



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

THE OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY OF THE ACADMIC YEAR 2018

ZK MATTHEWS HALL, MUCKLENEUK CAMPUS

8 February 2018

PROF MANDLA S MAKHANYA

PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

The African University shaping futures in the service of humanity

- Thank you Programme Director
- Mr Chairperson of Council, Mr Simelane
- Members of Council
- Mrs Makhanya
- Colleagues in Executive and Extended Management
- Student leaders
- Leaders of OL
- Our staff members and students
- Members of the media fraternity

This year, my address deliberately departs from its conventional format as I want to take this opportunity of the opening of the academic year to invite and mobilise you all to work with me, at whatever part of the institution you are located, to deliver what is expected of UNISA by society at large and our students in particular. Thus to me and the entire leadership of the institution, this is not another year of promises but that of implementation of agreed transformation plans and policies.

While I am fully cognisant of the fact that the change which is upon us cannot be simplistically understood as an event but a process, I invite the entire university community to shift into a higher gear of implementation of all our agreed transformation plans and policies. My message is very simple i.e. every correct strategic planning has to yield positive results.

Let me therefore reiterate that the year 2018 must be that of 'doing change, that is, a year of vigorous and uncompromising implementation of our transformation plans and policies as well as delivery of service to our students. I want you to do so in a timely manner and to do so efficiently.

I invite you all to become a community of practice where you dedicate yourselves collectively to deliver:

- A truly re-invented African university shaping futures in the service of humanity;
- Improved overall governance of our institution that is responsive and accountable all levels;
- A substantively transformed curriculum that is fit for purpose;
- Best teaching and learning environment that enhances success and throughput;
- Improved overall student experience free from epistemicides, linguicides and alienations;
- Changed institutional cultures that make UNISA a home for all of us;
- Efficiently working systems and policies that ensure efficiency and institutional agility.

We must all remember that our collective task to re-invent UNISA began at the very time when the three universities viz., the Unisa, erstwhile Technikon South Africa, and Vista University Distance Education Campus merged in January 2004 to produce a mega

comprehensive university which now enrolls more than 350,000 students. It is this mega university that is in our hands and we must make sure that:

- Its intellectual and academic project is top class and relevant;
- Its students are proud of being at UNISA;
- It actively shapes the futures and services of humanity;
- UNISA is indeed a pioneer of new ideas that enhance life chances;
- It is dynamic and always auto-critiquing itself for purposes of transformation, innovation and openness to exploration of new ways of knowing, new conception of being and new understandings of power and authority.

While cognisant of the fact that the South African higher education sector has been beset by a wave of protests that has rocked its foundations in the last two years on a scale that has not been experienced since the advent of our democratic dispensation, we at UNISA must take it as an opportunity to complete the reinvention of our institution that started in 2004.

As an institution that has dedicated itself to be truly African while globally competitive, to shaping futures in service of humanity, and a

home for the most unique Annual Decoloniality Summer School that pre-dates the #Rhodes Must Fall and #Fees Must Fall movements, it is high time we live our vision, our Charter, our 11Cs+1, our decoloniality, and deliver concretely on the transformation and social justice front.

This year we must express our boldness confident of our scientific diagnosis of the present problematic idea of the university to openly state that our reinvention of UNISA into that premier institution is predicated on six features which have to set it apart:

- A site of multilingualism: an institution in which African indigenous knowledges, languages, cosmologies and ontologies are central part of its identity and soul;
- A site of cognitive/social justice that fully embrace the idea that all human beings are born into a valid and legitimate knowledge system;
- A site of 'ecologies of knowledges' where pluralities of knowledges compete and reinforce each other;
- A socially responsive institution that is intolerant of epistemicides, linguicides and cultural imperialism;

- A re-capitalised institution in which even those without money have access to education - where education is a right rather than a privilege of the few; and,
- A thoroughly decolonized, de-tribalised, de-racialised, de-patriarchized, and de-corporatized home of everyone.

We must also be emboldened by the fact that as far back as 2014, UNISA Council approved our current Strategy 2030 which, among other things, seeks to reposition Unisa as the leading Africa-centred and real African university rather than a mere university in Africa, which is globally competitive. We are also emboldened by the fact that UNISA is host to the highest concentration of Africa-focused centres of research whose outputs have to inform our implementation of our strategies, plans and policies.

We are thus further emboldened by the knowledge that we have accumulated at institutional level, cascading from our various seminars, workshops and international conferences which focused on the idea of the university, decolonisation of knowledge, social and academic transformation as well as teaching and learning.

We are further emboldened by the recommendations of the South African Human Rights Commission Report on Transformation of Public Universities which directly feed into transformation in higher education.

The establishment of the Change Management Unit (CMU) in the Principal and Vice Chancellor's office in 2016 has contributed immensely through the rolling out of the leading change initiatives predicated on the theme of 'Transforming UNISA: Academic and Social Justice for Development'.

Throughout 2017, the Leading Change initiatives that involved organized debates and conversations on the meanings and implications of the student demands for free, relevant, decolonized and quality education; enabled us as an institution to exhaustively and openly engage such nomenclatures and processes as decolonization, diversification, Africanization and indeed transformation with a clear view to give direction and content to our transformation strategy, plans and policies.

I must say that our collective success as we brace ourselves for the year of implementation of transformation is dependent on us rethinking deeply about:

- Our leadership beyond the traditional managerialism;
- Our ethical conduct as leaders and teachers;
- Our professional conduct as leaders and teachers;
- Our loyalty to the institution and commitment to our students;
and,
- Our urgent restoration of trust among leaders, teachers and students.

This introspection is very necessary because UNISA is, without doubt, a major contributor to the South African knowledge economy through its graduates, and is clearly a national and continental asset. We enrol more than a third of all higher education students in South Africa and produce the majority of African graduates. We must, therefore, be consistently aware of the burden of history and the future we are carrying as UNISA.

Let us build from where we are fully acknowledging the strides made by UNISA in the past years, which are the result of the combined efforts of

its various stakeholders -- Council, management, academics, administrative staff, labour unions and students. Their sterling work assisted to make strides that catapulted us to where we found ourselves in the recent past. This was a stepping stone for us to drive our transformation.

We now have a new Council, under the leadership of Mr Simelane. You have this gentleman who is addressing you today who has been consistent in his drive to take this institution to another level. I am leading a team that has internalised what we stand for. This Council and Management are uncompromising on transformation as it spells a bright future for our University.

I would also like to acknowledge the role of our Chancellor, President Thabo Mbeki who is a brand in himself, that UNISA is proud to be part of. There is no doubt that, if we forge common interests as a UNISA family to advance the knowledge project and improve service to our students, nothing can stop us.

I am emphasizing the issue of boldness and confidence as part of my invitation of all of us to directly address such intimidating questions of the day as the language question, the critical social theory question, the

curriculum question, and the institutional cultural change question. The pan-Africanist and leading sociologist Kwesi Prah posited that:

'The intimidating question we face as academics in Africa today is, how do we decolonize the academic enterprise, how do we indigenize knowledge production, how do we usefully domesticate knowledge and its production.'

Our year of rigorous implementation of our agreed plans and policies cannot be successful if we continue to be timid and intimidated by those necessary demands put before us and those necessary changes that have to be done.

Confident of the scientific diagnosis we have made of the current systemic and epistemic crisis, we must by now be bold to implement curriculum change. What about if we implement it on the basis of the following five ideas:

<u>Dimension of Decolonization</u>	<u>Explanatory Notes</u>
1. Decentring of Euro-North American-centric knowledge	This entails two moves: restoration of Africa as a legitimate epistemic site of

	<p>knowledge and taking seriously African knowledge as a departure point without necessarily throwing away knowledge from Europe and North America. The purpose is to deal with the crisis of relevance and alienation. It is a restorative move that enables Africans to see themselves clearly. It entails shifting of a position from which Africans know and interpret the world.</p>
<p>2. Africanization of knowledge</p>	<p>This entails re-assertion of African identity and re-founding of knowledge on African cultures and values. It is a recovery process predicated on ideas of endogenous knowledge as ‘an internal product drawn from a given cultural background, as opposed to another category of knowledge which would be</p>

	imported from elsewhere.'
3. Adding/including African knowledge into existing canon of knowledge	This is a poor form of decolonization which takes the lazy format of just adding new items to the existing canon and existing curriculum. The pre-occupation here is with adding new content without re-configuring the curriculum.
4. Decolonial critical engagement with existing knowledge	This approach entails deep questioning of 'received' knowledge and critical engagement with the politics of knowledge production and dissemination. This approach seeks to unmask the concealed problems such as racism and embedded asymmetrical power dynamics.
5. Democratizing knowledge/ecologies of knowledge	This entails opening up of the academy to a plurality of knowledges including the

	<p>subjugated ones as part of achievement of cognitive justice. This opening up to ecologies of knowledge is meant to produce 'convivial scholarship' which 'confronts and humbles the challenge of over-prescription, over-standardization, over-routinization and over-prediction'.</p>
--	---

Transforming curriculum entails serious, deep and deliberately rethinking of the constitutive rules of our disciplines, their relevance and their fitness for purpose.

I urge you all to remember the words of the French historian of science, Michel Foucault, who argued that the sciences of today did not develop naturally but were a result of specific demands for specific knowledge needed at the time. Foucault posited that:

The epistemological field traversed by human sciences was not laid down in advance [...]. They appeared when man constituted

himself in Western culture as both that which must be conceived of and that which is to be known. There can also be no doubts, certainly, that the historical emergence of each of the human sciences was occasioned by a problem, a requirement, an obstacle of a theoretical or practical order [...].

As country, continent and the modern world at large, it is no longer possible to continue to dogde the reality of an epistemic and systemic crisis upon us. The challenge we are facing is well expressed by the leading sociologist, Immanuel Wallerstein, in his important book entitled ***The Uncertainties of Knowledge*** where he posited that:

I believe that we live in a very exciting era in the world of knowledge, precisely because we are living in a systemic crisis that is forcing us to reopen the basic epistemological questions and look to structural reorganization of the world of knowledge. It is uncertain whether we shall rise adequately to the intellectual challenge, but it is there for us to address. We engage our responsibility as scientists/scholars in the way in which we address the multiple issues before us at this turning point of our structures of knowledge.

My message is for us to rise adequately to the challenge. This rising adequately to the challenges of a systemic and epistemic nature requires us to embark on practical moves such as:

- **Rethinking thinking itself**

In our endeavour to deliver a fundamentally changed curriculum, we have to engage in a consistently and systematically 'rethink thinking' itself and even 'unthink' some inherited ideas, theories, and concepts. Cathrine Odora Hoppers and Howard Richards defined 'rethinking thinking' as:

The casting of light at last onto subjugated peoples, knowledges, histories and ways of living unsettles the toxic pond and transforms passive analysis into a generative force that valorises and recreates life for those previously museumised.

- **Learning to unlearn in order to re-learn**

This entails forgetting some of what we have been taught, to break free from the thinking programmes imposed on us by education, culture,

and social environment, always marked by the Western imperial reason.

- **Moving the centre**

This entail shifting paradigmatically and epistemologically from Eurocentrism including changing the shoulders of giants on which we have been standing. In doing this we have to reflect deeply about the race, gender, social location, and even geographical location of the key thinkers as we review our curriculum.

- **Returning to the base**

This move speaks to our key task of using our indigenous African languages in our teaching, learning and research.

Conclusion

Let me end by saying what is upon us is a necessary struggle to overcome domination and extroversion in the domain of knowledge generation which has direct implications on our political, economic and cultural development as a people. Whether we term what we are doing

transformation, decolonization or Africanization; what matters most is what we actually do on the ground to address the long-standing challenges of relevance of knowledge and education—relevance in terms of values and relevance in terms of practical skills. I must say also as I close this official opening address that throughout our daily work here at UNISA, we must all know that our priority is our students and we must put them at the centre of everything we do as we implement our strategies, plans and policies.

Nkosi Sikelela iAfrica

Nkosi sikelela iUnisa

Re a leboha

Re a leboga

Siyabonga

Dankie

Inkomo

Siyathokoza

Ndo livhuwa

Enkosi

Ro livhuwa

Aio

Thank you

