



WELCOME ADDRESS

FEROZA ADAM MEMORIAL LECTURE

PROFESSOR PULENG LENKABULA

PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR AT UNISA

FRIDAY 8 AUGUST 2025

KGORONG BUILDING

TABLE OF PRECEDENTS

Program Director, Dr Maureen Tong

Sign Language Interpreters

Ms Ngobile Mhlweni & Ms Nonhlanhla Sikhakhane

Prof Puleng LenkaBula, Principal and Vice Chancellor of Unisa

Members of the University Executive and Extended Management

Our eminent Keynote Speaker, Ms Cheryl Carolus - Executive

Chairperson of Peotona Group Holdings and Former South African High Commissioner to the United Kingdom

Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Former Chairperson of AU, Former Cabinet Minister and ANC NEC Member

Ambassador Thenjiwe Mtintso an Award recipient of 2025 OR Tambo Lifetime Achievement

Ms SK Motale, Councillor City of Tshwane

Prof Khanyisile Mbatha, Chairperson of Unisa Woman's Forum and all other members of the Unisa Women's Forum present

Members of South African Women in Dialogue and other guests from (SAWID)

Mr Waheed Adam, brother of our late Feroza Adam - joining us virtually

Dr Mmamajoro Phalatsi-Shilubana Postdoctoral Fellow, Research Institute for Theology and Religion, College of Human Sciences, UNISA

Our Discussants,

Rev Bafana Khumalo, Co-executive director, Co-founder and member of the SAWID Board of Trustee

Ms Yasmin Sooka, South Africa Women in Dialogue Representative and Executive Director of the International Truth and Justice Project

Ms Tania Nora Molapo, Chairperson, Unisa Student Representative Council, Tshwane Regional

Ms Karen Solomon, Author, writer, passionate leadership development practitioner, coach, mentor, teacher, community builder

Our nominees and nominators present

Our entertainers today

Greenside High School Dramatic Arts and Cultural Dancers

Mr Angelo Vaaltyn and Mr Kagiso Monyae

Other Members of the University Community who are present and who is joining us virtually.

Members of Media fraternal present

Our Esteemed Members of the Audience

Ladies and Gentlemen

Salutations : Khotsong, Lotšhani, Molweni, Sanibonani, Tameng, Matsheloni, Ha Bari, Avhuxeni

SPEECH

It is my singular honour to welcome members of the epistemic community to the University of South Africa (UNISA) as we gathered here Ladies and Gentlemen, Sisters and Brothers to celebrate one of the stalwarts of our liberation, Ms Feroza Adam. This celebration takes place as part of National Women's month. Last week Thursday 31 July was the Pan African Women's Day commemorating

the establishment of the Pan African Women's Organization (PAWO) on 31 July 1962.

Today is also an awards ceremony for UNISA women in various categories.

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge to women stalwarts of the liberation movement who are with us today. (To be confirmed)

We have amongst our midst **Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma**, who has held several leading roles before the dawn of our democracy and afterwards. She has served as a Cabinet Minister and as the Commissioner of the African Union. She continues to serve our country. (To be confirmed)

We also have amongst us, Ms Thenjiwe Mtintso, the former South African High Commissioner to Namibia. (To be confirmed)

Herstorical Significance of National Women's Day

The 1956 Women's march was not just a protest but a powerful demonstration of unity, purpose and strength. Women from diverse backgrounds and all corners of South Africa came together to stand against the injustices of apartheid. Their chant, titled "*Wathint'Abafazi Wathint'imbokodo*" which translates "You strike a woman, you strike a rock," became a resonant symbol of the resilience and power of women in the struggle for freedom.

The 1956 women struck at entrenched systems of patriarchy, racism and sexism. They did this against the backdrop of brutal crackdown by the apartheid police and security agencies. Ironically, that expectation that women must always be very strong like boulders, like *imbokodo* has now

placed an obligation to endure hardship, because they are *imbokodo*. Women leaders are measured against a much higher threshold than men.

Women in leadership is therefore always a contested terrain. It is exhausting, and often lonely, however quitting was never an option for me. [VC may add more here](#)

Honouring Ms Feroza Adam

The Feroza Adam Memorial lecture was initiated by the UNISA Institute for Gender Studies in 1994. It is now collaboratively organised annually by the Institute for Gender Studies and the UNISA Women's Forum (UWF) as well as SAWID.

Ms Feroza Adam's considerable personal power, ability to communicate, organise and speak with conviction in public, made her a force to be reckoned with, one who could hold her own in any context. She identified as a feminist and political activist with pride. She died tragically in a car accident on National Women's Day, 9th August 1994 shortly after becoming a member of South Africa's first democratically elected government. The ANC statement about Feroza said that she had been:

“a fierce opponent of apartheid and a tenacious fighter against gender discrimination a living embodiment of the struggle that brought a democratic government to this country. “

The theme of the Feroza Adam Memorial Lecture is: “HerStory: Navigating and Resisting Entrenched Change”

Today's theme is a befitting commemoration of Ms Feroza Adam, because indeed she was a fighter for change against an entrenched system of

discrimination that subjected women to unspeakable horrors, some of which still exists today.

When a woman takes leadership of an organization, that is often by itself a big change. Change management studies are rooted in the study of grief. The Kübler-Ross Change Curve, also known as the Kübler-Ross Model which pioneered the now well-known five stages of grief.

The reason is that when change happens, people often resist change and at the same time grieve the loss of what was familiar. Only those who wanted the change to happen are happy and quickly proceed to implement it.

In an organizational context, those who advocate for change are typically the new leaders of the organization who want growth, increase success and improve systems and processes. When Shareholders, management organization implement change they go against entrenched values, practices and processes.

Those who do not want the change to happen suffer a deep sense of grief of what is familiar. They may have been deeply invested in the status quo and the change may negatively affect their status, prestige or resources. They will therefore grieve the change and often respond in a negative manner.

The emotions associated with grief are denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. The grief could be caused by the death of a loved one, the end of a marriage or an intimate personal relationship, or chronic sickness or health condition that does is not curable.

Or it could be caused by resistance to women being in the helm, yes, patriarchy often causes people to grieve the fact they are no longer led by a man. When a man takes a leadership position, they never have to justify the fact that they are the new leader. Women on the other hand, are compelled to spend a lot of time and energy proving that they are worthy of leadership, even if they are taking over from a man who was not a great leader.

Very often people are deeply invested in what is familiar and have spent a lot of time defining their own role in its processes and implementation.

Sometimes people are also invested in a situation where the systems and procedures are weak thereby enabling them to commit fraud. When you bring about changes that close taps of illicit money flow you are met with the time of resistance that I faced from 2021.

Changing that is therefore very uncomfortable and they respond by resisting that change. This is irrespective of whether the change is for the better or it would improve things or the reputation of the organization.

This has been my experience being at the helm at Unisa

The first emotion most people feel when they go through these lifechanging experiences is **denial**, which for them is more comforting than having to face the reality of what has happened, it is easier to behave as if the change has not happened at all.

The second emotion is **anger**. Those who resist the change get deeply angry that they are required to change their behaviour, learn new processes or implement them. They resent that and respond in anger.

The third emotion of people who resist change is **bargaining**, they bargain that if they resist the change long enough things will go back to what used to be. When that fails, they become **depressed**.

When they realise that the change is here to stay, they accept, therefore **acceptance** is the final stage of grief.

I believe that there is a growing sense of acceptance of my leadership at Unisa, and we see more and more people buying into the new era that I have brought.

Changing the vision, mission, systems and processes is only the first step in change management. The other important part is to ensure that people buy into change. Addressing the human element of change management is therefore also very important.

When I became the first woman Vice Chancellor of Unisa after it had been in existence for 147 years, I experienced many obstacles and great amount of resistance because patriarchy could not accept that a woman could lead a university with the global footprint. After I took over as VC of Unisa many did not believe I would last.

I had to fight battles the intensity of which I had not anticipated. When I took the decision to take the battle to the courts some worried that this might ruffle features of important decision makers and stakeholders. I soldiered on despite the massive obstacles I faced.

I took the sustained media negative media coverage in my stride and pushed for change nonetheless and my track record since I took over speaks for itself. Unisa has exponentially improved its ranking and its

research output. (VC may add more about the changes she has brought to Unisa)

These are the challenges that women in leadership face.

The book *Leading Change* (1995) by J P Kotter which has been cited by several scholars, including publications such as Harvard Business Review provides us with several important steps to consider leading to lasting change. The emphasis is to ensure that people see, feel, and then adopt the change by changing their behaviour.

Some of these steps are:

1. **Increase the sense of urgency** as to why change should take place. Inspire them to move and make real and relevant objectives.
2. **Build the guiding team for the change process.** Position or appoint champions of the change process who represents all levels of the organization that have the right emotional commitment and the right mix of skills.
3. **Develop the vision for the change process.** Leadership must clarify the aim of the change. Get the team to establish a simple vision and strategy that will focus on the emotional and creative aspects necessary to drive service and efficiency.
4. **Communicate with all stakeholders to ensure their buy-in.** Involve as many people as possible, so they feel like they are part of the change. They may become ambassadors of the change because they feel included in the process. (VC may add about the stakeholder sessions she is undertaking)

5. **Empower the action by removing obstacles.** Enable constructive feedback and provide lots of support from leadership. Reward and recognize progress and achievements.
6. **Create quick wins** to show that change is possible to implement. Establish manageably sized goals that are easy to achieve to inspire the team. There should be a manageable number of initiatives. Finish current stages before starting new ones.
7. **Keep up the momentum** to keep people focused on the change. Continuously foster and encourage determination and persistence. Encourage ongoing progress reporting, highlighting achieved and future milestones.
8. **Keep the door to the past firmly closed** by making the change stick. Reinforce the value of successful change via **recruitment, promotion, and new change leaders.**
9. **Institutionalize the change** and make it part of the organizational culture.

The change at Unisa is here to Stay!

In her 2019 book *Becoming a Dangerous Woman: Embracing Risk to Change the World*, Pat Mitchell, the first female president of CNN Productions said when women take leadership, they are entering a dangerous space full of risks, but it can be equally rewarding and lead to lasting change. [Women often bring about innovation men had not thought about, yesterday the DM of DIRCO said this!](#)

The UNISA Women's Forum Women of the Year Awards

The 2025 UNISA Women's Day promotes Ms Feroza Adam's dream as well as honour the substantial accomplishments of the UNISA women who have made exceptional impacts in their various disciplines. The UNISA Women of the Year Awards will be in several categories.

I congratulate all the women who will receive these awards today.

Back to you programme director. Thank you, Ngiyabonga, Enkosi, Ke a leboga, Ndo livhuwa, Ngi a khensa, Baie Dankie! **ENDS -:**