

# Congratulations Doctor President!



From left: Prof Marinus Wiersma: Vice-Chancellor and Principal of Unisa, President Nelson Mandela, Dr Theo Rood: Chairman of Unisa's Council and Dr Chris Garbers: Chancellor of Unisa. At the back is Mr Stokkies Stockhoff, Registrar: Academic of Unisa. (Photograph: Willie de Beer, Unisa)

"One of the advantages of being awarded an honorary degree is that the recipient is generally freed of the anxiety that a former teacher might be present at the ceremony, dissenting from the judgement that the student is worthy of a degree. As a former Unisa student I do not have this luxury today.

But indeed, it is not the performance of an individual that is being recognised by this honour, but that of our nation. It is with deep humility that I accept it on their behalf.

At the same time I would like to take this opportunity to express on behalf of myself and a multitude of others, the gratitude of those who have found in Unisa the opportunity for further education in circumstances which would otherwise have made it impossible.

That the degree is in the subject of law is apposite, not merely because of my own passionate academic pursuits; but because of its relevance for the transformation we are undertaking. We have as a nation chosen a path of change which gives the legislatures a task of critical importance, that of creating a framework of law for political and socio-economic transformation.

Having just completed the second session of our democratic Parliament, this may be a good moment to reflect on whether we are succeeding, as a nation, in moving towards our common goals!

Are our legislatures and executive directing and managing the process with adequate clarity of purpose and efficiency? Have we sufficiently taken the measure of the burden which our chosen

**On Saturday, 16 September 1995, Unisa honoured President Nelson Mandela for the excellence he has shown in leading our country and as an alumnus of this university by awarding him a honorary doctorate in the law. This is an excerpt of the speech President Mandela delivered on the occasion:**

path of transformation places on the legislative process?

As far as the issues of education are concerned, I wish to briefly reflect on two matters.

Firstly, to express the concern at the attempts by some parties to delay the transformation of the education system, and thereby delay the attainment of genuine equality among all South Africa's children. Tragically, many of the privileged, continue today, by hook or by crook, to seek ways of perpetuating apartheid in education.

What makes this particularly tragic is that these parties stake their future in the past; and they are bound to fail dismally, for neither history nor the disadvantaged majority will afford them that dubious opportunity.

Secondly, regarding higher education, we should again emphasise that the changes required cannot be achieved by government alone.

The National Commission on Higher Education is a crucial vehicle through which the redefinition and repositioning of the sector can be articulated in a consultative process. It is also addressing, on an urgent basis, the crisis in student funding. For, it is our firm view that merit, and not personal financial standing, should ultimately determine access to higher education.

Success however will depend on both students and the institu-

tions themselves, sharing responsibility for change, particularly through the Transformation Forums. Similarly, the creation of a climate of learning and teaching must also be the joint responsibilities of universities and their students, reflected in the pursuit of negotiations and respect for the rights of others.

These are matters affecting all universities generally, and they will affect each university in different ways.

So is the case with Unisa, which has 40% of South Africa's enrolled university students. One cannot overemphasise the role of distance education, especially in those communities disadvantaged by apartheid.

Herein lies the scale and special nature of the challenge to your university. It is inevitable that an institution so central to our education system should have etched upon it the legacy of apartheid. To the same measure, Unisa is to be commended in its efforts to transform itself and thereby make a special contribution to the transformation of our society.

None of the nooks and crannies should be left unexamined if such selfscrutiny is to bear the necessary results.

For instance, we cannot avoid acknowledging the fact that Unisa's personnel was shaped under the imperatives of another era. Today, when we have to deal

is when such a history and culture engender an attitude of entitlement.

Indeed, having been entrusted with the role of principal distance educator for our country and beyond, Unisa should be seen to lead the process of transformation in higher education. The onus is on the students and the academic and administrative staff to join hands in this effort.

We raise all these questions because we are confident that Unisa has got the capacity, the will and the community of spirit to meet the challenges.

May I in conclusion thank you again for the honour you have bestowed upon me. I wish you success in transforming Unisa into a centre of pride for all of us and for the world. I thank you."

**In 1996 sal Unisa  
al vir 50-jaar die pas  
aangee in afstandsonderrig.  
Daar word vele geleenthede  
beplan om die verjaarsdag te vier  
en u as student sal daarvan in kennis  
gestel word sodat u ook kan  
deelnem aan die feestelikhede.  
Hou dus die Unisa Nuis/News  
sowel as u inligtingstukke  
dop vir meer  
inligting.**