



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

STAFF ASSEMBLY: SCIENCE CAMPUS, FLORIDA

THAMSANQA KAMBULE AUDITORIUM

1ST FLOOR GJ GERWEL BUILDING

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Good morning and a very warm welcome to you all. It is always good to visit this very exciting and innovative campus, which in a concrete sense, in my view, reflects the innovation, excitement and future that we aspire to as the University of South Africa.

At our academic opening at the beginning of this year, it was announced that I had been granted a second term of office by the

university Council. You will appreciate that this is a significant honour and one which I accepted with deep humility and with the same commitment to service to our students and our country, as that which underpinned my inauguration as Vice Chancellor of Unisa on 16 February 2011. The vision that I held for the role of Unisa in higher education, was clearly spelt out in my inaugural address, when I stated:

“In the fullest and truest sense therefore, higher education is essential in deepening knowledge and expanding people’s horizons and efforts to be fully human. *It enables and nurtures learning and creativity and the ability to live and relate well with others, in harmony with creation. It is central to socio-economic development, and it is invaluable for the formation of human and moral agency of peoples and societies.* Higher education is without doubt, fundamental and integral to the development of all societies and peoples. “ⁱ

Colleagues, as I thought about embarking on a second term of office I reflected back on Unisa’s growth and development in the past five years and I asked myself the question: “How far have we come along the road to realising the vision that I espoused five years ago?”

Well, if one goes back and reads my inaugural address, then I must say that we have made very real progress on a number of the challenges that needed to be addressed towards the institution that we all aspire to. I asked: “..... what are the challenges, prospects and or opportunities that UNISA faces today, which we need to attend to? How do we position UNISA as an ODL higher education institution, for success? For UNISA to claim that it aspires to be *the* African university in the service of humanity in the 21st century, it will need to address challenges that include:

- Developing Human Capital and Improving African Intellectual Output
- Promoting Infrastructural Deliverability
- New Strategies for Advancing ODL on the Continent
- ICTs and ODL
- Our Research Agenda.”¹

Well I think we can tick a few of those boxes.

- We now have a very vibrant research and innovation agenda, including increased research outputs and very significant improvements in our infrastructure – look about you!
- Similarly we have a dynamic stakeholder engagement agenda that is consonant with our aim to be an integral part of, and player in, national and continental education development and to leverage

¹ Prof MS Makhanya. Inaugural Address. 11 February 2011.

and maximise all available resources to that end. For example, last year, we entered into some very strategic partnerships, including with the African Union, all of which are firmly aligned with our vision to be a truly African university shaping futures in the service of humanity.

- Insofar as advancing ODL on the *Continent* is concerned, I think we can say that we have gone beyond that to include the *world*. If ever we needed proof of that, we need look no further than the fact that we will be hosting the 26th World ICDE Conference in October, together with the SCOP and UNESCO ODL policy meetings – all of which are calculated to shape and inform global ODeL into the future. This is a first for the African Continent. On my travels it has been confirmed over and over that Unisa is a much sought-after partner in ODeL and not only in terms of its business model, but also because of the experience and reputation that it has accrued over more than 142 years; its quality regime; and its innovative and creative approach to ODeL. I can assure you that this is something that is quite unique – and we are the envy of many.
- We have also embarked on a systematic infrastructure development plan which is aimed at realising our strategic agenda and growing the university to its full potential. This is an ongoing process that is being rolled out in line with the availability of resources.

Sustainability must, and does, inform the stewardship of our resources. If we do not guard against wasteful expenditure then wonderful facilities such as this very campus, will not be available for the generation to come.

- Our ICT infrastructure programme remains a very complex process that is being rolled out incrementally and in line with the implementation plan. It will take some years to implement fully, but we have realised that this core function is one which cannot be dealt with in a superficial manner. Progress must be solid and sustainable.

All that we do must happen within the context of our transforming higher education sector and system. You will know that in the space of one short year, we have witnessed a fundamental transformation in the higher education sector, which has materially impacted and influenced Unisa's activities and trajectory. Just last week the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Minister Blade Nzimande formally welcomed the TVET sector into the higher education fold. This has some significant implications for us as a university and if we intend to remain a key, efficient and effect role player in the system, we must ensure that we are an agile, quality, high performance institution.

2015 also marks the final year of our strategic plan – Unisa 2013–2015: Towards a High Performance University. The 2016–2030 strategy document has been approved by Council. In line with the national and organizational trajectory sketched above, it will come as no surprise to learn that Council has approved three strategic goals for this period:

GOAL 1: Towards becoming a leading, ODeL, comprehensive university in teaching, learning, research, innovation and community engagement based on scholarship.

GOAL 2: To craft and embed an agile, innovative, sustainable and efficient operational environment.

GOAL 3: Harness ICT's to support the transformation of the core business to enable high performance, service and quality to all its communities.

While these goals may seem familiar, I assure you that their conceptualization and articulation are very much in line with, and cognizant of, a fundamentally different higher education environment, as well as our vision to be the African University, *shaping futures* in the service of humanity. (which is the new Vision for Unisa approved by Council for the 2016– 2030 Strategic Plan.) The first strategic phase, namely 2016 to 2020, is now nearing completion in respect of its

objectives and actions, and these should be finalized and signed off shortly.

A revised institutional structure is also awaiting final approval from Council and this too will be implemented from the beginning of next year. So this year finds us at a critical juncture of both the old and the new and we have a lot of hard work ahead to ensure a seamless transition into the new strategic phase. I want to urge all Unisans to become actively involved and participate energetically and with unwavering commitment to the demands that will be made upon us in 2015, never forgetting that all is done in the service of our most important stakeholders – our students.

What is required from each of us is actually very simple – *focus on the vision and make it happen!* However, we will only make it happen by going the extra mile where this is required, and ensuring the highest order of service delivery to *all* of our stakeholders – including one another, *all of the time!* We are all called on to be dedicated servants of the people, for the people; this of course, is very much in line with our ethos of servant leadership and our 11 Cs plus 1. However, let me be clear. None of this will happen until we have an optimally efficient operational environment.

That dedication, colleagues, must take the form of diligence in service. And I know you may be thinking “Oh no, not service again!” So let me say this very clearly, While most staff go above and beyond the call of duty there remains at Unisa a cohort of staff who choose to demonstrate their discontent through the withholding of their labour or even the “sabotaging” of the very projects and activities that are calculated to advance the best interest of both staff and students. And our students continue to suffer. The service we are providing to our students is to say the least – embarrassing.

I am continually dismayed by the ongoing flood of complaints from students -mostly justified- which speak in the main, to innocuous administrative queries that are simply ignored. I can tell you that just last week I had a student whose final plea in effect, said the following: “I have exhausted every single avenue including writing to the Minister and the President. If I don’t get a response now, I will take my life. I really don’t know what else to do. Unisa is holding my entire future to ransom.” What was so painful colleagues, was that the student had fulfilled all of the requirements for her degree. All she wanted to know, was if she would be graduating and if so, when and where. No one had let her know, or bothered to answer her many emails, until her final desperate email to me.

Actually, I find that disgusting. We are supposed to be shaping futures and not destroying them. Our complete lack of caring for our students is driving some of them to depression and frustration. It is simply intolerable. And inasmuch as we may be making wonderful progress on the challenges I identified 5 years ago, we continue to falter and fail when it comes to our service delivery. Unisa will never realise its full potential as long as we have people who just don't care; yet who ironically, demand to be treated with consideration which they are not prepared to extend to our students.

Colleagues I am sure that I don't need to add that if we *all* worked a full working day (and more where necessary) institutional efficiency would rise dramatically as would our levels of service delivery and successful scholarship. Our monitoring of ICT usage indicates for example, that many staff spend inordinate amounts of time on the social media and the internet, during office hours. We all need to manage our time more thoughtfully. Much of that commitment would involve an equally fundamental commitment to integrity, ethics and good governance – all of which have now become a fundamental part of higher education delivery. We are aware that governance and compliance are not popular, but let me assure you, as management and Council we will not

waver on the need for transparent governance and compliance in all of its forms. It is quite simply, *the right thing to do*.

Our new strategy 2016-2030 has at its heart, quality teaching and learning, and the deliberate construction of an operational environment that will facilitate that. We must place our students and their success at the centre of all that we do, ensuring a quality, relevant pedagogical model and framework that will promote increased success and throughput rates, and quality graduates whose skills, ethics and abilities are entirely consonant with workplace requirements.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude by thanking staff, students and organised labour for their respective contributions to this university. Ours is a relationship that is maturing as we begin to appreciate more fully our various roles and responsibilities at Unisa, and the very real challenges that we face and which impact on us all. I trust that the spirit of constructive engagement will grow from strength-to-strength this year.

“I want to end this address by quoting extensively, the words of one of the leading African intellectuals of our time, Tiyambe Paul Zeleza. He articulates the dreams of so many in regard to African universities, when he says:

I dream of truly decolonised, democratized, and decentralized African universities that are autonomous yet accountable, committed to the pursuit of intellectual excellence yet rooted in their communities, effectively managed internally yet working closely with all stakeholders; universities that are Africanised in their staffing, values, pedagogy, epistemologies, and instructional languages yet are capable of competing globally, contributing to the global pool of knowledge, and responding quickly and effectively to global changes and emerging local needs; universities that attract students and faculty from across the continent and the diasporas, and that participate in extensive academic exchanges with universities in other parts of the world; universities that provide inclusive education , where access is open regardless of physical or class disabilities or various cultural and social affiliations ; universities with ample and up to-date learning facilities, instructional technologies , and well equipped libraries and laboratories, manageable student teacher ratios, that provide multiple entry and exit points as well as individual and group enrolments for lifelong flexible learning; universities with vibrant communities of scholars where public seminars , lecture and debate flourish, research and publishing are valued

... universities where gender is mainstreamed, curricular are innovative and not trapped in the old parochial disciplinary divisions or the current faddish interdisciplinary fields and which produce students who are literate in the major fields of knowledge, innovative and entrepreneurial , as well as critical thinkers and citizens; universities where the professors are highly trained and motivated and productive but also include practitioners' from other sectors; universities, in short , that are the spearhead for the African renaissance.²”

How are we faring?

I would like to believe that the fact that we have so many colleagues in attendance this morning speaks to a university that *is* engaged and that understands that if we intend to grow and develop as an institution, then we need to commit ourselves afresh to the principles of selflessness, integrity and determination that enabled all of us to be here today. As so I call upon each and every one of you to move forward with confidence and an abiding commitment to *Social Justice and Fairness* and *Excellence with Integrity*, and most importantly, to

² Zeleza, Tiyambe Paul 2006 Critical Issues in Higher Education and Intellectual Developments in Africa Unpublished Paper—A paper read at the University of South Africa’s Founder’s Lecture, Senate Hall, August 7th 2006.

Service as we pursue our collective vision for this university and our country.

I thank you.

ⁱ Prof MS Makhanya . Inaugural address. 16 February 2011. University of South Africa.