



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**

*“Transformed landscapes: Women in the time of COVID-19 and
beyond”*

21 August 2020

Programme Director: Prof S Ngubane-Mokiwa: Deputy Chairperson
Unisa Women’s Forum

- Dr Sheila Kumalo, Chairperson: Unisa Women’s Forum
- Our keynote speaker this morning, Prof Lulama Makhubela: SAWID
– Owner & Managing Director: Africa Research House
- Brigadier Matshidiso Kgoadi, South African Police Service
- Prof Nokuthula Mazibuko, Head: Institute for Gender Studies
- Ms Claudia Fratini, Executive member: Unisa Women’s Forum
- Ms Zanele Meslane, Executive member: Unisa Women’s Forum

- Prof M Magano, Executive Member: Unisa Women's Forum
- 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 annual Feroza Adams Memorial Lecture and our Unisa Women of the Year awards.

But this year we certainly can't claim this this lecture is *business as usual*. There are two manifest differences. The first it that we are in the midst of the hugely disruptive COVID-19 pandemic and the second is linked to the first, in that virtually all of our events and meetings are now Teams or virtual meetings, attended by many faceless colleagues who have switched off their video visuals to save data or to hide secrets they would prefer us not to see!

Of course, as we have got to grips with the pandemic and the quite revolutionary reality of working from home, our lives have changed. Most recent surveys indicate that while initially, most people actively disliked working from home, trends now indicate a preference for working from home and one suspects that as our children return to school, this sentiment will likely grow. On a lighter note I'm not so sure

whether this preference stems from living in one's PJs all day (as I have heard some staff members talking among themselves) or whether it simply has to do with the convenience of not having to battle traffic and transport – especially on those cold winter mornings.

But we should not get too comfortable just yet! I have been seeing a growing number of reports that are indicating that businesses and universities are implementing working from home dress codes – ostensibly to ensure a professional working mindset and attitude – but one suspects that it is also to prevent the ghastly spectacles of people forgetting that they are in formal engagement, oblivious of their videos, . In fact, I think that it is these incidents that taught us all to switch off our videos so quickly! Be that as it may, I trust that all of you are attired in precisely the same manner as would have been the case, had this been our gala dinner/lunch!

On a more serious note, it is my privilege today to congratulate the very worthy nominees and winners of our women of the year awards. But colleagues before I do that let me just briefly highlight three revelations that have emerged during this time of COVID -19 that have highlighted both the capabilities of women the lockdown and associated pressures have reinforced, and the debilitating prejudices women continue to endure. I am going to be very brief.

Firstly, it is now common cause that those countries with women heads of governments, have fared better during this pandemic. Germany, Taiwan, Finland, New Zealand, Iceland, Norway and Denmark have somehow moved through this pandemic with pragmatic aplomb and little of the ghastly infighting and politicking which is so prevalent everywhere else. Why? They have put their citizens first and their egos second - and their citizens and ultimately, their societies and economies have reaped the benefits. Isn't that what leaders are in fact supposed to do? Serve? While some might argue that this comes more easily to women because of their inherent nurturing characteristics, I would like to respond by saying that being a head of state is not gender specific when it comes to handling challenges. The pressures are the same and the demands are the same. May I suggest that women are more in tune and preoccupied with the needs of their people, the precariousness of the environment and of the demands of the 21st century before they are preoccupied with power play and point scoring.

Second, and our keynote speaker has alluded to this. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the horrific levels of gender and child-based violence that are so prevalent in our society and so many societies across the world. Levels of femicide and infanticide have spiked sharply globally and in South Africa as women and children have, and continue to endure lockdown situations. I'm not sure if we

have become numbed to the constant stream of horror stories, but we simply have to find ways and means of changing the mindsets and conditions that characterise these behaviours.

In fact, it was with this untenable situation in mind, that as a university we have undertaken to establish a *division for gender equality* in the Office of the Principal and Vice-Chancellor (VC) of Unisa. The location of the division in my office is deliberate. It serves to send out a clear message that we are serious about tackling the scourge of gender-based violence and prejudice against women in all of its forms. At the same time as we are finalising the Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy, we are reviewing all institutional policies, with a view to formulating more coherent and broader policies that will enable us to pointedly fight and ultimately root out any form of gender-based violence. But we know that policies without a designated structure mean nothing. This Office, which will undertake research, policy advocacy, interventions to protect victims, and counselling, will work closely with the Commission for Gender Equality. It is our hope that these interventions will give practical and demonstrable meaning to our commitment to fight against gender-based violence.

I would urge the women's Forum in particular, to support this office and to take its work to heart. It is my hope that as a university we will

demonstrate in word and deed, that we are transformation agents when it comes to the scourge of gender-based violence.

Thirdly and finally colleagues, we know that the lockdown has been more difficult on women than it has on men, and especially those in the academe (and frontline services). Not only have they had to teach their students from home, conduct their research, manage their homes without their normal avenues of support, ensure that their own children are properly educated and look after their emotional wellbeing, but many have had to do so as single parents, while still others have had to make sure that their partners are also not neglected. Today I want to honour each and every woman who is juggling all of these roles – and remaining sane. With that honouring is the realisation that it is the women of our world, who keep the wells oiled and turning.

Unisa women, it is undoubtedly time to recommit more deliberately to building on the amazing achievements and sacrifices of our mothers of the 1956 march, and to emulate the deeds and commitment of the phenomenal Feroza Adam. Today, this month, we honour them, and we accept that it is now our turn to make our contribution – for women and for (South) African society. You will need to 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. We are all accountable for the reversal of the current malaise that sees to many of our women continue to struggle under every manner of prejudice.

But having said that, let us not lose sight of the achievements and accomplishments of so many women who *are* making their mark on a daily basis and who are demonstrating just what can be done when the potential of women is unleashed, acknowledged and encouraged. Even during this time of COVID-19, many powerful and high-achieving Unisa women have demonstrated to us what can be accomplished - 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 today we have celebrated and acknowledged 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 nurturing of Unisa women into a more active expression of their rights and their abilities; to the power of unisa in overcoming adversity and

serving others; 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.