



Office of the Principal and Vice Chancellor

Prof Mandla Makhanya

Principal and Vice Chancellor of UNISA

Welcome remarks

Unisa Founders Lecture

***Theme “Understanding and Institutionalising Decolonisation
for Inclusive Higher Education in South Africa.”***

15 August 2017

Senate Hall, Unisa



Programme Director and governance specialist at the Unisa School of Governance, Dumisani Hlophe



Our keynote Speaker and a seasoned leader in the South African higher education sector, Professor Muxe Nkondo



Panellists, Professor Puleng Segalo and Professor Vuyisile Msila



Vice-Principal: Teaching, Learning, Community
Engagement and Student Support, Prof Gugu Moche



Our special guests



Academic and administrative staff



Student leadership and students



Distinguished audience



Ladies and gentlemen

I extend a warm welcome to you all in the spirit of Ubuntu. Feel at home and be part of Unisa family as you settle down to absorb the heavy dose of an intellectual input from a distinguished leader of the South African higher education sector who is also a seasoned veteran of the struggles for transformation in South African universities.

When the Founders Lecture was conceived and launched fourteen years ago it was the time of many important developments in the South African institutions of higher learning: university mergers, closure of some teaching, agricultural and nursing colleges as well as efforts to transform these institutions in a manner that would remove vestiges of colonialism and apartheid. This lecture was designed to help us reflect on the nature and role of the institutions of higher education with the aim of making well-informed interventions and be aligned with the

trends in the sector or even be trailblazers or pathfinders. In the last two years we have witnessed the proverbial stirring of the higher education or more specifically the public university sector as waves of protests and demands for transformation, swept across the length and breadth of this country. Similar protests in various forms have been witnessed in universities abroad. More recently Unisa has reinvigorated its transformation efforts. We have established a Change Management Unit, developed a concept document articulating what an African university is, launched a Leading Change Campaign and we have organised various workshops and forums focusing on transformation. These are parts of the hive of activities that are aimed at reinforcing and sustaining impactful transformation in this institution. This Founders Lecture could not have come at an appropriate moment in the life of this institution when discourse on the character of our transformation is permeating every sphere of our institution. There seems to be a general consensus, at least at face value, on the need for transformation. Sometimes there seems to be contestations on the grammar for transformation. A forum such as the Founders Lecture provides us with a perfect intellectual space for reflection on these critical issues. An unsuspecting observer would be forgiven for assuming that transformation should come naturally and be embraced in the knowledge institutions such as universities as these after all often

write about organizational changes and need for social justice but they, in reality, offer one of the stiffest and well-refined subtle forms of resistance to transformation. The Director General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova writes that:

“There is no more powerful transformative force than education- to promote human rights and dignity, to eradicate poverty and deepen sustainability, to build a better future for all, founded on equal rights and social justice, respect for cultural diversity, and international solidarity and shared responsibility, all of which are fundamental aspects of our common humanity.”(Unesco 2015, 4)

The ideal transformative education described above assumes that education and education institutions are transformed and ready to perform this role whereas many post-colonial and post- apartheid institutions need to transform to ascend to this ideal form and optimally fulfil their mandate or else they will be institutions of alienation and indignity for those not afforded justice that is grounded in their current and past experiences.

If we are to lay a claim to the assertion that the 21st Century will be the African century, if we are to give the true meaning to the Africa rising narrative, if we are to realize the AU Agenda 2063, if we are to make

real the promises of our constitutional democracy and achieve the goals of the National Development Plan 2030 then our universities will have to be reconfigured and recalibrated to be fit for a meaningful contribution as knowledge institutions producing human resources of innovative leaders and active participants of the smart economies of the 4th industrial revolution. Going back in history Africa has occupied this premium position in the world when the Egyptian University of Alexandria and Timbuktu in Mali were the magnetic centres of global knowledge. We have witnessed intellectual giants such as Cheik Ante Diop, Walter Rodney, Chancellor Williams, among others, trying to document Africa's great contributions to human civilizations and yet in our dominant narratives we only hear of Plato and Aristotle, William Shakespeare and William Wordsworth if not Jane Austen as though African experience had been nullified. In the current discourse we should also guide against a narrative that exclusively focuses on humanities and social sciences as though Africa has little to offer in science and engineering whereas our forebears had made great impact which now has been relegated into footnotes of human intellectual contributions.

The lecture tonight ought to be a launching pad for more vigorous engagements on the role of the university in our times and the

trajectory of our envisaged transformation programme. Let us rise to the challenge and get inspiration from the great African universities such as Alexandria and Timbuktu, Makerere and Dar es Salaam.

Let me take time to invite everyone here and those beyond this hall to participate in this discourse on transformation with the aim of impactful changes and not debate for the sake of debate.

I thank you

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