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MR S SIMELANE, CHAIRPERSON OF COUNCIL
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA
CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE
145 YEARS UNISA BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION
ZK MATTHEWS GREAT HALL, MUCKLENEUK CAMPUS
4 JULY 2018

The African University shaping futures in the service of humanity

Thank you Programme Director

Distinguished guests, ladies and Gentlemen

It is on occasions like this one, when an institution turns 145 years of existence, that we who are now part of it feel very proud that we are indeed steering a tested academic and intellectual formation, which continues to breathe, to live, to shape futures, and provide service to humanity. It is indeed a humbling yet edifying experience to be part of 145 Years UNISA Birthday Celebrations.

It is also humbling to note the significance of our 145th birthday as it coincides with the centenary of the birth of Nelson Mandela; a Unisa Alumni. In honouring Madiba's life and legacy, and given our rootedness in South Africa and the African continent, we want to celebrate 145 years by reiterating the message of Nelson Mandela Day, that 'no matter how small your action,' celebrate by 'changing the world for the better, just as Nelson Mandela did every day.'

There is no doubt in my mind that this 145 milestone that UNISA is celebrating today is a reflection of its emergence, trials, tribulations, triumphs and resiliencies.

UNISA is part of this long walk of the idea of a university in general. I must underscore that universities are part of those very important human-made institutions that are always under spotlights and critiques while no-one ever wished they never existed. Universities like all great and important human-made institutions are also always open to the risks of 'capture' by various forces—ranging from capital to the state. Society and students also want to 'capture' Universities.

Thus, while the university has to be responsive to demands of diverse stakeholders, it also has to avoid acting like a weather van—which religiously responds to each and every wind blowing. There are times, when universities have to lead in public discourse based on accumulation

of cutting-edge research while remaining obedient to its diverse constituencies.

It was indeed in that spirit that UNISA committed itself to fulfil the people's demands for an open-gated institution of higher learning, which we today call Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL). For those that the apartheid regime deemed to be dangerous and to be terrorists and decided to incarcerate in such notorious institutions as the Robben Island—UNISA embraced them as students and human beings and provided for their thirst for knowledge and education. Let us congratulate UNISA for this sterling job. We pledge to continue to be a caring, responsive and indeed of service to humanity.

UNISA is indeed a mega university which is proud to be a home for over 350,000 students. We are proud to be the major player in increasing the objective of access to more students. We have seen pleasing growth in the range and demographics of our student base. We continue to attract a growing number of students emerging from secondary education and looking for affordable and accessible tertiary education. In addition, we have seen an increase in the number of students who are unemployed and are in search of better education opportunities. This paves the way for both UNISA and our Government to consider the challenge that this poses.

As Council, working closely with Senate and UNISA Management, we endeavour to let this mega institution of higher learning to live and live well while delivering on its mandates. We pledge to ensure that:

- Its intellectual and academic project is top class and relevant;
- Its students have the best service delivery experience and that they are perpetually proud of being at UNISA;
- It is dynamic and always auto-critiquing itself for purposes of transformation, innovation and openness to exploration of new ways of knowing, new conception of being and new understandings of power and authority.

Minister, I must say that we at UNISA take the current challenges rocking the higher education sector in South Africa seriously but not in an apocalyptic fashion so as to declare the end of the university.

Not at all, we take it as a challenge to which we are measured whether we could rise adequately to it and we embrace it as an opportunity to complete the reinvention of our glorious institution.

We are an institution which has dedicated itself to be truly African in ethos while globally competitive. We might have been the first institution of higher education here in South Africa that was never afraid of the resurgences of decolonization and Africanization. This is why we are proud to be the home for the most unique Annual Decoloniality Summer School

that pre-dates the Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall movements—because the questions of social justice always pre-occupied us.

In 2016, Unisa embarked on the Transformation process that culminated in a Council Transformation workshop in August 2017 which included all Unisa stakeholders. Transformation remains at the top of our agenda. We have drafted a plan that expresses UNISA's boldness, commitment and confidence in confronting our troubled past and uncertain futures. In doing all this we are emboldened by the knowledge that our Pan-African research centres and institutes inform our implementation of UNISA strategies, plans and policies.

There is no doubt in my mind that, if we forge common interests as a UNISA family to advance the knowledge project and improve service to our students, nothing can stop us. The 145years birthday celebration will allow us to commit ourselves once again to creating a culture of passion for what UNISA represents, and in the process create a university that is a high performance, service focused and people-centered institution.

Let me once again take this opportunity to acknowledge the previous leadership of this institution (Council members, chancellors, and Vice chancellors) as well as the current leadership for doing such a sterling job. The systems and processes could not have been built overnight.

Let me end by reiterating UNISA Vice-Chancellor's words at the Official Opening of the 2018 Academic Year in February where he declared that: "2018 is our year of rigorous implementation of our agreed plans and policies." And I indeed agree with the VC. On behalf of all 'Unisans' and all the stakeholders here present, join me in wishing UNISA a happy 145 years' birthday!

Thank you