



**Unisa Remembers former Pro Vice Chancellor Prof Narend Bajinath (18 September 1960
– 01 May 2022)**



On my return from the United States this week, I learnt with great sadness the news of the passing of Prof. Narend Bajinath, former Pro Vice Chancellor of Unisa and CEO of the Council for Higher Education. The Unisa community joins with Prof Bajinath's family, colleagues and friends to mourn the loss of a colossus in higher education.

Prof Baijnath was a person of high distinction and remarkable service orientation who earned both national and international recognition and good standing in public service. We reaffirm the legacy of a great servant-leader in the higher education and development sectors, a legendary son of Kwa-Zulu Natal and one of Africa's internationally renowned and accomplished scholars. He exemplified intellectual radiance, management talent and unreserved dedication throughout the execution of his executive duties at Unisa. His tremendous skill, creativity and passion for higher education did not falter throughout the course of his lifetime. As a robust thinker, engaged scholar and trailblazer extraordinaire, Prof Baijnath challenged dominant assumptions, invited dissent and saw that new thinking was required for the new challenges facing higher education in the era of technological revolution. He was a celebrated strategic and innovative thinker who was highly agile and embraced change with all its complexity. Prof Baijnath led the construction of Unisa's strategy that culminated in the writing of Unisa's first strategic plan for the merged institution, *Unisa 2015: An Agenda for Transformation*.

A careful study of Prof Baijnath's service to the nation reveals that he was of conspicuous merit. The full measure of his contributions to the field of higher education in general, and to Unisa in particular, is vast. Prior to being Unisa's Pro Vice Chancellor, he served as Unisa's Vice Principal of Strategy, Planning and Partnerships and before that, he served as the Vice Principal of Research and Planning.

From 2011 to 2015, as PVC, Prof Baijnath was responsible for cohering the organizational architecture of Unisa, ICT, Procurement, Open Distance and e-Learning (ODeL), Open Education Resources (OER), Academic Planning and Community Engagement. Prof Baijnath ensured that all activities that pertained to the portfolios above, were executed in an integrated and coordinated manner in line with University's strategic objectives and social justice mandate. He played an essential role in establishing value-added higher education, government, business, civil society partnerships and networks at a national and international level.

Prof Baijnath worked diligently to ensure that Unisa remains sustainable through the course of massive and unprecedented changes in technology and delivery modes in higher education. When he took office as the Pro-Vice Chancellor, he sounded the alarm and alerted the university community to the clear and unmistakable signs that pervasive technology was going to have increasingly significant implications for higher education. He saw that eLearning was gaining a firm foothold in universities around the world and that education technology allowed students to become more engaged in constructing their own knowledge. He knew as Jack Welsh said, "If the rate of change on the outside, exceeds the rate of change on the inside, the end is in sight". He knew that Unisa had to craft a unique model that needed to be

relevant to the University's positioning in the current higher education system locally, while being forward-looking in how it positions the institution strategically as a global player. Prof Baijnath knew that Unisa must leverage the unprecedented opportunities provided in ICT-teaching and learning tools, methods, and resources, including OERs. In doing so it must overhaul the institution's underlying operation model to transform the student experience for the better, ensuring that students get a consistently high-quality education, comparable to the best anywhere.

While serving as Pro Vice Chancellor, the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr BE Nzimande nominated Prof Narend Baijnath to serve on the prestigious Board of Governors of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) for the period 2012- 2015. Prof Baijnath was then appointed as the chairperson of the Commonwealth of Learning - Board of Governors (2020). Further to this, he was a member of the HEQC Board, the Academy of Science of South Africa, and was a member of the *Governing Council of the Magna Charta Observatory for Borderless Higher Education*. He served on the jury panel of prominent experts in the prestigious OPAL Awards. The awards were developed by the Open Educational Quality Initiative which aims to promote open educational practices that support the production, use and re-use of open educational resources. Prof Baijnath also served on the illustrious editorial board of the Asian Journal of Distance Education.

Prof Baijnath had a tender heart for those pushed to the fringes of society, and as such was elected Honorary Vice-President of the *National Council for Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa*. He advocated for improved technologies for persons with disabilities. He knew that viable and productive partnerships stemming from necessary interrelationships and actions, was essential if we are to make a significant impact on the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in South Africa.

Prof Baijnath is celebrated by his Unisa colleagues for his great humanity and enduring friendship. He was generous with his time and sought to encourage and support young scholars in their academic formation. To those who knew him well, he had a great sense of humour, and was a joy to work with. He demonstrated the best of what it meant to be human. He was an exceptional human being with an astonishing capacity to embrace, love, forgive, serve and genuinely care for the peoples and places of Africa and the world.

It is a consolation to us that his dynamic contributions will continue to bear fruit through the higher education community. He will be remembered for many years to come by the Unisa family, his colleagues in the higher education sector and particularly our students and communities whom he so faithfully and earnestly served.

Prof Bajinath's celebrated career, and sustained service to the nation, has left us a rich legacy, which will no doubt endure and give us much to reflect upon and act on, in the decades to come. On behalf of the Unisa community, I want to emphasize our sincere appreciation for the life and service of Prof Narend Bajinath and want to wish his dear wife, Indira, and his children, Mohini and Rohan, great comfort, and lasting peace in this time of grief and loss.

Rest in Peace Prof Bajinath



Electronically Signed:
Professor Puleng LenkaBula
Principal and Vice-Chancellor