



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA
CONGRATULATIONS: FEROZA ADAMS MEMORIAL LECTURE AND
UNISA WOMAN OF THE YEAR AWARD CEREMONY
PROTEA RESTAURANT
16 August 2019

Madam Programme Directors, Prof Sindile Ngubane-Mokiwa, Deputy Chairperson: Unisa Womens' Forum and Ms Sophy Mabaso, our esteemed Sign Language Interpreter

- Dr Sheila Kumalo, Chairperson: Unisa Women's Forum
- Mrs Thoko Mpumlwana, Chairperson of the South African Women In Dialogue (SAWID) Trust and other members of SAWID
- Our Keynote Speaker for the Feroza Adam Memorial Lecture, Ms Zine Nkukwana: CEO, Lindamahle Management Systems – South African Women in ICT Forum

- Prof Nokuthula Mazibuko, Head: Unisa Institute for Gender Studies
- Ms Reabetswe Mathibeli
- Ms Phelisa Nkomo
- The Unisa Women's Forum Executive and members
- Our most distinguished and most deserving nominees and winners of the Unisa women of the year awards
- And distinguished guests, and our honoured ladies

Warm greetings to you all and to this highlight on our institutional calendar, the Feroza Adams Memorial Lecture and our Unisa Women of the Year awards.

Last week I was privileged to attend the UNISA/ SAWID/UNESCO WOMEN: WOMEN'S MONTH CELEBRATORY DIALOGUE. It was both enlightening and encouraging. The theme of the dialogue was: *Supporting Women Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Economic Development*. I must admit that I felt a sense of excitement at being part of that celebratory dialogue. At this dialogue I noted a sober reflection of what it is that South African women need to do, to claim their space and advance their own development – as entrepreneurs and change agents in a new South Africa and Africa, on an equal footing with men. I was pleased to bear witness to this psychological

leap that is moving us from reflection to deliberate and concerted action.

This move is going to assist many young women waiting in the wings to seize upon opportunities for growth and development; to demonstrate their academic excellence; to rise up as leaders for socio-economic and political development; and, to put up their hands to say: Here I am! Look at what I have to offer. I am ready to serve – I am ready to show Unisa, South Africa and the world just what I am capable of.

So perhaps, Unisa women, it is time for us to choose deliberately to build on the amazing achievements and sacrifices of our mothers of the 1956 march as well as Feroza Adam. I don't know about you, but I can think of no greater honour than to acknowledge the contributions of those who have gone before, to the extent that we use those achievements as the foundations upon which we choose to build! In fact, if we are to be honest, that is the true nature of genuine and lasting development.

And believe me, lead you must. Within a few short decades Africa will be the youngest most populous continent in the world. Who will be the leaders of these millions of young people? I dare to say to you this afternoon that it is you – and those who are to follow, who must take

up the challenge and show the way – for both women and men. There is no room to fail.

I must at the same time say that I truly believe that the reality and importance of the role of women in the transformation of the African Continent is finally hitting home. I venture to suggest that the reality is dawning amongst our male leaders that we will not survive without the contributions of African women. In fact, it is really encouraging to see the strides being made in so many African states when it comes to women taking leadership positions, including in parliaments. Rwanda, Ethiopia and South Africa are some of the countries that immediately spring to mind.

But while it is appropriate to acknowledge and celebrate progress we are equally compelled to confess our ongoing failures in according women their rightful place in society. The lot of by far the majority of African women – is horrendous, and that must change.

Let me reiterate what I said to you last year. So, what does that mean for you as Unisa women, and what does it mean for South African women? Well, for one thing, each time you enter a room; each time you sit in a meeting; each time you sit in a boardroom; each time you sit on a selection committee, each time you cast your vote, in any election - look about you and ask: “Where are the women?”. And

when I say that I mean, deliberately ask the men in these forums – “Excuse me, but where are the women?” I know that Dr Selematsela did that at our recent management lekgotla. Bravo Dr Selematsela - you were heard and we will consider this when it comes to future appointments. Be activists. Mobilise for women’s’ rights – it works.

Activism is seldom comfortable and to be honest, most people don’t like conflict – so they choose to keep quiet. But you know, I can assure that the women who marched in 1956 didn’t feel comfortable about marching *en masse* to the Union Building either. I can assure you that the many who travelled vast distances by bus, many with little children, many leaving families behind, to demonstrate their support for the cause were seriously inconvenienced. No doubt many had husbands who were not that supportive of their decisions to march. But they acted because they knew that they had to do what they had to do. It had to be done. For their own sake as deeply oppressed women in a deeply patriarchal and politically alienating society, and for the generations of young women and men who would follow on.

Today, this month, we honour them even as we accept that it is now our turn to make our contribution – for women and for (South) African society.

That means, Unisa women, that you will have to start looking at the world, and our university through new and different lenses – through

visionary and strategic lenses, which acknowledge the very real fact that the women in this room and women of a similar age across the country, are going to be increasingly responsible – not only for leading this University and this country, but also for showing what it means to be responsible citizens of a country in dire need of the particular kind of leadership that women provide. And by the way, I refer here, to both staff and students.

It is women such as yourselves – this generation - who must ensure that the status quo is broken decisively, and that the road is cleared and paved for those who must follow. No doubt it will take the same kind of courage that was demonstrated back in 1956, because I doubt that South African women have ever been under greater onslaught from South African men. So, you will need to prevail and rise above these dark times – as your grandmothers, mothers and sisters have done before – and harnessing your collective and singular determination, chart your own destiny – with or without those men who choose to live with mindset of subordination and exclusion.

But having said that distinguished guests, and honoured ladies, let me also say that there is a danger in focusing too much on the challenges that women face. When we do that we tend to lose sight of the achievements and accomplishments of so many women who are making their mark on a daily basis. At our university, so far this year,

we have honoured many powerful and high-achieving colleagues whose achievements are a testament to the value that women bring to the academe, to the workplace, to our Unisa community and to our society.

Women at Unisa have done us proud and there must be a time to celebrate this. That time is now. Today we celebrate and acknowledge our high achievers - our powerful and our triumphant women.

Our nominees and awardees this year speak to the flourishing of the many initiatives that we have in place at Unisa to advance women and black women in particular, in leadership and in their careers; to the maturing of Unisa women into a more active expression of their rights and their abilities; and to the ownership of Unisa women of their space in the university. Our awardees are women who, in fulfilling their daily responsibilities, have grown as achievers, leaders and as servants of the people. They have demonstrated by dint of their nominations that their peers acknowledge them as Unisa leaders and colleagues in the truest sense of the word; serving others and honouring their responsibility to be the best that they can be. They have, and we have, every right to be proud and to celebrate this moment of acknowledgement.

I am delighted to congratulate both nominees and the winners. May you continue on your paths of excellence. To our winners, well done.

We salute and honour you. May you become ever more Unisa women of substance!

I thank you.