

Unisa statement on The Citizen article about the acquisition of the Unisa airport

Approved for public release
27 March 2026

The University of South Africa (Unisa) takes note of the article published by The Citizen newspaper today (Friday, 27 March 2027) titled “*Unisa airport claim falls flat on closer look*”.

The university finds the angle of the article by the journalist, Mr Siphon Mabena unfortunate, regrettable and bordering on pettiness. Mr Mabena, seemingly disappointed to find that the facility does actually exist, opted to take the cowardly route of attempting to belittle and besmirch what is otherwise an unprecedented and praiseworthy achievement by an institution of higher learning on the African continent.

It is equally regrettable that Mr Mabena declined an invitation to attend the media briefing where the announcement about the airport acquisition was made. This would have afforded him the opportunity to engage directly with the facts and context.

Here are the facts for the benefit of all stakeholders and to reiterate the message already communicated to Mr Mabena in response to his media enquiry:

- Unisa has indeed acquired an airport facility on the outskirts of Pretoria East, in Tshwane. By Mr Mabena’s own admission, the previous owners confirmed to him that the facility has already been transferred to Unisa.



- Unisa is indeed the first institution of higher learning on the African continent to acquire an airport facility.
- The acquisition of the airport facility indeed forms part of the broader strategic programme to activate one of Unisa's ten catalytic niche areas, namely Aviation and Aeronautic Studies.
- This primarily means that the facility will serve as a platform for practical training for students enrolled in Aviation and Aeronautic studies. To this end, the university is finalising all the modalities, requirements (including infrastructure) and business processes associated with operating an airport facility for learning purposes.
- The airport facility is primarily for learning purposes and will therefore not be the size of a normal commercial airport. Mr Mabena's expectation to see a facility the size of an OR Tambo Airport was clearly a figment of his own imagination.
- Any third-stream income opportunities emanating from the airport acquisition will be fully pursued.
- The university reiterates the position that once the modalities, requirements and processes associated with the acquisition have been finalised, the full details will be shared with all stakeholders.

“We reiterate our disappointment in the angle and thrust of Mr Mabena's article, despite the obvious achievement and huge potential linked to this acquisition by Unisa. We had expected a journalist of his experience to look at this through an analytic and less-shallow lens. He has disappointed us greatly. We, however, remain focused on the mission to catapult Unisa to even greater heights. No amount of naysaying and uninformed attacks will deter us”, said Professor BB Senokoane, Unisa Spokesperson.

/Ends.

ISSUED BY UNISA MEDIA AFFAIRS

