



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

**PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS: GALA DINNER: RESEARCH AWARDS  
CEREMONY**

**FUNCTION AND EXHIBITION HALL**

**CSIR INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE**

**4 March 2016**

- Madame Programme Director, Ms Natalia Molebatsi, Performance Poet and Writer
- Chancellor of the University of South Africa, Judge Bernard Ngoepe
- Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, VP: Research, Postgraduate Studies, Innovation and Commercialisation
- Recipients of our research awards
- Our entertainer this evening, the New Kopano Quartet
- Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

A very good evening to you all. On behalf the Council and Management of Unisa, it is my pleasure to bid you a very warm welcome to our celebration this evening – a fitting finale to intense, week-long programme on Research and Innovation at the University of South Africa.

The theme of our 2016 Research and Innovation week has been provocative, yet timely: *Researching transformation; Transforming Research*. I believe that Unisa has demonstrated over the course of this week that we are serious – and excited – about transformation in pursuit of growth and development and the role that research can and must play to that end. Unisa aims to advance excellent research and innovative solutions that address important national and global questions, and contribute to the economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being of South Africa and the African Continent. Unisa's geographical reach - nationally and on the continent – and its high public visibility provide significant opportunities to work alongside global and continental peers, government researchers and the policy-makers who initiate and guide national research initiatives in government departments and science councils.

Our Research, Postgraduate Studies, Innovation and Commercialisation Portfolio, is focused on strengthening our

university towards becoming a leading provider of postgraduate programs on the Continent. They provide a space where innovative thinkers flourish; and the good news is that they reward innovative ideas. Driven by a desire to both explore new worlds and to apply new ideas to real-world problems, research at Unisa is not conducted only by academics and graduate students. Research opportunities are also provided for professional and administrative staff, making research a truly university-wide enterprise. Our commitment to advancing women in research, and especially black women, is a matter of pride and is bearing fantastic results.

Fundamental to our approach is an abiding commitment to excellence and support for our early career researchers, emerging research leaders and researchers from designated groups. We have a profound belief that it is the right thing to do if we are to meet and overcome the challenges posed by our developmental state, and the imperative for genuine and lasting transformation. And if our long list of awardees and newly rated researchers is anything to go by, we are succeeding in our research strategy and mission.

However, we need to adopt a pragmatic approach to research and innovation that is calculated to ensure its relevance, as well as the judicious disbursement of the funds that have been

entrusted to us. Globally one discerns a growing trend towards *targeted* or *niche* research, whose aim is aligned to national developmental agendas. This is very likely as a consequence of the global economic squeeze and the pressure being placed on Universities in particular, to do more with less.

Furthermore as current events demonstrate so starkly, South African higher education finds itself in the midst of ongoing, deep structural socio-economic and political challenges, all of which are happening within an urgent and relentless push and drive to visible and fundamental transformation. It is long overdue and while we might decry some of the methods and agendas that have manifested themselves in recent weeks, when it comes to Research and Innovation it is only appropriate that we should be asking about the relevance of our research to our society, our country, our continent and the world that we all inhabit. Is it - can it be - a quality force for transformation? Are we confident of the relevance of our research to our respective developmental agendas?

Our research agenda should also be cognizant of the continental development agenda which is currently articulated in the Africa Agenda 2063. Unisa's historic MoU with the African Union Commission, and its profile as a key participant in the Continental developmental agenda, has given rise to research

and innovation expectations that will have to be thoughtfully considered and managed. Our membership of BRICS has for example, opened up many valuable collaborative research opportunities, and since the partnership was launched we have been engaged in a number of very exciting, mutually beneficial projects.

The challenge for universities and researchers today, I would suggest, is to find the optimal balance between research that accommodates the entire spectrum of scholarship, which adds to the body of knowledge, but which may *not* foster national development *per se*, and research that fosters the national agenda.

Many institutions the world over still find themselves with curricula that perpetuate outmoded disciplinary, pedagogical and research traditions and practices, whereas in fact, in many cases, real world problems require trans-disciplinary approaches. At Unisa we have taken deliberate steps to accommodate transdisciplinary research, in acknowledgement of that real-world paradigm. Transdisciplinarity in the manner which Cheikh Anta Diop practiced, offers rich possibilities for intellectual research and dialogue on Africa.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nabudere, *Cheikh Anta Diop*, 24.

When one considers that such eminent scholars as Kwame Anthony Appiah, Achille Mbembe, Dismas Masolo, Jean Omaroff, John Comaroff, Elias Bongmba, James Cochrane, and Paul Zeleza, have also studied Africa from interdisciplinary perspectives<sup>2</sup> then one begins to appreciate the value of this kind of research for Africans and for Africa.

In addition, while we take seriously the assertion in the new White Paper on Post-Secondary Education and Training (2013) that all higher education institutions should conduct research, this is done cognizant of the concomitant call for collaboration and the optimal leveraging of our resources. Research and innovation in South Africa today demand broader participation; they must become part of the societies that we serve. We need simultaneously to innovate, *and* conduct research that will make a concrete, measurable contribution to our development as a people, nation and continent.

Much of our research is publicly funded, and given our developmental challenges and the overarching imperative to develop an African expression in the generation of all new knowledge, we do have a moral obligation and indeed, responsibility, to utilise our funding for research that will

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<sup>2</sup> Elias K. Bongmba, *The Dialectics of Transformation in Africa* (New York, n.y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

contribute meaningfully to the amelioration of our situation.

“Examples from the Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs) and from other emerging nations such as Brazil, China and India, where sustained economic growth have been achieved, indicate a strong determination to build indigenous science and technology capacities. It is evident from their R&D expenditures and the number of researchers per million inhabitants. The NICs spend US\$66 per inhabitant while China spends \$17, India \$11 and Africa \$6. Sub-Saharan Africa has 113 researchers per million populations compared to China’s 454, India’s 151 and NICs’ 595. We should have these figures in mind as we chart visions and dreams of industrialization by 2010, 2020 etc.”<sup>3</sup>

*The Joint science academies’ statement: Science and technology for African development asserts:*

“African countries must be able to develop, adapt and exploit scientific and technological solutions appropriate to their specific needs, otherwise they risk becoming ever more dependent on advice and assistance from the developed world.....*Without embedding science, technology and innovation in development we fear that ambitions for Africa will fail.*”

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3. <http://www.interacademies.net/File.aspx?id=6431>

At Unisa, under the very able leadership of Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, we most certainly continue to *embed science, technology and innovation in development* towards the advancement of social and economic empowerment.

Tonight, after a week of showcasing Unisa's research and innovation programme, we have gathered to honour our brightest and best for their professionalism, their consistent dedication to research and innovation and the demonstrable success that they have achieved.

I am just so proud to note the year-on-year increases in our research outputs and our rated researchers. If I am correct this is the biggest number at Unisa to date? Well done to you all, for your dedication and your commitment to your disciplines. It is not easy conducting research while teaching. It requires of you to go the extra mile – and this is often at the expense of those at home. Thank you for your dedication, your professionalism and your sacrifice. We are honoured to acknowledge your efforts and achievements tonight. We salute you, congratulate you and share in your pleasure and pride.

I thank you