Ministries<sup>1</sup>. We need to explore options for the professional preparedness of the system to serve this target group through the development of an agile and professional workforce to render youth development services<sup>2</sup>.

I provide this backdrop to highlight the importance of this conference about the education and training of a professional cadre of youth development workers to service the massive global constituency of 1.2 billion young people<sup>3</sup>, accounting for approximately 18% of the global population.

Closer to home – of the total South African population of approximately 50 million people, about 42% (21 million) are between the ages of 14 and 35. This group of young people represents those who are most affected by the socio-economic challenges the country faces – ranging from unemployment to complete destitution.

Notwithstanding the commendable progress made in South Africa in advancing youth development, we, as a university, recognise that a lot more needs to be done swiftly to remedy the situation of the youth in South Africa, across the African Continent and beyond. We recognise the problems associated with our not dealing with this “youth bulge”

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<sup>1</sup> The dimensions of youth problems are elaborated on in *National Development Plan for 2030*. 2011. National Planning Commission. Presidency: Pretoria.

<sup>2</sup> McKay, VI. 2012. *Reconfiguring the post-schooling sector: Towards credible institutional mechanisms for skills planning*. DHET/HSRC: Pretoria.

<sup>3</sup> The United Nations defines individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 as youth.

and we, as the Presidency: Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, the National Youth Development Agency and Unisa, are currently focusing on the establishment of an Institute dedicated to youth development research, training and development.

The broad-based social mobilisation of young people both in South Africa, and across the globe, is a constant reminder of the urgency for action to address the needs of young people and to design strategies that seek to holistically respond to their needs. It is for this reason that the capacitation of youth workers is critical to our endeavours to address the problems of the youth and to ensure that youth development is a national feature in South Africa (and beyond). Youth development in South Africa is central to the National Youth Policy 2020 which calls for, inter alia, the holistic development of the youth, and which relies on the critical role played by the cadre of youth development workers who are charged with the development of our youth. Kofi Annan (World Assembly of Youth, 15 September, 2014) drew our attention to the need for the empowerment of the youth. As he puts it:

Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies.

Indeed we, as a university, recognise the plight of youth on the margins of society, and together with our partners, focus on the capacitation of youth development workers to empower the youth.

Together with the Presidency: Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the National Youth Development Agency, we as the African university in the service of humanity, commit ourselves to ‘shaping futures’ through the development of competent, professional youth workers who might contribute directly to a supportive and enabling environment for young people, empowering them to become agents for development and peace. We commit as a university, to the development of competent, professional youth workers who might contribute directly to a “supportive enabling environment for young people”, and consequently to the well-being of societies.

It is therefore my honour and pleasure to welcome the delegates to UNISA, to enjoy our African hospitality, the meeting of minds, and to share in our common *Ubuntu*. We are committed to ensuring that youth development work is a recognised, skilled and vital profession. With our partners’ vast experience in youth development work, we are ready to elevate our combined efforts to the next level. May this conference, consolidate our efforts.

But in truth, honoured guests, this Conference is not so much about our university or our partners or any of the many stakeholders who will

attend, nor is it about Unisa's deep commitment to being a university *of* the people and *for* the people of South Africa, our Continent and indeed, the world. Rather it is about our collective aim to facilitate the establishment of youth work as a profession. This is long overdue. So the conference is about providing a platform for the discussion of education and training in the youth work sector, and to developing an "as is" and a "to be" strategy to map the way forward to our end goal.

Clearly, Unisa has already evidenced its commitment to the establishment of youth work as a profession, and so my message of support today is not aimed so much at the conference per se – I think that goes without saying. Rather it is aimed at reminding us of the rationale behind the establishment of youth work as a profession – and that of course is the growth, nurturing and development of our youth into the kind of citizen that will be an asset to our societies and whose values promote the development of all and not just the privileged few.

In essence, this conference and Unisa's commitment is about encouraging our youth to get excited about education – their own and that of their peers; it is about the possibilities that education brings for them and their families; it is about prioritizing properly for a brighter future - for themselves and for their countries; it is about understanding that whatever path they may choose in life, they will need education to fuel the journey. In the final analysis, it is about the *hope* that education brings into situations of hopelessness.

This conference is about breaking that cycle, and I am pleased and honoured to offer my own support and that of the University of South Africa, to these vital deliberations.

Thank you