



*Office of the Principal and Vice Chancellor*

**PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR**

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**WELCOME ADDRESS: 2018 CHANCELLOR'S CALABASH AWARDS  
AND DINNER**

**1 November 2018**

***Theme: In Support of First-generation University Entrants***

Gallagher Estates and Conference Centre, Midrand

1 November 2018

Programme Director: Dr Somadoda Fikeni: Director Special Projects  
and Advisor to the VC, in the Office of the VC

- Our Chancellor, His Excellency President Thabo Mbeki, Former President of the Republic of South Africa
- Mr Sakhi Simelane, Chairperson of Unisa's Council and other Council members present this evening

- Mr Cassius Lubisi, Director General in The Presidency who will receive the award on behalf of the Honourable President of the Republic of South Africa, His Excellency Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa
- Mrs Mandu Makhanya
- Distinguished recipients of Unisa's 2018 Calabash awards

***President Cyril Ramaphosa, receiver of the Outstanding Alumnus Award***

***Mr Ngila Michael Muendane, receiver of Unisa Robben Island Award***

***Ms Gloria Serobe receiver of the Outstanding Educator Award on behalf of Women's Investment Portfolio Holdings (WIPHOLD)***

- Members of the Diplomatic Corps
- Members of Unisa's Executive and extended management
- Distinguished guests, friends and alumni of Unisa, ladies and gentlemen

Allow me to echo the Chancellors warm welcome to you all.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, we are living in troubled times, ironically characterised by truly remarkable advances in Science and Technology, which tend to be fostered by, and go hand-in-hand with, obscene wealth and comfort on the one hand, and desperate poverty and even societal and human regression on the other.

There can be no doubt that technology is shaping our world to a greater or lesser extent, and we are obliged as governments and as citizens to equip ourselves for our role in this so-called *4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution*. To deny that reality, or the necessity of preparation for such a world, is to deny our citizens their rightful opportunities and to smother the vision of Africa - and South Africa – rising, in its infancy.

Let me assure you that we need to handle the promise and potential of the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution in the context where we address the realities of our socio-economic and political disparities which currently militate against the very progress that we seek.

The recently released *Ibrahim Index of African Governance*<sup>1</sup>, for example, sounded the warning that sub-Saharan Africa's population is projected to double by 2050, and it will be the source of more than half of the world's population growth over that period. Africa's population has increased by 26.0% over the last ten years and 60% of the continent's 1.25 billion people are now under the age of 25. So, not surprisingly, the number of working-age Africans (15-64 years old) is expected to grow by almost another 30% over the next ten years. And while Africa's overall GDP has risen nearly 40% over the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibrahim Index of African governance (IIAG). 29 October 2018. Accessed at: <http://mo.ibrahim.foundation/iiag/>

past decade, our score for sustainable economic opportunity has increased by just a fraction of 1 %. Worse still one discovers that the quality of education has worsened for more than half of Africa's citizens over the past five years.

At the same time we are seeing the emergence of more and more young leaders in Africa, in countries such as Uganda, Zimbabwe and Cameroon, and there are rumblings about alignments with like-minded youthful leaders in East Africa. It is the calibre of those leaders, and their ability to govern ethically, which will determine the future success or failure of our Continent. Our young people are impatient. They want change and they want to lead that change. And we must equip them to do so.

Dr Mo Ibrahim (who presented the 11th Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture at Unisa in August 2013), warned:

*“Africa has a huge challenge ahead. Its large and youthful potential workforce could transform the continent for the better, but this opportunity is close to being squandered..... The evidence is clear – young citizens of Africa need hope, prospects and opportunities. Its leaders need to speed up job creation to sustain progress and stave off deterioration.”*

So, what does it mean to us as educators in a country that has the highest Gini-coefficient in the world? What does it mean for our students who must take on the mantle of responsibility for the future of our country, our continent and her people?

South Africa is undoubtedly in the most financially precarious position that it has been in for a long time. The job market continues to shrink and the number of youth and young adults seeking employment is increasing. We are in the midst of financial, political and education crises. We must respond. And we will.

The University of South Africa, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, stands out in our country and our continent, as a beacon of hope and much needed incubator and generator of the skills, qualifications, talents and leadership that we need so desperately, to steer our country and our continent and its peoples into the future that we deserve.

To give you some idea of the impact of this quite unique institution, Unisa is a national and continental asset because of its size, reach and reputation. Early indications are that Unisa's contribution to public HEI enrolments can be expected to be just over one-third of the total public HEI enrolments for 2017. Current provisional enrolments for 2018 are **384 772** (as on 5 September) and poised to

rise due to the introduction of fee-free higher education initiatives. Unisa is one of the universities that seems to be experiencing a significant increase in enrolments in 2018 and it is likely that we will exceed our 2019 enrolment targets. This implies a greater portion of unfunded students, which will be for the expense of the university.

A significant increase of 64,8% was reported for first-time entering students between 2016 to 2017. Preliminary 2018 figures, still subject to finalisation indicate a further increase of first-time entering students to 82 433.

African students enrolled at Unisa comprised 74,2% in 2017 and numbers continue to increase. The other categories either remain stable or continue to decline. Of those students, female students comprised 65% in 2017 and that percentage continues to increase. We are increasingly concerned about the decline in male enrolments.

Enrolments for 2017 comprised the following fields of study:

- Business/Management's - 30,3% - and decreasing
- Education's 28,4% - and increasing
- Other Humanities - 30,0%
- Science, Engineering and Technology's - 11,3%

The degree-credit success rate remained constant on 64,9% between 2016 and 2017. Good news is that the positive trend of graduates continued. Building on the success of 2016 where Unisa has recorded over 40 000 graduates in a single academic year as part of the HEMIS submission to DHET, a record 44 842 graduates were reported for 2017, an increase of 3, 5% between 2016 and 2017. Based on the total graduates of 44 842 in 2017 and the continued increase in enrolments in 2018 and the graduation ceremonies in 2018 it seems possible that the Ministerial target of 49 627 graduates for 2019 will be achieved.

It is important to remember that Unisa's qualifications are quality assured and accredited in like manner to our residential institutions, which places us in a very unique and important situation in the global and continental distance education environment. Enrolling more than one third of our countries students, and assuming a growing importance on the continent, the success of our university is fundamental to the stability of our higher education sector and higher education on the Continent. You will therefore understand the absolute criticality of ensuring our success and our sustainability – primarily by ensuring that we have the financial means to do so.

We have achieved this very satisfactory performance, distinguished guests ladies and gentlemen, under very trying circumstances and with ever decreasing levels of funding.

While the battle for fee-free higher education for the most financially deserving is now a reality, its implementation has brought with it another raft of problems, compounding those which already exist and which are adding to the woes of the sector. Higher education in South Africa is in truth, assailed from all sides by competing demands and by hugely stressful societal realities, which in large measure find their origins and their impetus outside of the academe.

We are beginning to realise with the passage of time, that many of our first- generation university students are completely unprepared for university life. Many should, in fact, be pursuing other available avenues of education rather than a university education. But expectations of them are so very high and there are limited alternative avenues.

I was reflecting the other day that if a student had registered for a 3-year undergraduate degree in 2015, they would have been subjected to uncertainty, disruption, violence, delays, duplications to name but a few, for the duration of their studies! No university experience is supposed to be like that and so I must honour them too, for walking

with us and staying the course, over what has been and continues to be a very challenging journey of their studies. It think it says something about the resilience of our students.

Our students' critics don't appreciate the pressures that are brought to bear on so many of our youth, and especially our first- generation students. The so called "black-tax" phenomenon is magnified for these young people. Parents make tremendous sacrifices, including the selling off of precious livestock or committing their meagre financial resources, to pay for studies, accommodation and the like, and they pin the future prosperity of the entire family on their child's success.

They have, quite understandably, unrealistic expectations: of what university is actually about, what is expected of their children as students, and of what is realistically achievable and what is not. Many times a student is directed into a discipline which is perceived to provide lucrative job opportunities, rather than suited to the student's aptitude, and when students can't cope with what is in any case a difficult transition and difficult qualifications, and when they realise that they are failing and that they will cause great disappointment to their families, the pressure and stress can become unbearable. It is very difficult to understand and apply the discipline and rigour that are necessary for successful studies from a deficit

position and a context of such high expectation. For some it becomes too much.

This evening's theme is "*In Support of First-generation University Entrants.*" And while the Chancellor's awards dinner speaks more directly to financial support for the university and its students, the recent tragic suicides among our students obliges us to consider other forms of support for our students, which we need to identify and provide for. That such pressure and failures should lead to suicide in our youth is as unacceptable as it is tragic.

Our first time university entrants rightfully have expectations of a quality learning experience, of the strong possibility of success, and of exiting university as quality, capable graduates, into a world that will embrace them and that will have use for their qualifications and skills. They want the assurance that they will be active participants in the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution and not the fallout of failed institutions and failed states. These young men and women will be laying down family foundations and traditions of embracing further education, with the hopes and dreams of becoming a *somebody*, and that in so doing their example will be emulated and perpetuated from generation to generation. They cannot afford to fail, for to do so would be to assert that in fact, education does not offer hope for them or their families.

We need to get back to basics – to re-imagine a world for South African and Africans that simultaneously develops and matures the African consciousness and practice, while asserting our place and our voice in the global arena - with all that that entails. And we need to rediscover the spirit of resilience, common purpose and commitment to our country and her citizens that saw democracy prevail in 1994.

As universities, we must harness our massive pool of intellectual capacity and power, revisiting our curricula and even our business models to ensure our relevance and our ability to adapt with agility to a transforming environment. *Quality, excellence* and *service* must remain the watchwords. We must offer more comprehensive psychosocial support.

And since it is abundantly clear that we are grooming our future leaders, a second area of focus needs to be on leadership and governance. This is an urgent imperative. We are grooming our future leaders who are quite evidently, ready and willing to lead.

At a meeting between our founding President, the late President Nelson Mandela and South African religious leaders in *June 1997*, which marked the beginning of the *Moral Regeneration Movement*, the late President Mandela said:

Our hopes and dreams, at times, seem to be overcome by cynicism, self-centeredness and fear. This spiritual malaise shows itself as a lack of good spirit, as pessimism, or lack of hope and faith. And from it emerge the problems of greed and cruelty, of laziness and egotism, of personal and family failure. It both helps fuel the problems of crime and corruption and hinders efforts to deal with them.<sup>2</sup>

At the ensuing *Morals Summit* in 1998 President Mandela enlarged on this statement as follows:

The symptoms of our spiritual malaise are only too familiar. They include the extent of corruption both in the public and private sector, where office and positions of responsibility are treated as opportunities for self-enrichment; the corruption that occurs within our justice system; violence in interpersonal relations and families, in particular the shameful record of abuse of women and children; and the extent of tax evasion and refusal to pay for services used.<sup>3</sup>

These words have assumed an uncanny reality in our society today. They resonate with all of us. Our nation seems to have lost its soul

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<sup>2</sup> N Mandela, From Liberation to transformation, and address to religious leaders on 24 June 1997 in Johannesburg, in Phakamani: Magazine of the ANC Commission for Religious Affairs. Pg 9

<sup>3</sup> N Mandela, address at the opening of the Morals Summit, Johannesburg, 22 October 1998. Both of the above quoted in Linking Crime and Morality, Reviewing the Moral regeneration Movement, published in the Crime Quarterly no 11, 2005. <http://www.issafrica.org/pubs/CrimeQ/No.11/Rauch.htm>

and purpose. Many today feel powerless, vulnerable and afraid, and rightly so. They have a desperate need to see justice being done, and a desperate desire to see clean, ethical government and governance. They long for the country to prosper and they want universities and all education institutions which are relevant in every sense of the word. As educators we have a role to play in inculcating those values and qualities towards a critical and responsible citizenry.

As institutions of higher learning we need to reassert the notion of *active citizenship* as articulated in the NDP 2030 (p30), which asserts that citizens must be active in their own development. They should:

Actively seek opportunities for advancement, learning, experience and opportunity. Work together with others in the community to advance development, resolve problems and raise the concerns of the voiceless and marginalised. Hold government, business and all leaders in society accountable for their actions. Active citizenry and social activism is necessary for democracy and development to flourish. The state cannot merely act on behalf of the people – it has to act with the people, working together with other institutions to provide opportunities for the advancement of all communities.

The Roman Poet Horace said: “Adversity has the effect of eliciting talents which, in prosperous circumstances, would have lain dormant” and an African proverb says: “Smooth seas do not make skilful sailors.” Both speak to the innate strengths and skills, which must now come to the fore as we try to fathom a very uncertain future and how best to prepare our graduates for it and as we try to support our first-generation students on their journey to active, responsible and successful citizenship and leadership.

Our awardees this evening, ladies and gentlemen, are distinguished exemplars of what it means to be responsible, critical and active citizens. They have demonstrated in their lives and their careers, the commitment, diligence and dedication that is required to build and prosper themselves and their country, and they have committed unambiguously to the core tenets of service, ethical leadership and governance, and a deep and abiding respect for education as the cornerstone of any society. They have given in far greater measure than that which they have received.

This evening, as we honour them, I ask that you to consider ways in which you can contribute to the flourishing of our university and our students, towards the responsible, critical and active citizenry that we need for a stable and prosperous democracy. I therefore support and echo our Chancellor’s call for your support. Given our

current challenges and constraints I feel no hesitation or compunction saying to you all – our doors - and our pockets - are open, please talk to us.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, Unisa will continue to be the African university shaping futures in the service of humanity come what may. I would like to invite you all to join us on that journey as you too, make your contribution.

I thank you