Media Release

Unisa Vice-Chancellor to visit Africa's first Millimetre Telescope site and sign strategic agreement with the University of Namibia

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The Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of South Africa (UNISA), Professor Puleng LenkaBula, will this week visit the site of the first Africa Millimetre Telescope (AMT) on the Gamsberg Mountain in Namibia, marking a significant milestone in Africa's growing role in global astronomy and space science.

On Thursday, 26 February 2026, Professor LenkaBula and a delegation from Unisa will tour the AMT site, located near the H.E.S.S. Observatory in the Khomas Highland of Namibia. This will be followed by a formal signing of the first addendum to a standing Memorandum of Understanding between Unisa and the University of Namibia (UNAM), cementing the two universities' collaboration on the AMT project and related scientific, technical, and outreach initiatives.

Bringing Black Holes into Sharper Focus

The Africa Millimetre Telescope is a next-generation 14-metre radio telescope that will operate at millimetre wavelengths and become a crucial part of the global Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) network. The EHT made history in 2019 by producing the first-ever image of a black hole.

By adding a powerful telescope in Southern Africa, the AMT will strengthen the global network's coverage and sensitivity, enabling scientists to produce sharper images and improved time-resolved observations of black holes. In time, this will significantly enhance the ability of researchers to create detailed "movies" of the dynamic environments surrounding these extreme cosmic objects.

The AMT will also be the first millimetre-wave radio telescope on the African continent, positioning Namibia – and its African partners – at the forefront of global millimetre astronomy.

A strategic partnership between Unisa and UNAM

The signing of the Addendum, which will take effect from 1 March 2026 and remain in force for the duration of the broader MoU, builds on the Memorandum of Understanding entered into between Unisa and UNAM on 13 August 2024 and formalises specific cooperation in relation to the AMT project.

Under this agreement:

Unisa has committed an initial financial contribution of N$4 million in 2025 as a pre-payment and foundational investment in the AMT project.

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It will also provide technical expertise and support during the commissioning and operational phases of the telescope, contribute research personnel, and support long-term capacity development.

From UNAM's perspective, the Addendum reinforces the University's role as a founding African partner in the Africa Millimetre Telescope project. UNAM will continue to contribute scientific expertise, research personnel and institutional support, while facilitating UNISA's integration into AMT research, operations, and public science outreach initiatives in Namibia and beyond.

The two universities will collaborate on science outreach initiatives, including support for mobile planetarium programmes and public science engagement in Namibia.

Advancing African Science and Human Capital Development

As part of the AMT international consortium –including partners such as Radboud University, the University of Amsterdam, University of Oxford, University of Turku, UNAM, and Unisa – African institutions are playing a growing role in high-impact global astrophysics.

The AMT dish is being designed and built specifically for this project by mtex antenna technology and will be integrated into global Very Long Baseline Interferometry (VLBI) arrays, including the Event Horizon Telescope. It will operate primarily in the 86–350 GHz frequency range and connect Africa directly to cutting-edge black hole research, but it will also avail for extended frequency coverage down to 12 GHz to enable co-observing with the SKA-mid in South Africa.

For Unisa, the partnership aligns strongly with its commitment to research excellence, continental collaboration, and social impact. Through its involvement in the AMT, the university seeks not only to contribute to frontier science, but also to strengthen postgraduate training, technical skills development as well as public engagement with astronomy and space science across Southern Africa.

"The coming of the Africa Millimetre Telescope is a proud moment for Africa, being the first of its kind on the continent. As a partner in the project, Unisa looks forward to the groundbreaking science and human capital development that the AMT will engender," said **Unisa Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Puleng LenkaBula.**

"For the University of Namibia, the Africa Millimetre Telescope represents far more than a scientific instrument; it is a statement of Africa's readiness to host, lead, and contribute meaningfully to frontier science," said **UNAM Vice-Chancellor, Professor Kenneth Matengu**. "This partnership with Unisa strengthens our shared commitment to building world-class research infrastructure on African soil, while simultaneously investing in the development of local expertise, postgraduate training, and public science engagement. By anchoring the AMT in Namibia, we are positioning the country and the continent as active participants in global knowledge production, not merely observers."

Site Visit at Gamsberg

Namibia's high altitude, dry climate, and radio-quiet environment make it an exceptional location for millimetre astronomy. The telescope will initially be constructed near the H.E.S.S. site, with the intention of eventually relocating it to the higher Gamsberg plateau once infrastructure is fully developed.

The visit by Professor LenkaBula underscores the strategic importance Unisa attaches to continental scientific infrastructure and long-term partnerships that advance Africa's position in global knowledge production.
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