



Office of the Principal and Vice Chancellor

Prof Mandla Makhanya

Vice Chancellor and Principal of UNISA

Welcome and Address

Unisa-Sowetan Dialogue Series

“Are trade Unions still working for the workers?”


25 August 2015


Durban


 Programme facilitator, Dr Somadoda Fikeni


 Our esteemed panellists,


- The President of Cosatu, Mr Sdumo Dlamini
- The President of Nactu, Mr Joseph Maqheleni
- The President of Fedusa, Mr Koos Bezuidenhout
- The Secretary General of Solidarity, Mr Gideon du Plessis
- And the Labour Analyst, Ms Mamokgethi Molopyane

 Sowetan Dialogues Coordinator, Ms Nompumelelo Runji
and your colleagues from the Sowetan newspaper.

 Leaders of different formations of the public, the private
sector and the civil society

 Members of the media present tonight

 Distinguished audience

 Ladies and gentlemen

It gives me a great pleasure to welcome you to the Unisa-Sowetan Dialogue Series being held in the great city, Ethekwini. I welcome you to this dialogue series that is increasingly gaining momentum and making waves across our society which, faced with a myriad of challenges, desperately need a sustained national dialogue and a difficult conversation about the trajectory of our democracy and the content of our nation-building project.

Two decades into our democracy, we are now coming to realize the harsh realities of nation-building project especially the vexing challenges of socio-economic transformation and sustained economic development. We face both the stubborn reality of the legacy of colonialism and apartheid as well as dilemma of current policy choices. Several historical milestones of our struggle and journey towards realization of our freedom and social justice are invoked to contextualise our collective journey as a nation. As we mark 60 years since the adoption of the Freedom Charter, as we mark 59 years of Women's march on The Union Buildings in Pretoria, as we mark 25 years since the freeing of the founding president of our democracy, Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of liberation movement, I begin to appreciate in a profound manner what Madiba shared with us, as he wrote, ***No Easy Walk to Freedom*** and indeed, it is ***Long Walk to Freedom***.

Despite the gains made since our transition to democracy in 1994, there are current challenges which, if not attended to as a matter of urgency, may undermine whatever gains we have made. There is a general consensus that our economy is experiencing acute problems as shown in our very low economic growth, unacceptably high levels of unemployment especially among the youth, poverty, rapidly increasing levels of inequality even by international standards, struggling and at times declining manufacturing and mining sector, the Marikana tragedy as well as currently volatile and fragmented state of the labour movement as well as the energy supply crisis coupled with general crises afflicting our state owned companies. South Africa is, to a significant extent, a commodity export economy, and its serial downgrade by international agencies, the global financial and economic crisis that is now beginning to affect China and other emerging economies that South Africa has been gravitating towards in terms of trade and commercial relations, further compounds the picture I painted above.

Tonight we have come to listen to reflections of the leaders of the Trade Unions to reflect on the state of our labour unions. In the whole equation of our political economy, trade unions play a very crucial role in driving our economic performance and productivity. It is, therefore, perfectly understandable that the issue of the state of our unions would be so topical in our national conversation about the current and future state of our democracy and economy.

I, therefore, welcome the leaders of our diverse Trade Unions who have agreed to participate in this important forum. I hope your insights, as practitioners and critical agents in our nation-building process, shall leave us lot more enlightened with many concerning questions answered.

Let me again, welcome our partners from the iconic Sowetan Newspaper, who, within a very short space of time, have demonstrated their passion for community engagement and

community dialogues, something that I share and am very passionate about. Unisa-Sowetan Dialogue Series partnership is an active partnership that in all indications, is beginning to get the country talking and reflecting on key issues of our time. This is one of Unisa's most valuable partnership that is beginning to penetrate different spheres and spaces of our society.

Without any fear of contradiction, I am sure I speak on behalf of everyone gathered here tonight, that we look forward to this dialogue with an intense air of anticipation. It is a view that many of our fellow compatriots share that social and political stability, social cohesion and national unity as well genuine nation-building process are all greatly enhanced or reinforced by robust, sustained, and honest sharing of knowledge and views, no matter how diverse these may be. It is, I am convinced, only when we give narrative dignity to all voices that we can create an inclusive democracy. I am mindful of the fact that we have invited to the panel the leaders of the Trade

Unions to speak on the subject of the relevance of trade unions for the workers in the current political economy. Perhaps shop stewards may reflect from the audience to reflect on their appreciation or otherwise, of the role of trade unions in their well-being.

As it is the women's month, let me take time to wish you a happy women's month but let every month be a month to fight the scourge of patriarchy in our society and in the world. I also decry the scarcity of women leadership in the Trade Unions. Where are the women trade union leaders?

As I conclude, I look forward to that time when these dialogues are taken to the rural and farm communities, to the various townships and informal settlements of our country. Increasingly, these dialogues are poised to shape the agenda of our national conversation on matters that really matter. When that happens we

will know that the chill of our socio-political winter is giving way to a Spring season of our politics and economy.

May we have a great festival of ideas this evening. I wish success to our deliberations this evening.

I thank you

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