

## KEY NOTE ADDRESS:

“Academic Closing Ceremony”

6<sup>th</sup> December 2010

ZK Matthews Hall

Prof MS Makhanya  
Pro Vice Chancellor  
Unisa

### **Introduction**

The official closing of our academic year is always an occasion on which we reflect on what we have achieved and give gratitude to our staff and Unisa stakeholders while being mindful of our strategic intent and future vision for our institution.

This year our academic closing has particular personal value to me as I will not only be closing our academic activities but also saying goodbye to my position as Pro Vice Chancellor. But I am delighted that the position of Pro Vice Chancellor will be most ably filled by Professor Narend Baijnath, who has now been formally appointed as Unisa’s new PVC.

### **Leadership and Governance**

Over the past two years, in particular, we have focused on shaping our institutional and academic identity to reflect who

we are as a truly comprehensive open distance learning institution rooted in the African continent yet with a global presence. Even though I will be signing off some of the projects that began under my leadership I will continue to monitor their progress in close collaboration with Prof Baijnath, while taking up my position in 2011 as Principal and Vice Chancellor of Unisa. I am committed to leading our institution in a manner that befits the vision I have spelt out in previous conversations with the Unisa community: **SLIDE 2**

***The new Unisa will combine scholarship, critical thinking and self-reflection with the values of African cultures – openness, warmth, compassion, inclusiveness, and community – and through cutting edge technology we will reach our students wherever they are. This new Unisa will be a focal point for innovation sensitive to our local context of African ethics but mindful of our global reach.***

In this regard I wish to re affirm to our Unisa community that the University has committed itself firmly and consistently in our *2015 Strategic Plan: an Agenda for Transformation* to the promotion of good governance. Members of council and members of executive and extended management therefore must at all times in their official capacity ensure that they act in

the best interest of our University, taking up their fiduciary duties and showing care and diligence in exercising their duties. Our various policies and procedures aim to give expression to good governance practices in our institution thereby ensuring an environment in which equity, social justice and fairness prevails.

**Focusing on our vision: towards *the* African university in the service of humanity**

Unisa's compelling vision statement "towards the African university in the service of humanity" inspires us to be responsive and active members of society with the potential to transform not only ourselves but also the context in which we operate. I recall the words of Judge Justice Bernard Ngoepe on the occasion of his reappointment as the University's Chancellor, when he reminded us that: **SLIDE 3**

*"...the entire University will need to get firmly behind transformation efforts that are aimed at improving Unisa's academic enterprise in its totality. There can be no doubt that Unisa's lion's share of students in South Africa means that it has a pivotal role to play in socioeconomic development: a serious responsibility that speaks not only*

*to our professional integrity as educators, but also to our social responsibility”*

As we reflect on 2010, I can gladly report we do indeed have the lion's share of students in South Africa with our most recent headcount exceeding 290,000 this year. But more important is our success in graduations and throughput rate, which has reached 9.1%, which exceeds the ministerial target of 8.4%. Further, we graduated 22 675 students in 2009 which means that between 2004 and 2009, Unisa contributed a total of 97 500 graduates to society. Let's pause for a moment and digest that news. Unisa is a very significant player in the socio-economic development of South Africa.

But I am also pleased to say that our health as a university is not just about numbers. We have embarked on initiatives to protect our natural and working environment, ensuring that Unisa becomes a healthy space that protects the wellbeing of our people and uplifts communities towards sustainable growth and development. **SLIDE 4**

### **Our natural and working environment**

The protection of our natural environment and resources is now a global issue. Along with other universities, Unisa plays a key role in providing a critical knowledge base that will ensure a healthy and sustainable environment for future generations.

As a result of a significant growth in student numbers in two of our Colleges, the University decided to invest in our Florida campus by providing a specially designed campus to accommodate under- and postgraduate lecturing and research facilities for chemistry and physics, a water-retention dam for agriculture, and an up market food research facility. In addition to this the Florida campus has also made a sterling effort to become more accessible for the disabled community.

#### SLIDE 5 (photo of Kgorong)

But perhaps the most striking change to the Unisa landscape has been the completion of our entrance building, the Kgorong Building, which opened its doors on 4 November providing a user-friendly entrance and gateway to the Muckleneuk Campus and providing a new and more central home for units such as Corporate Communication and Marketing, the Alumni offices, a library information desk and Unisa's Art Gallery. In designing these spaces special attention was given to environmental factors by creating work-spaces that will be fit for purpose and kind to the environment. The building has enhanced our physical infrastructure and is an asset that reflects Unisa's identity.

Our focus on the environment however has not been reserved for new facilities and resources. In September, a collaborative effort was made by the Environmental Sciences Unit, University Estates, Security Services and DESCO to dispose of our old electronic goods on Recycling Day. University staff were invited to participate by bringing their e-waste items to be disposed of in the correct manner and where possible to be recycled.

SLIDE 6 (photo of notice about switching off)

You would also have noticed the banners as you enter the Muckleneuk Campus, urging us to be mindful of our wasteful practices and to conserve energy in the University. SLIDE 7 (photo of switching off the lights).

I hope you are all diligently switching off your lights and other electrical appliances when you leave the campus and in this way contributing to our joint effort to conserve our resources.

### **Our Social Mandate**

Unisa has firmly committed itself to create, promote and develop a nurturing environment for its students, staff and civil society to ensure that people have a sense of pride and belonging when engaging with our institution.

SLIDE 8 (Brite Site)

But some people have gone beyond the norm in giving true meaning to community outreach. While I will be mentioning a few community projects when I speak of College achievements, I would like to focus on some of the more inspiring projects for 2010 such as the Bright Site Project under the leadership of Professor Rienie Schenk. This project operates amongst the Sunnyside community by providing students with practical learning experience while serving the disadvantaged communities in this area. We hope too to extend this project to other areas using the generous funds from the Strategic Projects Committee beginning in KZN.

#### SLIDE 9 (Parow Campus)

The Parow Campus AIDS Committee took the initiative to invite Life Choice, a non-government organization that primarily undertakes HIV/AIDS education at high schools, to provide Unisa staff and students in Cape Town with the opportunity to be tested during the January 2010 registration period. The purpose of the exercise was to promote the University's drive for voluntary counseling and testing for students and staff members.

#### SLIDE 10 Literacy Coaching Project

Special mention should be made of Professor Lilli Pretorius and her adopted primary school in Atteridgeville where she is running a Literacy Coaching Project with great success under difficult circumstances. It is often people like these, who work

behind the scenes, unnoticed by most of us, who deserve the highest praise.

There have been other important community outreach projects, such as MathsEdge, one of three CSET community engagement flagship projects, and the strategic projects that are managed by my office are all community focused and include the Unisa Learning Campaign, the In-service Teacher Training Unit, and the Academy for African Languages and Science. But perhaps the one we remember best was the FIFA World Cup when Unisa joined in the celebration with an array of activities aimed at strengthening relationships with our community. These included: **SLIDE 11 FIFA**

- An interactive engagement session with our staff to kick off the FIFA World Cup in true Unisa style. The Vice Principal Strategy and Planning Prof Baijnath took us on an exciting journey showcasing our strategic goals and making it fun to understand our Unisa context as a vital part of our identity.
- **SLIDE 11 Better World**
- Adding to the excitement our staff, students and the broader community were invited to enjoy learning opportunities during the world cup at the Better World Village, a space allocated close to Burgers Park in Pretoria in which the Unisa Campaign for Learning, in a collaborative effort with the City of



Tshwane and various other stakeholders, presented various learning opportunities to the community addressing critical issues such as homelessness, human trafficking, HIV/AIDS, Xenophobia, sustainable local development and creating a greening city

- **SLIDE 12 VRIJE**
- In an effort to strength international relations while simultaneously providing life skills for the community, the Directorate for International Relations collaborated with Vrije University from the Netherlands in presenting a soccer clinic for more than 300 children in Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town. Dr Harry Wels, the director of Strategic Alliances at Vrije University, captured the essence of the event by saying that: **SLIDE 13**

*“Sport is a metaphor for life skills and we aim to teach the kids how to relate sport to broader issues”*

The World Cup was not just an event but a learning curve not just for Unisa or those fans that actively participated but for all South Africans who showed their commitment to our country and showed the world that we are more than capable of hosting an event to top international standards. I also need to thank

those of you who kept the Unisa ship afloat amidst all the excitement and fun by ensuring that our university was operationally functional for the duration of the World Cup.

I turn now to College activities for 2010

## **College Activities for 2010: Highlights**

### **SLIDE**

**CHS declared 2010 the year of happiness by celebrating their academic successes as follows:**

- **a record total of 105 Doctoral graduations**
- **an increase in NRF rated academics**
- **CHS staff completing higher degrees**
- **a number of programme reviews**
- **Scholars Development programme**
- **Mentorship programme**
- **Leadership programme**
- **Africa speaks: Visiting African Scholars**
- **Unisa Language Festival**
- **Continued support for Ethiopian students**
- **Support for students in the regions**
- **The Early Childhood Indaba**
- **World report on child injury prevention**
- **Education research day and Education Students' conference**
- **USBAH's seminar on HIV/Aids**

### **SLIDE**

### **CEST Highlights included:**

- **The launch of six MIT research flagship projects in ODL, topology, exo-toxicology, human computer integration, water, and human language technology**
- **An increase in NRF rated researchers**
- **An increase in accredited research outputs by 5%**
- **Increase in staff completing higher degrees**
- **A large grant from DoHET for the Unisa Science Foundation Programme (in conjunction with CAES)**
- **A new PQM for the School of Engineering and a revised PQM for the School of Computing**
- **Research awards in quality and innovation**
- **Accolades and strategic appointments for the Executive Dean, Prof Setati and Senior Staff, Prof Les Labuschagne and Dr Moche.**

### **SLIDE**

### **CAES highlights included:**

- **The Fog Water Harvesting Project launch**
- **Cleaning up Sol Plaatjie Township**
- **Skills development project at Mandlethu High School**
- **ABCD (Asset Based Community Driven) project in Mathopestat**

- **Celebrating Women's Day in Losperfontein Prison in Brits.**
- **Children's Map Competition**
- **Various awareness campaigns for sustainable environments, gardens, seeds**
- **Health awareness during the Soccer World Cup (Soccer Fans Wipe your Hands)**
- **Celebrating World Environment Day, National Arbor Day and World Food Day**
- **Pioneering the importance of WIL**
- **Visiting African Scholars**
- **Support for Ethiopian students by the Department of Geography**
- **Two newly inaugurated Professors.**

#### **College of Law:**

- **Academic achievements for Prof Kelly Louw, Proffs Masiloane, Montesh, Ogutto and Zinn**
- **The hosting of the International Property Law Conference**
- **The establishment of the Institute for African Dispute Resolution in Africa**
- **The Migration and Citizenship Rights Project**
- **Short learning programme on Refugee Law under the Brite Site of Sunnyside project**

- **The Brains Trust Project to develop a critical cohort of new knowledge producers fit for purpose in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

## **CEMS**

- **Postgraduate Induction DVD**
- **Four new NRF rated researchers**
- **140 publications in accredited journals**
- **Renewal of EXXARO Chair**
- **Nine research flagships**
- **A first staff morale survey and student satisfaction survey**
- **Electronic dashboard and helpdesk for student service delivery**
- **Training workshop on alternative assessment**
- **50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of BMR**
- **Executive Dean involved in RARE (Responsible, Accountable, Relevant and Ethical) leadership approach for Africa**

## **Strategic and Academic Initiatives embodying the Unisa Vision**

Apart from these exciting College developments, I would like to summarise some of the highlights for 2010:

#### SLIDE

- We produced the 2015 Revisited, Unisa's response to the HEQC audit report and a new three year IOP
- We made significant progress in our Open Distance Learning implementation plan with the appointment of Dr Paul Prinsloo as ODL coordinator under the Vice Principal Academic and Research and we have all become accustomed to our weekly read of the ODL Communique
- In terms of technology we are Microsoft's flagship for Live@edu with 622 721 mailboxes created for Unisa students giving us one of the world's largest VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) presences. All staff will be trained in how to use a VLE in 2011 through the ODL implementation initiative
- Our School for Graduate Studies took off with various activities aimed at postgraduate learning, supervision, quality assurance, support for Ethiopian students, and networking with the five Colleges
- We held successful seminars, symposia and workshops on Graduateness and Tutors and Tutoring
- The Dean of Students went on walkabout and was enthusiastically received in the Regions; the NSRC under the leadership of Mr Nhlamulo Siwela increased its

participatory role in Unisa's structures and several of its members have been invited to take up positions in SAASCO, BMR and the Black Lawyers' Association respectively; the Advocacy and Resource Centre for Students with Disabilities held an awareness campaign raising awareness around the disabled student.

- In the Regions, the mobile bus service will strengthen Unisa's reach to far flung students; Limpopo region hosted the Es'kia Mphahlele Memorial Lecture
- IODL held a number of exciting events with international visiting scholars who not only presented lectures but also devoted time to workshops for up-skilling staff in innovation and technology
- Our Research Directorate experienced the highest ever number of NRF ratings this year. 33 Unisa academics were rated by the NRF, 21 male, 12 female. A special mention must be made of Professor WL Fouche of CEMS who received a B1 rating.
- Unisa Press, which joined the Research Department in September published and launched two more volumes in the Road to Democracy series in collaboration with SADET.
- Unisa was allocated a Chair in Intellectual Property Law by the Technology Innovation Agency of the Department of Science and Technology and we are happy to

announce the appointment of Professor Joseph Strauss into this Chair.

- Professor Michelle Kelly-Louw from the College of Law received the award for Distinguished Young Woman Scientist by the Department of Science and Technology.
- 20 Unisa staff members registered for their doctorates and participated in the Unisa/Santrust PhD proposal writing project while a further 80 staff members enrolled for PhD study
- Our Library had several major accomplishments this year: we became the first library in Africa to implement Radio Frequency Identification Equipment in the Muckleneuk Library making self-service possible for the first time; the Institutional Repository was substantially expanded, adding an average of 2000 items every month; research space has been expanded; and perhaps most exciting, Unisa has become the first academic library to offer mobile services to clients who cannot visit the library in person. The first two mobile libraries will operate in the Polokwane and Cape Coastal regions.
- In our HR department, we have set up systems to deliver effective and efficient service, and we have trained staff in the use of HR Oracle Self Help. HR is also inculcating a culture of mentorship and coaching at Unisa and



Management is in the middle of a training programme on coaching which has already had significant results.

- Unisa's Finances are in a sound state with an operating surplus for 2010, attributed mainly to adjustment of the fair value of investments. We have also seen a 10% increase in student revenue this year.

I have not by any means exhausted the accomplishments and achievements for 2010 but I think I have shown that we have much to celebrate and much to be proud of. Behind the public face of this great university are the people, the majority of whom are dedicated and hard-working, inspiring us with the way in which they conduct themselves. Why am I saying "they"?

It is you I am talking about. Please give yourselves a huge round of applause.

We have come to the end of the year and the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The first decade coincided with the Vice Chancellorship of Professor NB Pityana who gave us nine years of outstanding leadership. We have already said good bye to Prof Pityana on several occasions but it is fitting to say it once more at this academic closing ceremony. We thank him for his inspired leadership and wish him well for the future.

Next year will not only be a new year with new leadership but also the beginning of the second decade. We are advancing swiftly towards the year we marked for the achievement of many of our strategic goals, the year 2015. What will the next five years bring? With people like yourselves, I can only assume that they will be better than ever.

Thank you and enjoy your well-deserved holidays.

