

PROF MANDLA MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION: DR SAMAH JABR

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2020

07 MARCH 2020

Thank you, Programme Director, Dr Fraser-Moleketi

- Ambassador Sheila Sisulu
- Our guest speaker today, Dr Samah Jabr
- Our discussants, Ms Nardos Bekele-Thomas and Ms Linet Gatakaa Miriti
- Our authors present today: Ms Natasha Allie; Baba-Tamana Gqubule and Thandiwe Matthews, and publisher Fébé Potgieter–Gqubule
- The OWLAG Choir and MCK Special School Marimba Band
- Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

Allow me to echo Dr Fraser-Moleketi's warm words of welcome to you all.

I am proud to say that I am the Principal and Vice-Chancellor of a fantastic university: the University of South Africa (Unisa), which

happens to be the largest university on the continent. We enrol around 380 000 students at Unisa, the clear majority of whom are women. We are also committed to ensuring that our female staff complement reflects gender equity and, on top of that, we have an array of institutional initiatives that are deliberately aimed at developing and advancing women – black women in particular – in their scholarship. So, I think it would be true to say – and indeed this is the case – that Unisa is firmly committed to gender equity and advancement in both word and deed.

I was therefore pleased to have been invited to this event this year. I was unable to attend last year because of a prior engagement, but I made a promise to myself that this would not happen again this year – and here I am! And, as my reward, I have been given the honour of introducing our keynote speaker this morning. May I just say – what a woman!

Dr Sabr, I must confess that I had to turn to the “University of Google”¹ to learn more about your illustrious life and career. But, to be honest, I found so much information I soon realised (as is the case with so many passionate high achievers) what a remarkable and busy woman you are, and just how dedicated you are to understanding,

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samah_Jabr

and promoting understanding, of what in essence is a hugely complex situation, whose ramifications and the associated trauma are intergenerational and seemingly intractable.

So, let me introduce this woman of substance.

Samah Jabr was born to a Jerusalemite family on August 8, 1976. She graduated from Al-Quds University (Jerusalem) in 2001, as a member of the first cohort of students from the Faculty of Medicine. She gained advanced training in psychiatry in France and the United Kingdom, as well as in clinical research in the United States. She specialised in psychotherapy and was trained at the Israel Psychoanalytic Institute of Jerusalem. As one of 22 psychiatrists practising in the West Bank, she is among the first Palestinian women in this profession.

Dr Jabr serves as Palestine Medical Director for the Palestinian Medical Education Initiative (PMED), and practises as a psychiatrist and psychotherapist in both the private and public sectors. She is a prolific author, whose research has been published in both Palestinian and international peer-reviewed journals. One of her best-known works is a publication which she co-wrote with the American child psychiatrist, Elizabeth Berger – a study focusing on clinical transference and countertransference across the

Israeli/Palestinian divide, and another deals with the survival and wellbeing of the Palestinian people under occupation.

Dr Jabr has taught at various Palestinian universities and is a supervisor at the George Washington University in Washington. In addition to being a fellow at the Centre for Science and Policy at the University of Cambridge, she works as a consultant and trainer for the United Nations' Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), for Save the Children and for Doctors Without Borders (MSF).

A volunteer for the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI), Dr Jabr assists in establishing reports based on the testimonies of victims. In the documentary *Beyond the Frontlines: Tales of Resistance and Resilience in Palestine* (Alexandra Dols, 2017, France), she explains that the objective is to let the perpetrators know that their acts of torture are known, reported and filed, so that they may be held accountable. I sometimes wonder if the world at large realises just how important this act of humanity is, to the victims as well. In my view, it is an act of immense kindness and sensitivity, which acknowledges the worth and dignity of the victims in contexts that are calculated to denigrate the very same.

Dr Jabr is also a sought-after speaker at many illustrious and influential organisations where she conscientises her audiences to the complexities, challenges and devastation wrought upon the Palestinian people as a result of their ongoing struggle for liberation. She addresses the individual and collective psychological damage of the Israeli occupation by asserting that, in accordance with Fanon's views, one of the core challenges of the Palestinian struggle for national liberation is the need to build "a psychological understanding and culture that can liberate the people's minds, parallel to the liberation of the land".

Dr Jabr regularly features on radio talk shows where she discusses a variety of topics, including mental health, the rights of people with special needs, marginalisation and abuse, and she is a columnist of note. She has been widely recognised and awarded for her scholarship and publications – a fitting testament to a woman of substance.

Dr Jabr, your work of sense-making and rebuilding within these contexts of conflict is so incredibly important, that we hear its echoes around the globe – and especially right here, in South Africa. And so, we are deeply honoured that you are sharing some of your

insights here today. We look forward to what you have to share with us this morning.

I thank you.