

**PROFESSOR MS MAKHANYA  
RETIRED PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA  
FAREWELL ADDRESS TO THE UNIVERSITY  
29 APRIL 2021**

Thank you Programme Director, Dr Geneveive James

- His Excellency Dr Thabo Mbeki, Chancellor of Unisa and Former President of the Republic of South Africa
- Former Chancellor of Unisa, Judge President Bernard Ngoepe
- Chancellor of the University of Pretoria, Prof WL Nkuhlu
- Chancellor of Rhodes University, Judge L Mpati
- Mr MJ Maboja, Chairperson of Unisa Council
- Former Chairpersons of Council, Dr Mathews Phosa and Mr Sakhi Simelane and all former Members of Unisa Council
- Prof P LenkaBula, Principal & Vice Chancellor of the University of South Africa
- Ms M Kubayi-Ngubane, Minister, Department of Tourism
- Adv. SP Holomisa, Deputy Minister, Justice and Correctional Services

- Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and Higher Commissioners representing various Countries to South Africa
- Mr B Ngcaweni, Deputy Chairperson of Council and other Members of the University Council in attend here tonight
- Prof Barney Pityana, former Principal and Vice Chancellor of Unisa and all Unisa retirees
- Prof MS Makhanya, former Principal & Vice Chancellor of Unisa, Mrs Makhanya, Family members and Friends of Professor Makhanya in attendance
- Prof Tebogo Moja, Advisor to the first Minister of Education post our independence, currently at New York University
- Members of the University Executive and Extended Management present
- My special guests, including Prof N Baijnath (Chairman: Board of Governors, Commonwealth of Learning), Prof AC Bawa (CEO: Universities South Africa [USAf]), Dr KS Sukon (Director-General, Open University of Mauritius), Mr Maxim Jean-Louis (President: Contact North/Contact Nord), Generals from various arms of the Army, members of SAWID
- Former members of the University Council and former office bearers in attendance here tonight
- Representatives from National, Provincial and Local Government present



- Representatives from various Institutions of higher learning present
- Members of the Business Community present here tonight
- Members of the University Community present
- Members of the Organised labour represented by Mr S Bila and Mr J Jonker in attendance here tonight
- Members of the National Students representative Council and other students Formations
- Distinguished members of the audience
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Well, since everything has a beginning, it must also have an ending. And when I commenced my tenure at Unisa, in the back of my mind, was the very clear understanding that this day would come. This then means that work that one commits to has to be done without any delay and each day counts and is significant when it is understood within this context.

And so, this moment, this event, marks the culmination of a quite tumultuous decade and chapter – not only in my life and career, but also in the history of this magnificent and beloved university that is Unisa – the University of South Africa. But before I can talk about few points that are part of the narrative of the last decade, let me share something that many of you may not be aware of i.e. this time coincides with being a so-called senior which comes with the benefit of a pensioner’s card



that brings with it a variety of discounts and very respectful treatment wherever you go!

Over the past decade I have officiated at many retirement and long service awards ceremonies. And each time I was struck by the fact that some staff have been with this university for a lifetime - some for more than forty years. For them, and many others who are on the same career path, Unisa was, and is, a “job for life” despite the current job market that suggests the contrary. I’d like to believe it was so much more than that.

Having served for 33 years at Unisa myself, I believe that for most of us Unisa is a *home*. Unisa is an institution that has equipped us to grow intellectually and develop professionally, given us multiple opportunities to see the world, experience fantastic celebrations of truly illustrious people and momentous occasions, and perhaps equally importantly, helped us to build a special Unisa community. The fact of the matter is that Unisa paved the way for the breaking of the cycle of disadvantage and “otherness” that so many of us experienced, resulting in well-educated people who will build on new foundations of flourishing and responsible citizenship.

It is these qualities ladies and gentlemen, that prosper nations and Unisa has played, and continues to play, its part in that regard. And this ability



to “change futures in the service of humanity” has not only applied to our students, but also to our staff - and this is one of the main reasons for my abiding commitment to Unisa’s ongoing transformation. Put simply, Unisa is a university that changes lives, and I am deeply honoured and humbled to have been a key part of that transformative process during my time at this university and particularly for the past ten years.

So, after 33 years at this place which I call my other home and having moved through the ranks from the position of lecturer to that of its most senior position, that of the Principal and Vice Chancellor, it is time to bid you all goodbye. As I pondered about these years, it dawned on me that when I started to work for the university I had told myself that I would serve for five years and return to industry since this is an environment that I enjoyed being part of for a number of years after the completion of my studies at the University of Fort Hare. I cannot tell you today how do you compare 5 years to 33 years.

But before I continue, allow me to say that during 23 of my 33 years, I worked under four Vice Chancellors – Proff Van Vuuren, Wiechers, Melck and Pityana, all of whom made their own distinct contribution to this university, all of whom added another chapter to our Unisa story, all of whom undoubtedly shared the same love, loyalty and commitment to this university, its staff and its students. To each of these former Vice-



Chancellors I owe an immense debt of thanks and gratitude because they provided for me, my executive and extended management and our Council, a sound and healthy platform and springboard for our own vision, articulation and implementation of a university in transformation - a university optimally shaped to serve our students.

Reflecting back on my time at Unisa I can speak of many highlights and I can certainly reminisce, sometimes with much fondness and sometimes with abiding shock and humour about the many characters and incidents that crossed my path over the years. This I will not do. Rather, I would like to touch on just a few highlights, which I am proud and honoured to regard as highlights of my tenure as Vice-Chancellor.

The first of these must without a doubt be my genuine love of working in academia. This is something that remains close to my heart and has never been replaced by anything else. I say this with confidence because I worked in industry prior to coming to Unisa and I would undoubtedly have been given better perks given the career track that I was on. But I am certain that industry would never have given me the innate satisfaction that I enjoy when working with students who hold a very special place in my heart, and I suspect that will always be the case. For me, above all, a university is about its students. And so, you will understand when I say that one of the most rewarding aspects of my career is that I have supervised students who have gone on to be leaders in their own right in both industry and academia. Still others have chosen



careers in politics and they are doing well there. Whatever their career choices, I am honoured and proud to have played my small part in their education and development.

And, perhaps, aligned to my love of students has been the role that I have played as a mentor. I have mentored many people and have watched with immense pride and satisfaction as they have moved on to lead successful lives and enjoy successful careers at various organisations including universities. And Unisa being a university that serves humanity I have mentored people beyond South African borders with similar outcomes. I doubt that there are many careers that offer that kind of job satisfaction.

I must simultaneously say that I am deeply grateful to those who mentored me, because it is largely what I have learnt from them that built who I am and promoted me into mentoring others. I saw this not only as a matter of personal choice, but a responsibility and contribution to our collective development.

When it comes to moments of career pride, I must state my belief, that on my watch, Unisa grew into a university of choice as evidenced in the quite remarkable growth in student numbers. Quite fittingly, at a time when access and social justice continue to be burning issues at universities around the world (and this has been highlighted quite starkly



by the pandemic) Unisa has led the way in providing opportunities to those who might otherwise have been ignored or marginalized. I mentioned earlier on, the power of the University to transform lives and shape futures. I believe that in this instance we are making a seminal contribution, while giving genuine expression to our vision.

We have also seen a marked improvement in our research record in the past decade. The energy that has been invested in this project is quite remarkable and the results speak for themselves in greater numbers of research outputs, many more rated researchers, and research foci that speak to the realities and issues of our country and continent. As part of this improvement, we have also been able to record a significant rise in the number of staff who have received their doctoral degrees.

Our community engagement programmes, initiatives and projects, often in collaboration with other institutions or state and business entities, have received great press for their practical and rewarding results and our sensitivity to and understanding of, those whom we serve. They speak to the important role that our universities play in our communities and they highlighted the critical link between the academe, research and social and community development. I think that for many, the pandemic has brought into sharp focus that which we already know. Societies are riven with shocking inequalities, and our universities have a key role to play through wide-ranging yet inclusive collaborations, to not only





change that status quo but to cultivate greater self-reliance and independence as a country. The time for reliance on outside agencies to meet our needs must end and we as universities must take the lead in driving our self-sufficiency and independence. We have the tools at our disposal. It must however be driven quite deliberately.

I must also add - and I suspect that this is a matter of real pride for most of us - that in the past 10 years, Unisa has graduated the highest number of students in the history of the university. We have made a massive contribution to the sector, our country, and our continent when it comes to our enrolments and our contribution to the pool of graduates. I believe that under the able leadership of our new Vice Chancellor, Professor Lenka Bula, this trajectory and contribution will continue.

Closer to home, and I touched on this earlier, we have seen quite a drastic improvement in the conditions of employment and professional incentivization of our staff members, and I deliberately include insourcing in this, because I am in no doubt that these have improved the plight and lifestyles of our staff in measurable ways. I would suggest ladies and gentlemen, that much of this has to do with a university community that has been built on the basis of servant leadership, the ethos of the 11Cs plus one, a groundbreaking Charter on Transformation and the deliberate inclusion of our various stakeholder groups as part of



our institutional functioning. And while this has not always been easy, I am of the firm view that this has been a core part of the transformation that is needed to ensure our relevance as an authentically African university that is both relevant and excellent.

The results speak for themselves. If one considers the many reports on the truly solid, excellent achievements and accomplishments of our staff, and the numerous appointments to boards, commissions and other important bodies, then one realises that as an institution we are doing our job in our support of these colleagues and conversely, that our colleagues are flourishing in the supportive environment that we provide them. It is a fact that our staff are highly sought after by many organisations - including universities - as attested to by regular reports of those who are appointed in high offices. I trust that this concerted development of our staff will remain a priority of the university.

Ladies and gentlemen there are many, many, highlights that I can mention, but allow me to draw to a conclusion by highlighting perhaps the most recent of these, and that is our accelerated transition to a fully ODeL institution, which was prompted in no small measure by the advent of the pandemic back in March last year. If ever one wanted an example of “where there is a will there is a way,” this must surely be it. I remain humbled by the truly herculean effort of our staff and students, to not only adapt to this singular global disruption in real time, but in so doing,



to innovate and change at pace, thus ensuring that the academic year was not lost and that Unisa moved to its Council-approved fully ODeL status in record time. Looking back over a few short months I know that we will be able to claim in years to come that we were the first university in the world, to offer fully online exams for quality assured and accredited programmes – at scale. Make no mistake, while it has certainly been a challenging process, we must simultaneously agree that it had to be done, and that more importantly, it was the right thing to do in a world that is moving increasingly online and at a time when the role or purpose of higher education is increasingly being questioned.

Our recent success of the online pilot project at the Graduate School of Business Leadership (GSBL) and its pending rollout to our other colleges similarly testifies to that pioneering spirit which has perhaps always distinguished Unisa staff from those at other higher education institutions. I am particularly proud of this singular achievement – more so of the staff who went above and beyond to accomplish it, and the overwhelming majority of our students who understood its rationale, relevance and purpose and who have had to weather the inevitable glitches with such equanimity.

Allow me to conclude by extending to the hardest working executive in the country, our executive team at Unisa (both past and present), a heartfelt word of thanks and appreciation. To our Executive



Management who are ably supported by our Executive Deans and Executive Directors and Directors, I would like to say: yours has been a particularly difficult tenure during back-to-back times of severe sectoral, national and global disruption. That you have not only stayed the course but taken our university to greater heights, speaks to your character, professionalism and commitment to our university, our students, our country and our continent. I thank you all so profoundly and I am proud to have had you by my side these past years.

Mention must also be made to all members of Senate who have often been the locus of lively debate and contestation, but always one believes, in the best interests of our university and students. To our Senators who serve on this highest academic body of our university, also in a time of disruption and transition, I thank you all.

I must also thank those members who have served on the Unisa and Thabo Mbeki School Board for their commitment to our university through thick and thin. Their steadfast commitment, much needed experience, wisdom and steady perseverance through the years has been both inspirational and so well received and utilised. Special mention can perhaps be made of our much loved and respected stalwart, Dr Brigalia Bam, who together with me, co-chaired the Board.



Sincere thanks and gratitude must also be extended to the Unisa Council currently chaired by Mr Mashukudu Maboja, but also those chaired by Mr Sakhi Simelane and Dr Mathews Phosa for their unflagging commitment to, and support of, this mega university, through good and difficult times. To members of Council, past and present, I would like to say: “Your contribution cannot be quantified”. I owe you a deep debt of gratitude and I know that I speak on behalf of all when I say our institution and our country similarly owe you a debt of gratitude.

Of course, no appreciation would be complete without mention of our illustrious Chancellors, i.e., our Chancellor President Thabo Mbeki and the former Chancellor Judge President Bernard Ngoepe. Honourable sirs, I cannot think of greater honours for any university or any university leader, than to have had at its helm such highly accomplished and committed persons as yourselves. It is my deep honour to have served this university during your chancellorships and I know I speak for all when I say we are humbled that you have committed to contributing your time and adding your names to our illustrious list of Chancellors.

To those colleagues and organisations in the higher education environment and sector, including USAf, ACDE, ICDE, CoL, HETL, I thank you for the trust that you placed in me and in my university. Thank you for your willingness to work together so collegially in the best interests



of our students and higher education at large. Long may your relationship and association with Unisa continue.

Finally, I must thank those staff in my office, for whom the term “office hours” had little meaning, and whose sense of humour and fortitude in every imaginable kind of circumstance ensured that I was able to continue with my schedule irrespective of how many times it was changed.

To Ms Judith Pollock, now retired, whose Scottish sense of humour, fearlessness and sense of fair play characterized her contribution to my office and its efficiency, I thank you.

To Ms Linky Mogano, whose quiet efficiency and honesty and firm handling of my schedule ensured the smooth handover from Ms Pollock and the transition into a rapidly transforming institution, I thank you.

To Dr Jeanette Botha, the Director in my office whose efficiency, work ethic and professionalism ensured that my work runs smoothly.

To Prof Somadoda Fikeni, the Director of Special Projects in my office who injected life in my projects and ensured positive impact of these projects.



To drivers - Mr Daniel Makgata and Mr Geelbooi Sepato (GBoy) as well as Mr Chris Lekhuleni who supported the two gentlemen when it was not possible for them to be at work – you all provided professional chauffeuring to the Principal, drove with professionalism – adhering to speed limits, obeying rules of the road, and ensuring location of appointments so that the Principal is never late for his meetings.

To VIP Waiters – Mr William Mashilo and Ms Mavis Mnisi who joined the VC's office when Mr Mashilo retired – you have rendered professional service to the Chairperson of Council, Members of Council, the Principal, top management, and VC's visitors by serving refreshments and beverages where necessary. Ensuring proper function lay-up and excellent presentation, professionally unsetting and restoring of function venue after events, managed and controlled stock in VIP Bar and Kitchen according to the set standard.

To Cleaners - Ms Kedibone Komane and Ms Nonsikelelo Mlambo who maintained a clean and tidy environment -- You ensured that the VC's office, VIP Lounge and the kitchen are clean and tidy and putting everything back in place after events and removing left-overs.

I won't forget to mention Vice Principals who served directly in my office over the years, thank you to all of you.



Let me also thank members of the Department of Leadership and Transformation who have worked closely with me i.e. Prof Greg Cuthbertson, Prof Zodwa Motsa-Madikane, Prof Vuyisile Msila, Prof Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Dr Malekutu Bopape and Mr Console Tleane.

It is appropriate for me to now thank my wife, Mrs Mandu Makhanya, for the choice that she made to be married to a fellow like me. I guess someone else would have been angry and not supportive to a fellow like me, but here you are and you have never even raised your voice against me and I am truly blessed and therefore need to thank God for you for keeping me sane and my family who understand the type of father and grandfather that they have.

Once again, thank you so much Chairperson of Council -- Mr Maboja, Chancellor of our university – President Mbeki, Principal and Vice Chancellor – Prof Lenka Bula and all of you who have joined us tonight.





Re a leboha

Siyabonga

Re a leboga

*Dankie*

thank you

Inkomu

Siyathokoza



Ndo livhuwa

Enkosi

Ro livhuwa

Aio

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