



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

WELCOME ADDRESS: 2017 CHANCELLOR'S CALABASH

AWARDS AND DINNER

2 November 2017

***Theme: The Role of Active Citizenship and Higher Education
for a Revitalised South Africa***

- Programme Director: Dr Claudelle Von Eck, CEO: The Institute of Internal Auditors South Africa (IIA SA)
- The Chancellor of the University of South Africa, His Excellency, Dr Thabo Mbeki
- Retired Chancellor Judge Bernard M Ngoepe, South Africa's Tax Ombud and Dr Ngoepe
- Chairperson of Council of the University of South Africa, Mr Sakhi Simelane and members of Unisa's Council in attendance this evening
- Members of the Diplomatic Corps

- Members of Unisa's executive and extended management and Unisa staff
- Recipients of Unisa's 2017 Calabash awards
- Members from organised labour and our student leaders
- Distinguished guests, friends, Unisa Alumni, ladies and gentlemen

A very warm welcome to you all. I know that I speak on behalf of Unisa's Council, executive and extended management and staff, when I say that we are delighted that you have elected to join us this evening. We look forward to an evening of good company and fine wining and dining.

Last year I spent most of my welcome address reflecting on the tenure of the then outgoing Chancellor, Judge Bernard Ngoepe, and this year I am delighted and honoured to bid a very warm welcome indeed, to our new University Chancellor and host of this awards and gala dinner, His Excellency Dr Thabo Mbeki. So to you and Mrs Mbeki – a special word of welcome. We know that like your predecessor, you love this magnificent university and all that it means (past and present) for our country and its citizens.

Ladies and gentlemen, in 2015, in my welcome to you, I said the following: *“Two weeks ago I was sitting in the Presidency together with my peers and a variety of higher education stakeholders, engaged in very intense discussions around the #FeesMustFall campaign, the urgency and gravity of which was manifest in students’ voices, the drone of helicopters and the occasional thud of stun grenades in the grounds outside.”* How quickly we forget! In 2016, this function took place in the ongoing environment of dissent, marking the culmination of a year-long period of disruption, protest and violence in the sector. Unisa, like many other universities was obliged to employ additional security to ensure the safety of our staff, our students and our facilities, for the entire year, and yet despite that we suffered some losses.

2017 has been a little kinder to us in terms of disruption and violence. Somewhat ironically though, two years in the making, the Fees Report, which was commissioned by the President is now ready and we are expecting that it will be released soon. In true South African tradition it has however been leaked and already we are seeing reactions, which were in fact quite predictable. Whatever the outcome, we need to be prepared, because in truth, it is a case of damned if you do and damned if you don’t. Two of our universities have already been negatively

affected and entered ad hoc examination arrangements. Other universities have adopted a “wait and see” attitude, but make no mistake – the sector remains in a volatile state, which goes hand in hand with continually escalating costs and direct threats to our financial sustainability.

So one suspects with good reason, that 2018 will herald another year of the same. It’s all very challenging for everyone. Everyone - distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen - will be affected; be it in your taxation, as a parent of a student, as a sector employee or as a student.

So what does all of this mean for the sector and obviously, for Unisa, when we know that higher education institutions are unambiguously tasked to be promoters of equity, social justice, and inclusion, but when we operate in an environment that is characterised by the challenges I have just outlined, which in effect, excludes so many students – evidenced for example in the very worrying growth of NEETS – young people between the ages of 18 – 25, not in education employment, education or training.

Well ladies and gentlemen, that’s when you get creative, roll up your sleeves and do what has to be done. And I am very proud

to say that Unisa is tackling its challenges head on, and with vigour, across a broad front.

They say charity begins at home and the staff at Unisa have demonstrated their commitment to supporting our students, by personal contributions to the Principal's bursary fund which we set up. Council also made a large sum of money available (R99 million) which is currently being disbursed to offset student debts or to provide students with bursaries. Council members are tapping into their networks for access to bursary assistance to needy students, or for students who have not been able to graduate due to outstanding debts.

Just this week I was pleased to be able to write to Council member Mr Maboja, Deputy Chairperson of the Finance and Investment Committee of Unisa's Council, thanking him for the very generous financial support, in the form of no obligation bursaries, that Eyesizwe Mining Development Trust (formed by the founders of Exxaro Ltd) was able to provide for our Unisa students who had passed their qualifications but were unable to graduate because of outstanding fees owed to the University. My calculations indicate that this financial support has ensured that 85 students will be graduating! Collectively these gestures of support and commitment, ladies and

gentlemen go a long way to alleviating our financial burdens and our Students financial burdens, and the challenges we face in ensuring our sustainability and existence for future generations.

Our Unisa Foundation, and in fact our various portfolios and colleges are also hard at work forging collaborations and embarking on projects that are all aimed at the development of our communities and our citizens, and in the preparation of future leaders of our country and Continent. Our Institutes are also intimately involved in researching, seeking solutions and alleviating a multitude of socio-economic challenges, the impact and outcomes of which are received and appreciated with really heart-warming gratitude.

Distinguished guests ladies and gentlemen, much of what I have raised is, and should in fact, be the ‘normal’ work of the university that is dedicated to serving its communities and our citizenry. However, in the current financially constrained environment even this crucial role of the university as the pivotal shaper of society, is in jeopardy.

Put plainly, we need all of the help we can get – and this is where you, as the guests this evening of our Chancellor

President Mbeki, have a role to play. Our very impressive guest list reflects movers and shakers from across the spectrum of our society – men and women of influence and power, and who have access to resources or networks of resources that could be accessed to support our university in one way or another. Given our current challenges and constraints I feel no hesitation or compunction in asking you all, will you help us?

We have provided forms at every table, and we ask that you complete those and ensure that we get them back. I also ask that if there are other ways in which you feel that you can assist our university and its students, feel free to speak to myself or Mr David Farirai from the Unisa Foundation and we will gladly hear you out.

Ladies and gentlemen, time constraints have not allowed me to share all of Unisa's unique qualities. Suffice to say that we enrol more than one-third of all students in the higher education sector in our country, which would be irretrievably weakened by our decline. We know how to get the job done and we have contributed seminally over more than a century, to producing graduates and alumni who have gone on to shape and develop this country and our people. We are honouring some of those remarkable women this evening – and yes, I, am

thrilled that this is an all-women awardee evening – I, Mr Chancellor and Mr Chairman of Council; couldn't be prouder.

Unisa will continue to be the African university shaping futures in the service of humanity come what may. I would like to invite you all to join us on that journey as you too, make your contribution.

I thank you.