



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

THE OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY OF THE ACADMIC YEAR 2019

ZK MATTHEWS HALL, MUCKLENEUK CAMPUS

15 FEBRUARY 2019

PROF MANDLA S MAKHANYA

PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

The African University shaping futures in the service of humanity

Thanks Programme Director, Professor Zungu

- Mr Chairperson of Council, Mr Sakhi Simelane
- Members of Council
- Mrs Makhanya
- Members of the diplomatic corps
- Colleagues in Executive and Extended Management
- President of the NSRC, your executive members and all student leaders

- Leaders of NEHAWU and APSA
- Leaders of all organised structures
- Our esteemed staff members and students
- Friends of the University from all walks of life
- Members of the media fraternity

Good morning to you all. Allow me to commence this address with a warm welcome to you all. A special welcome to those who have come on board as new staff members since last year's academic opening. The data which has been provided to me indicates that we gained 355 new colleagues in 2018. We have also been joined by eight more senior colleagues since December last year. They are:

1. Prof Mahadeo Basdeo, Executive Dean: College of Law;
2. Prof Luvuyo Lumkile Lalendle, Executive Director: Planning and Quality Assurance;
3. Mr Arnause Rabatome Mohlala, Director: Employee Relations and Wellness;
4. Mr Xola Bernard Lingani, Chief Audit Executive: Internal Audit;
5. Adv Jele Joel Baloyi, Deputy Registrar Governance;
6. Prof Lindiwe Innocentia Zungu, Executive Dean: College of Graduate Studies;
7. Prof Solomon Ramagoai Magano, Deputy Executive Dean: College

of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES); and,

8. Dr Gabriel Gavin Isaacs, Chief Operating Officer: School of Business Leadership.

I hope that you have had an opportunity to familiarize yourselves with Unisa's *Charter on Transformation* (which is available on the Intranet) and in particular our *11Cs plus 1*, which articulate the kind of culture which we seek to embed and practice at Unisa. My wish for us all this year is that we work together for the good of our students, and the health and wellbeing of our university.

This morning we will also be acknowledging several colleagues whose contributions to Unisa, through their professional conduct, their commitment and their loyalty, set precisely the kind of example which we should all be striving for. They are living and practicing the 11Cs plus 1, and their efforts have been noted and acknowledged - by colleagues and students alike.

To the recipients of the awards this morning I say: "Congratulations, well done and well deserved"! You are beacons of excellence which can and should shine a light over the entire institution, illuminating the path that all should follow. We are proud of you all.

I know that there are others who may not have been nominated. To those staff too let me say very sincerely that we appreciate your diligence and integrity. No one loses with such colleagues in our midst.

There can however be no doubt that we have a long way to go in ensuring that these levels of excellence are uniform across the institution. Now more than ever before, we need service excellence and institutional loyalty, and it is to this that I now turn.

We meet here today against the backdrop of major developments within the sciences. Humanity continues to make advances in innovation and the employment of science to understand nature, interface with it, and improve our lives. These advances bring with them exciting possibilities, as well as concerns over what the implications can be for productive labor. Yet, we may not ignore nor seek to suppress the ingenuity that is shown by our scientific endeavors.

I am talking here about what has come to be known as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, with one of the key features thereof being advances in Artificial Intelligence and the employment of advanced technology in resolving some of the stubborn challenges still faced by humankind.

From the vantage point of higher education these developments have meant that there is growing emphasis on the promotion of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). The view is that these subject choices and related career paths are what is necessary for our country to leap-frog, from being a developing economy to a developed one.

On the other hand, some caution against emergent binary thinking, which seeks to treat the sciences and the arts as being diametrically opposed disciplines. Hence the shift now towards the Sciences, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM). Surely, that is where we are as South African universities, where we assign equal premium to the arts as we do to the sciences. We should develop technical skills at the same time as we encourage critical thinking and compassion for all of humanity – the rich and the poor.

As we struggle with these exciting debates we may realise though that less attention has been devoted to the skills and knowledge that would be required to re-conceptualise our social contract to prepare and equip our citizens for the world that is emerging from the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

It is my submission that this imperative will become more material and pressing as deeply unequal societies struggle to adapt to a world that is being designed by the relative few *for* the relative few, but which will, and is already, impacting all of us. There is no escape and there is no room for Luddites. In this view, our Humanities and Social Sciences will become increasingly important, even critical, as originators of new social contracts and new knowledges, whose educators are equipped to incubate and produce graduates who will be able to traverse and succeed in this brave new world.

A recent World Economic Forum Global Challenge Insight Report titled *The Future of Jobs Employment, Skills and Workforce Strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution* lists the following top ten skills as being critical to being able to thrive in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. (NB: The timeline is 2020):

1. Complex Problem Solving;
2. Critical Thinking;
3. Creativity;
4. People Management;
5. Coordinating with others;
6. Emotional Intelligence;

7. Judgement and decision making;
8. Service orientation;
9. Negotiation; and,
10. Cognitive flexibility.

These are skills that we need to cultivate ourselves and which we need to inculcate in our students. To what extent are we succeeding in doing so? If we don't or can't do it, who else will do so? (And by the way, one cannot but note their resonance with our 11Cs Plus 1.)

Programme Director, let me say that even though Universities across the globe - and at home - are under sustained attack across a broad array of fronts - from cost, to relevance, to exclusion - there is no doubt in my mind that our role in society is more critical than ever before. Our collective futures simply cannot be left in the hands of "a global cabal" whose interests are profits, rather than human progress, especially for the poor, and whose practices are manifesting in the erosion of the value of accessible university education and indeed, education broadly.

What that means for us as universities, colleagues, is that we are going to have to reassert and prove our value *in*, and *to*, society, and to the parents and students who have placed their trust in us. And let us not

underestimate the seriousness of the responsibility that rests on our shoulders right here and right now - especially when we claim to be *shaping futures in the service of humanity*.

At Unisa, colleagues, this means getting back to the basics of product and service excellence. This includes taking a long hard look at ourselves and asking how open and committed we are to make the personal and professional changes that are necessary to adapt to our changed and changing education context. Are we as educators equipped and prepared to usher our students into the world of the Fourth Industrial Revolution - or are we more likely to withdraw, disengage and try to prolong the inevitable as long as is possible? What is needed in the current climate and context is proactiveness that goes beyond business-as-usual.

I am pleased to say that we are already well on our journey of revitalizing the academic project and I have already made it abundantly clear that our focus in 2019 will be on the academe – on our core business. One of the Eight Dimensions on Transformation, which the Chairperson has just referred to, focuses on Knowledge, epistemology and language. As we argue in the Integrated Transformation Strategy which the Council adopted last year “the transformation of a university would mean nothing if its core offering, which is teaching, learning and research were not

transformed to reflect the context within which it operates, which is the African continent.” The university must, therefore, “also reflect decolonial knowledge systems which seek to disrupt Northern epistemologies and replace them with knowledge systems that reflect humanity’s contribution to development from all continents.” We argue further that “the university should also aim to contribute to the development of African languages as languages of science and commerce.”

It is within this philosophical setting that we should frame our academic offering; an academic programme that is transformed and offers the requisite technical, intellectual and social skills which our students need.

I trust that *all* our academics will come on board to ensure that our academic project achieves its full potential, and that it won’t be left to the few to shoulder the project of transformation upon which we have embarked.

That said, *none* of our efforts in regard to ensuring academic relevance and excellence; developing appropriate pedagogical models and practices; ensuring our active participation in the Fourth Industrial Revolution; being community and stakeholder engaged, and conducting relevant and cutting edge research *will be of any use*, if our academic project is not supported

by quality, efficient and effective teaching and learning and administration and crucially, staff support, initiative and loyalty.

The reasons for this emphasis colleagues, is that as I was mulling over this address, I began to appreciate the pitfalls of getting so enmeshed in the current contextual dynamics and difficulties that we run the risk of losing focus on our core business and our key stakeholders. So today, let me declare unambiguously, that we intend to declare “war” on all forms of laxity and dereliction at Unisa.

I expect dedicated service to students in all its permutations. And to that end I want to call on staff members to renew their vigour in appreciating our students and acknowledging that we have in our midst young men and women who need a different type of support, which we should be happy to provide for the sake of their futures and ours – a future that is by no means cast in stone.

At every long service awards ceremony, I hear the immense pride in the voices of those who have worked at this university for many years. They know our value and impact. Many have told me: “Unisa gave me what I have today”, and, “Unisa educated my children”. They are grateful and

appreciative of the magnitude of Unisa's contribution to their lives. But, I ask myself what has happened now?

Today, too often, Unisa is demonised by some of our detractors and unappreciated by some of our staff. What is even more disconcerting is the fact that there are some staff whose sole intention seems to be to "milk" Unisa, with little by way of return.

That sense of pride, loyalty and commitment must be rekindled. Everyone who is proud of Unisa and proud to be working at Unisa should demonstrate that visibly – in word and deed. If we were all to provide the levels of service that are expected of us, if we were all to practice the 11Cs Plus 1, this university would be transformed overnight. And given the example of those who will be receiving awards this morning, we know that it can be done. We need to accept our responsibilities and be prepared to be held accountable for them. If we can all do our share, then quite frankly, we have nothing to fear and nothing to lose – and everything to gain.

Programme Director, let me make it clear to those who think that they will be carried by the University without them demonstrating why we should in fact keep them - we neither need nor want passengers. We need

consistent performers who will add value to the university and deliberately advance its agenda.

I am particularly “taking a swipe” at those managers who have a distorted view about their roles and prefer to be managed, instead of managing. I want responsibility and accountability to be drilled down to virtually every staff member, and for managers to tell me that they know what everyone does on a day-to-day basis! I am in an uncompromising mode when it comes to performance!

Colleagues, Unisa pays well! That is a fact. But I am embarrassed and angered to say that in far too many instances we are not getting the reciprocation of effort that justifies that pay. I expect a full day’s work from everyone. I expect all employees to take accountability for that and all managers to hold their staff accountable.

Managers must find a way, by means of evidence, of guaranteeing that staff are work a full day. Let us declare the *death knell* of sloth and indifference at Unisa.

Let us not attempt to defend those who should be shown the door!

Each one of us must be excited about our students and their success! I want us to turn a corner in improving chances of success of our students (particularly undergraduate students). The pain of seeing so many students failing is etched in my heart and my soul. We must improve our throughput rates, especially for black and women students in the fields of accounting and economic sciences, natural science, and engineering. This is a transformation imperative that we cannot abdicate if we are serious about redressing the imbalances of painful apartheid past, when the black child was not expected to study, pass and excel in mathematics and science.

I am in no way advocating for a situation where we simply pass the students who have not done their work. What I am advocating for is relentlessness when it comes to support and accompaniment of students as they journey through their studies. My call is simply that each one of us has a critical role to play in reversing the injustices of the past and contributing to an equal society reflected by, amongst others, equity in our throughput rates.

Colleagues, when I speak of students I include our post graduate students. I am fighting a fierce battle on behalf of postgraduate students. I will ensure that students are recruited deliberately for enrolment in honours

degrees and furthermore that we make a success of these studies. Thereafter, I am going to task the College of Graduate Studies to account for the effectiveness of *every supervisor on an ongoing basis*. We must therefore develop a model that includes ongoing monitoring and evaluation of our Master and Doctoral supervision efforts.

Supervision for our Masters and Doctoral students requires urgent attention. We are frankly being let down far too often by unsuitable or lax supervisors and our students are suffering for it – not to mention our reputation!

I cannot have postgraduate students who complain about supervisors who do not do their work. We need to ensure that supervisors offer satisfactory evidence of their competence and conduct when it comes to the supervision of our students. Poor supervision must be eliminated at Unisa.

I have been asking myself a fundamental question as to why I decided to quit industry in the 1980s to become an academic. My answer has always been that I felt deep down in my heart that this noble job of teaching our students at a distance education university was burning and could not be stopped by anything. I accepted that I may not have had the privilege of studying at a university known during our time as a so-called "liberal

university", but I was privileged to have studied at the prestigious University of Fort Hare. Even then, I understood that Unisa attracts students who cannot be at contact/residential universities.

For me, these represented students who are disadvantaged and who need truly dedicated men and women who *choose to teach* at such a university rather than just going for high-paying jobs. For me, teaching is a *calling*, and I want to differentiate between people who choose to teach because of a "calling" and those who want a job! I am sorry, but I don't want people who are at Unisa for a "job" because they are obviously at a wrong place! It is in fact a huge irony that our students, who are mostly already disadvantaged, should suffer the additional disadvantage by being neglected, rather than nurtured, by the very institution in whom they have vested their hope and aspirations. Unisa students need teachers and admin staff who genuinely care. Therefore, I say that working at Unisa can never just be a job.

In addition to the academic transformation that is underway, as part of our commitment to make Unisa more accessible and equitable - and as a demonstration of our appreciation of our context and our students - council and management have plans underway to invest in student facilities. This has been made possible by donations of land in Mthatha,

Ray Nkonyeni Municipality in Margate, and Johannesburg (by Gauteng Government). Work is also underway to find adequate space for facilities in Durban. This continues to be difficult logistically. And while we have been fighting unsuccessfully for alternative space in Durban we are not going to give up. We remain committed to providing these services to our students. You will note in each instance of land donation we have worked with communities who appreciate the need and the value of education for their young people. That is how it should be. These collaborations, in my view, represent the African ethos of community and sharing.

Colleagues, we must ensure that we are relevant, contextually aware and that we produce graduates who will be able to navigate the future with confidence and success. Last year I shared with you a blue print of how that should be done and how it would be implemented at Unisa. This year I would encourage each of us to look inward, examine our consciences and self-correct. We must commit to giving in full measure that which we would like our children and generations to come, to receive.

I thank you