

MEDIA ADVISORY

Minister Chikunga to deliver keynote address at the 2026 Unisa World Autism Awareness and Acceptance Seminar

Approved for Public Release
Date: Tuesday, 28 April 2026

The College of Education at the University of South Africa (UNISA), through its Department of Inclusive Education, will host a World Autism Awareness and Acceptance Seminar on Wednesday, 29 April 2026, at the Unisa Main Campus in Pretoria.

The seminar forms part of the national observance of World Autism Awareness and Acceptance Month and reflects South Africa's constitutional and international commitment to advancing the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities.

The seminar will be held under the theme: *Autism and Humanity: Every Life Has Value.* The theme aligns with the global observance of World Autism Awareness Day 2026 and calls for a shift from symbolic awareness towards meaningful, sustained action that recognises the inherent dignity, worth and potential of every autistic and neurodivergent individual.

It will feature high-level leadership and expert participation. The keynote address will be delivered by the Minister in the Presidency responsible for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, **the Honourable Ms Sindisiwe Chikunga**. A special address will be delivered by the Spouse of the Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa, **Mrs Humile Mashatile**.

International thought leadership will be provided by world-renowned autism advocates Professor Temple Grandin and Professor Tony Attwood, who will participate virtually. The programme also includes contributions from education and disability experts, civil society organisations, musicians and artists, creating a holistic and human-centred engagement on autism awareness and acceptance.

South Africa's commitment to disability inclusion is anchored in the Constitution and guided by international frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Despite these commitments, autistic and neurodivergent individuals – particularly women and youth from under-resourced communities – continue to face barriers in accessing inclusive education, healthcare, employment opportunities and social support services. The intersection of disability with gender, youth and socio-economic inequality further deepens marginalisation. In response, UNISA has convened this seminar to strengthen dialogue, collaboration and action towards a more inclusive society.

The purpose of the seminar is to support government efforts to advance the rights, inclusion and empowerment of autistic and neurodivergent persons. It also seeks to contribute to the implementation of disability-inclusive policies and programmes, promote alignment with national frameworks and international obligations, strengthen collaboration between government,



academia and civil society, and elevate the voices and lived experiences of neurodivergent individuals, with particular emphasis on women and youth.

The key objectives of the seminar are to -

- strengthen awareness and understanding of autism and neurodivergence;
- promote inclusive education and equitable access to services;
- address systemic barriers affecting women and youth with disabilities;
- support economic empowerment and participation; and
- encourage coordinated, cross-sectoral responses to disability inclusion.

Members of the media are cordially invited to attend and cover this important national seminar, which seeks to advance public understanding, policy dialogue and practical action on autism awareness, acceptance and inclusion in South Africa. The details are as follows:

Date: Wednesday, 29 April 2026

Time: 09:00 – 14:00

Venue: Protea Restaurant, OR Tambo Building, UNISA Main Campus, Muckleneuk, Pretoria, 0002

Ends/

ISSUED BY UNISA MEDIA AFFAIRS

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