



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

**PROF MANDLA MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR**  
**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**  
**VIRTUAL LONG SERVICE AWARDS CEREMONY**  
**14 December 2020**

- Our Programme Director this morning, Dr Nic van Staden, Manager: Administration and Remuneration, HR and our resident retirement expert
- Dr P Mokgobu, Vice Principal: Institutional Development and members of senior management present
- Mr Z Dlamini, Executive Director: Human Resources
- Esteemed colleagues
- And our VIP guests this morning – our long service awardees

A very warm welcome to you all.

What a year 2020 has been! What started out as a normal beginning to the academic year swiftly descended into the closure of our University for all but essential workers, as the global COVID-19 pandemic took hold in our country and we went into a national lockdown. By now we can see, and we are experiencing on a daily basis, the catastrophic effect of the pandemic on our economy and our citizens. Fast forward 8 months later and our country, society and this university are enjoying a much reduced level of lockdown, although the safety precautions still apply. And we are by no means out of the woods yet.

As a university we responded to the challenges posed by COVID-19 and managed to keep the university running even with some staff working from home and a severely reduced staff complement. We have been able to save the academic year. In fact, as I speak, fully online examinations are being conducted for a majority of our students. Make no mistake colleagues, this is a fantastic accomplishment.

Colleagues, one can make two observations about the disruption that we have been dealing with these past eight months.

First, in trying times such as these, one sees in action that famous English saying: *When the going gets tough, the tough gets going*. This simply means that when a situation becomes difficult, the strong and resilient will settle down, calm down, focus and work harder to meet the challenge. In my view Unisa has a lot of “tough” staff who simply knuckled down and did what needed to be done under very difficult circumstances – which were being experienced in their homes as well by the way. This speaks volumes about the calibre of each and every staff member who is with us today.

Second, this year-end comes with the realisation of how quickly time flies. It’s hard to believe that we have been through so much and achieved so much as a university in such a brief period of time. Of course, the year-end also signals the ending of my tenure as VC, although I will be staying on until the end of April to ensure a proper handover to the Vice-Chancellor Elect, Prof Puleng Lenka-Bula. So, the passage of time has additional meaning for me this time round, in that I will be bidding my farewells to Unisa having been a member of staff, and part of the University community for more than 30 years. I can say without any qualms, that I am a proud Unisan. I am sure that those of you in attendance today will be similarly surprised at just how quickly time flies, and how, as a collective, we have overcome every challenge that has been thrown our way during your

various tenures. The resilience that you have demonstrated in the performance of your duties has made Unisa the university that it is today.

I say this because in so many ways, Unisa is like a family – in fact, Unisa *is* a family – we even call ourselves *Unisans* as you will have just noted. And our metaphorical “blood,” that bond which cannot be denied, and which binds us together, is our service, our loyalty and our commitment – to one another and to this University, the very same qualities which have ensured our victory over the challenges posed by COVID-19.

But in the same breath I feel obliged to remind us again of that old saying which goes: *You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family*. Basically, what that means in the Unisa context, is that we cannot choose who the members of our Unisa family will be. We are appointed into this huge family and as that happens, we inherit a whole new cohort of family members. And somehow, we have to make it work. We have to find harmonious ways of working with those in our spaces and across the institution, to the extent that we are comfortable with one another, we rely on one another, we trust one another, and we are loyal to one another and to the university. We have to create a happy and nurturing “home away from home”. It isn't easy - I think we all know that too. I am sure you have all

experienced instances where we have felt terribly let down by a colleague or colleagues or by the institution itself.

The reason that I am reiterating this point colleagues, is because we will have to draw on that maturity and professionalism as we welcome our new VC and receive her as a family member who has a really big task ahead of her at a time of ongoing disruption and uncertainty in a very disrupted world. Our university is transforming rapidly, and we should also have the institutional review report just at a time when we are transitioning into a new leadership era. It is you, those long serving staff members who have already proven their worth and value to our university who will again be called on to lead by example, and ensure that the transition of leadership is a smooth one.

When it comes to Unisa staff, you are my people and I am yours. And we are stuck with each other - through good or bad and through thick or thin. And goodness knows, your time at Unisa has certainly brought with it the good and the bad, but I have no doubt that the good has outweighed the bad. If we once again draw on our goodwill and professionalism - and I am sure that you will - we will be able to enjoy a win-win situation and our university will flourish.

Today I will be acknowledging service to this university and our students that span periods from 10 years' service right to 45 years. And that colleagues, tells me that you are the kind of family member that everyone wants around. You are the ones who go quietly about their business, fulfilling your commitments and serving your fellow Unisans and our students. You, our esteemed colleagues present today, are the glue that holds the Unisa family together, that ensures that we are not a house divided.

Much of that, I believe, has to do with the fact that you understand and support this magnificent university and the role that it plays in our society and on the continent. Unisa shapes futures. Unisa offers opportunity and Unisa offers hope. Unisa has contributed and continues to contribute to the flourishing of our society - and that colleagues, is something of which we are immensely proud. But equally, Unisa is proud to have staff who understand and are committed to fulfilling this very honourable and critical responsibility and who have done so with distinction.

The people who have joined us this morning, are precisely those of whom I have just spoken. Each and every one of you, irrespective of the role that you fulfil at Unisa or the responsibility that comes with that role, has made Unisa what it is today. More importantly, each of

you has contributed in a material way, to the improvement of the life and living of every single Unisa graduate, over the course of your employment. There are few other jobs that offer such a satisfying outcome.

But you know, it is not one-way traffic. Being a Unisan brings with it many benefits. We are a good employer no matter whom one might want to compare us with. And I know that for many of you, myself included, Unisa has given us what we have today and Unisa has made us who we are today and for that we should be, and I'm sure we are, immensely grateful. We have enjoyed economic stability, we have been able to buy homes, buy vehicles, and educate our children. At a more personal level we have been encouraged to grow our own careers and we have been offered incentives for research and development which are the envy of many other institutions. So yes, Unisa has also been and is still, good to us. I have no doubt that you appreciate that, and you are proud of that.

So today we come to celebrate and honour your contributions to our university, our students and indeed, our country. Unisa owes its longevity and success to your efforts and the efforts of those who have gone before you. As an institution we are deeply appreciative of, and thankful for your service and contributions to Unisa, our

students present and past, to South Africa, our Continent and the rest of the world.

On behalf of the Council and Management of Unisa, please accept our very sincere thanks and appreciation for your contributions over the years.

Well done!