



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

**WELCOME AND OPENING ADDRESS: LAUNCH OF THE RESERCH AND
INNOVATION WEEK**

29 February – 4 March 2016

“Researching Transformation: Transforming Research”

- Madame Programme Director, Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng
- Our distinguished panelists, guests speakers and presenters:
 - Prof Malegapuru Makgoba, former Vice Chancellor of the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal
 - Professor Wim de Villiers, Vice Chancellor of Stellenbosch University

- Professor Sizwe Mabizela, Vice Chancellor of Rhodes University
 - Professor Adam Habib, Vice Chancellor of The University of the Witwatersrand
 - Dr Lunga Mantashe, University of Fort Hare, PASMA
 - Mr Lukhona Mnguni of the KZN SRC
 - Mr Mpho Morolane, President of the EFF National Student Command
 - Ms Shaeera Kalia of the Muslim Students Association
 - Mr Mduduzi Mabuza, President of Unisa's NSRC
 - Prof JMS Lubuma, Dean of Agricultural Sciences, University of Pretoria
 - Ms MP Matsoso, Director General: Department of Health, RSA
- Members of Council here present
 - Members of executive and extended management here present
 - Colleagues from sister institutions
 - Unisa academic and non-academic staff
 - Students
 - Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

A very warm welcome to Unisa's annual Research and Innovation week. This year we celebrate our 5th R & I week and I can say with confidence

and pride, that this is an event that continues to grow both in stature and content.

Our theme for the research week is “Researching Transformation: Transforming Research” – a timely and quite provocative theme that will no doubt elicit diverse inputs – all of which I trust, will contribute to a culture and spirit of research, creative intellectual curiosity and innovation – not to mention a concomitant increase in research outputs!

We are truly privileged to have as guest speakers, presenters and contributors a veritable *who’s who* in the field of Research and Innovation in our country and further afield. Our practice of including a broad range of R&I stakeholders is particularly apposite at a time when less “traditional” higher education stakeholders and voices are also claiming their space in the sector and making their contributions in all fields of academic endeavour. In the course of this week these diverse voices will be heard and their contributions discussed and debated in true academic tradition, within the context of exploring the concepts of research and transformation in their varied and interesting forms. I must therefore congratulate Prof Mamokgethi Phakeng and our colleagues in the Portfolio Research, Post-graduate Studies, Innovation and Commercialisation, for putting together a comprehensive

programme that is jam-packed with exciting and innovative discussion and events! And I am told that a number of college activities have been planned for the rest of the month as well.

Ladies and gentlemen, Unisa is vigorously engaged in establishing the university as a research institution where innovative thinkers can flourish and innovative ideas are rewarded. We are well on our way to being one of the leading providers of post graduate programmes in Africa, and our Science Campus at Florida, with its state-of-the-art facilities, is attracting a lot of very positive interest and engagement from a broad representation of higher education and research practitioners. Quite uniquely one suspects, at Unisa research is not only conducted by academics and post grad students; our professional and administrative staff are also encouraged and incentivized to conduct research. The research conducted by these colleagues has added depth and richness to the body of research knowledge at Unisa and shaped our thinking on the somewhat limiting boundaries of traditional research spaces – towards greater inclusivity. We are very proud of that.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, the evolution of human civilization has been informed and shaped by human curiosity. Our *need to know* has always overridden the fear of the unknown, and our

creative and innovative spirits have equally ensured that much of what we have learnt has been translated into human advancement and prosperity. At a time when the term “*the 4th Industrial Revolution*” and all that it encompasses is gaining traction globally, we here on this furthestmost tip of Africa are engaged in our own battles for transformation, growth and development – our own struggle for advancement and prosperity - which may or may not necessarily resonate with the dynamics of the 4th Industrial Revolution. We have learnt, and we continue to learn that while “no man or woman is an island,” we are called to work within our own contexts, sometimes advancing research and innovation imperatives which may well be contrary to those in the global arena. We see this in our five exciting themes which get to the very nub of the challenges confronting us as researchers, innovators and academics - right here and right now - and which are likely to continue into the future.

This is particularly pertinent in terms of the current debates on knowledge hegemonies, and their ongoing influence and domination of our higher education environment and practices, especially our research practices. In engaging in the debates we will be adding to a process of self-discovery and self-determination around issues that go to the very soul of what it means to be African.

As African researchers we are enjoined, along with our global peers, to examine questions of “conscience”, “ethics,” “soul” and impact in our deliberations. These are the fundamental underpinnings of research and innovation that on the one hand, provide an acknowledged and tested ethical framework for researchers, and on the other hand, the assurance of quality and rigour. In shaping our own research paradigms and epistemologies we should therefore be mindful not to “throw the baby out with the bathwater” lest we harm that which we have already achieved at such cost.

Our country is faced with a number of deep structural socio-economic and political challenges. The recent budget speech made that abundantly clear! We are all called to make sacrifices and to manage our resources with foresight, efficiency and integrity. There can be no denying that in this context we do not have the luxury of research for personal edification alone. We need to ensure that our research is relevant to a greater purpose and agenda of transformation and development. We need to ask the question: “Do we as research institutions, have coherent and comprehensive research agendas that seek to address our challenges while engendering a competitive edge in the field?”

It is common cause that we cannot “go it alone” when it comes to research and innovation. Collaborations, partnerships, and agreements at micro, meso and macro levels are the order of the day, aimed at ensuring the optimal leveraging of facilities and capacities. Here too Unisa has made great strides, in particular with our BRICS colleagues, and we intend building on those relationships as we roll out our Research and Innovation strategy. Whilst *blue sky* research will always be an integral part of scholarship and intellectual enterprise, we must begin to ask difficult questions about the application and impact of our research in a practical sense, and the balance that needs to be maintained between the striving for knowledge for knowledge’s sake, and those areas which may have beneficial and impactful application to the challenges of today.

Universities have always been branded as ivory towers, far removed from the realities of the societies that they serve, and we are thus called to demonstrate unequivocally that this is in fact not the case. Research and Innovation must be demystified to allow for broader participation, and knowledge institutions must take bold and concrete steps to influence the developmental and policy agenda for the good of the society and the world.

In their book entitled “Education, Economy, and Society” Salim Vally and Enver Motala argue that university should be understood as doing more than just producing graduates for the market. Universities are tasked with producing responsive and responsible citizens: critical thinkers. We will be facing that challenge head on as we tackle the following issues this week:

- [The] Fall and rise of public higher education: Vice chancellors and students speak
- Is Decolonial Theory the answer to transformation and Africanisation
- Co-authoring with students – power and ethics
- ODeL: Futures research and distance education: 2030 scenario
- The great race debate

You know, the saying usually goes: “There is *something for everyone* in this programme”. Given the current dynamics in the country, I would like to believe *everything* in this programme will be of interest to *everybody!*

The University of South Africa remains committed to being “The African University Shaping Futures in the Service of Humanity,” and to contributing, along with its sister institutions in South Africa, in Africa and the world in the ultimate search for answers and solutions facing humanity in the 21st century.

I wish you successful, thought provoking and inspiring engagements during this week as we celebrate Research and Innovation at Unisa.

I thank you.