

Unisa – a vehicle for social transformation

Unisa is a fully engaged university strongly rooted in its mission to support national development and social justice. At its 10th Annual Nelson Mandela Commemoration Day held on 31 July 2019, the Division Community Engagement and Outreach drove the discourse that higher education, in partnership with communities, can make a valuable contribution to deepen the legacy and vision of Nelson Mandela and produce a society that is just, caring and transformed.



Prof. Mandla Makhanya (Principal and VC) sharing some of Mandela's values.

In his address, Professor Mandla Makhanya, Principal and Vice-Chancellor (VC) said that Unisians must be careful not to supplant reflection on Mandela's legacy and values by narrowly focusing on volunteering and community service. "The time has come that we go beyond that," said the VC. "We ought to revisit the main aim, reflecting and striving to live Mandela's legacy and values."

Sharing some of Mandela's values, the VC said that Madiba's commitment to freedom and justice illustrated a character that is found in few men and women who do not place their interests above those of ordinary people. "He was satisfied with having enough," said the VC. "His focus was on raising funds and establishing a foundation that would and continues to benefit the poor and vulnerable."

The VC urged that the legacy and values espoused by Mandela should serve as a call to all to examine what we will in turn leave behind for generations to come when compared to what

Mandela left behind. “Universities must never shy away from advocating for, and where possible advancing, the legacy of Mandela,” he concluded.

The commemoration event was an opportunity for Unisa to showcase the community engagement efforts of colleges. “Across the colleges, we have over 100 community engagement projects at Unisa”, said Dr Genevieve James, Deputy Director: Community Engagement. Speaking about the dynamic role of higher education in national and continental development, she said that Unisa is an engaged university. “We actively develop strong relationships with communities for the improvement of life for community members, while advancing and enhancing scholarship,” said James.

The Colleges of Law, Science, Engineering and Technology, Human Sciences, Accounting Sciences and Education shared the impact of their community engagement efforts. James said that through Unisa’s community engagement projects the institution acts to defuse the liberating and life-giving principles and practices of social justice. “All registered community engagement projects at Unisa are linked to specific national and international development goals, such as the National Development Plan 2030, Agenda 2063 – The Africa We Want, and Sustainable Development Goals, among others,” she said.

At this special event, academics across colleges and support department staff were congratulated for their participation in Unisa’s Chance 2 Advance programme, which last year, crossed over the 100 000 mark in attendance since its inception. James explained: “The programme seeks to liberate, democratise and mobilise knowledge out of the university to create access for South African communities to cutting edge, current and socially transformative knowledge while concurrently mobilising community knowledge into the university to transform, enrich and revitalise scholarship”.

This is an effort that the VC applauds. “We should not be limited to celebrating just one day or 67 minutes. Ours should be a daily drive to live up to the higher ideals, legacy and values that Madiba set for us,” he said.

** By Tshimangadzo Mphaphuli, Senior Journalist, Department of Institutional Advancement*