

Media Advisory:

Unisa to convene African aviation leaders to shape the continent's economic future

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How can Africa's airports become more than gateways for passengers and cargo and instead serve as powerful engines of trade, investment, innovation and economic transformation?

This question will take centre stage when the University of South Africa (Unisa) Gauteng Region, in collaboration with the University's colleges, hosts the **2nd Annual Aerotropolis Symposium** from **Wednesday, 09 to Friday, 11 September 2026**.

Following the success of the inaugural symposium in 2025, this year's three-day gathering will bring together aviation industry leaders, policymakers, academics, urban planners and innovators to examine how aerotropolis development can strengthen regional trade, improve connectivity and accelerate sustainable economic development across Africa.

The symposium will explore the emerging role of the aerotropolis, an airport-centred urban and economic development model in connecting cities, industries and regional economies, while creating new opportunities for investment, employment, innovation and trade.

The keynote address will be delivered by Jonathan Fitzgerald (MAPM), Director, Airport Planner and Project Manager at V1 Neo Ltd, London, UK. Fitzgerald holds a Project Professional Qualification, an MSc in Airport Planning and Management, and a BSc in Civil Engineering. His expertise in airport planning and project management will bring an international perspective to discussions on developing integrated, airport-led economic ecosystems capable of supporting Africa's future growth. Mr Fitzgerald was born in South Africa but moved to the UK due to business opportunities in his area.

Featured speakers will include Dr Nkosindiphile Xhakaza, Executive Mayor of the City of Ekurhuleni, and General Fabian Msimang, retired Chief of the South African Air Force. Their contributions will provide strategic perspectives on aviation, regional development, intergovernmental collaboration and Africa's competitiveness in the global economy.

The symposium comes at a pivotal time for the continent, as African countries seek to harness aviation as a catalyst for greater connectivity, regional integration, investment and inclusive economic growth.

Discussions will consider how airports can evolve from conventional transportation hubs into dynamic economic ecosystems that attract investment, support innovation, facilitate trade and contribute to sustainable urban development.



The symposium also reinforces Unisa's strategic commitment to Aviation and Aerospace Studies, one of the University's 10 catalytic niche areas.

Through research, innovation, education and stakeholder engagement, the niche area responds to the growing importance of aviation and aeronautical studies in addressing national, regional and continental development priorities.

The 2026 symposium therefore provides an important platform for interrogating not only the future of African aviation, but also how aviation can help shape the future of African economies and cities.

Members of the media are invited to attend and cover the symposium as follows:

Date: Wednesday, 09 – Friday, 11 September 2026

Time: 08:30 – 15:00 daily

Venue: Functions Hall, 4th Floor, Kgorong Building, Unisa Main Campus, Tshwane, or online

You may also follow the symposium live via **YouTube:** [Aerotropolis Symposium Day 1](#); [Aerotropolis Symposium Day 2](#); [Aerotropolis Symposium Day 3](#)

- Ends -

For RSVPs and interviews requests, please contact (Unisa: Senior Media Officers) Tommy Huma on 072 218 6197 / humartm@unisa.ac.za OR Edgar Rathelele on 063 731 5456 / ratheme@unisa.ac.za

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