

MEDIA ADVISORY

Unisa and SAWS Mark 40 Years of Atmospheric Science with Focus on Climate Resilience

Approved for public release

Date: Friday, 16 October 2026

The University of South Africa (Unisa) and the South African Weather Service (SAWS) will host the **40th Annual Conference of the South African Society for Atmospheric Sciences (SASAS)** from 21 to 23 October 2026 at Unisa's Muckleneuk Campus in Pretoria, with Santam as the industry partner.

Held under the theme **“40 Years and Beyond – Atmospheric Science Excellence Advancing Climate Resilience in South Africa,”** the conference marks four decades of scientific collaboration and research excellence, bringing together leading scientists, researchers, policymakers, postgraduate students and industry experts to explore solutions to the growing challenges of climate change and extreme weather events.

As South Africa faces increasing risks from floods, droughts, heatwaves, severe storms and wildfires, the conference will highlight how advances in weather forecasting, climate modelling, artificial intelligence and early warning systems can strengthen disaster preparedness, protect communities and support evidence-based decision-making.

The conference also marks a significant milestone for SASAS. Its inaugural conference was held in Pretoria in 1987 under the then South African Weather Bureau, making the return to Pretoria for its 40th anniversary particularly symbolic.

Professor Mary-Jane Bopape, Distinguished Professor at Unisa and Co-Chair of the Conference Organising Committee, said that hosting this milestone conference reflects Unisa's growing commitment to advancing weather and climate research, developing the next generation of scientists, and strengthening partnerships that contribute to climate resilience in South Africa and across the African continent.

The opening ceremony on Wednesday, 21 October, will feature **Professor Puleng LenkaBula**, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Unisa, who will officially open the conference. Other speakers include **Professor Rebecca Garland**, President of SASAS; **Dr Jonas Mphepya**, Acting Chief Executive Officer of SAWS; and **Mr Imraan Patel**, Deputy Director-General at the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation.

The programme will feature keynote addresses by **Professor François Engelbrecht** of the University of the Witwatersrand on Earth system modelling, and **Professor Simon Driscoll** of the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom, on the application of artificial intelligence in weather and climate sciences.

Further contributions will be made by **Professor Thando Ndarana** of the University of Pretoria on improving extreme weather prediction, and **Dr Patience Gwaze** of the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment on air quality and policy.



Scientific sessions will explore climate extremes, tropical cyclones, wildfire risk, urban climate, air quality, environmental observations and climate change adaptation, among other critical research areas. The conference will conclude on Friday, 23 October, with the presentation of SASAS 40th conference prizes.

Members of the media are invited to attend the conference and engage with leading experts on the latest developments in atmospheric science and their implications for climate resilience, environmental sustainability and disaster risk reduction in South Africa.

Date: Wednesday, 21 October – Friday, 23 October 2026

Time: 09:00–15:00 (Registration from 08:30)

Venue: Unisa Muckleneuk Campus, Pretoria

Theme: *40 Years and Beyond – Atmospheric Science Excellence Advancing Climate Resilience in South Africa*

/Ends.

For interview requests, please contact Unisa Senior Media Officers: Mr Tommy Huma on 072 218 6197 / 012 429 3981 / humartm@unisa.ac.za OR Mr Edgar Rathelele on 063 731 5456 / 012 429 3981 / ratheme@unisa.ac.za

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