

Minister Pandor's remarks at the inauguration of Professor Marwala as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Johannesburg

Department of Higher Education and Training

Monday, 26 March 2018

18:00

Kingsway Campus, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg

I wish to begin by expressing grateful thanks and congratulations to Professor Ihron Rensburg, the former Vice-Chancellor, for the sterling work he has done in leading the University of Johannesburg to its current position of strength in teaching and research.

The inauguration of a Vice-Chancellor is an important milestone in the life of any University.

Professor Marwala, the university and South Africa are privileged that you have agreed to take up the position of Vice-Chancellor.

You have academic roots in South Africa, the US and the UK and I think you are possibly the first Vice-Chancellor who is a professional engineer. You are certainly the first from rural Limpopo to lead a university in the heart of cosmopolitan Johannesburg.

Your inauguration as Vice-Chancellor is a reminder that how far we have travelled on the road to transformation. You are living evidence of the immense possibilities that exist in South Africa. This month is human rights month. While it signals the work we still have to do, it also reminds us of the strides we have made.

Your first challenge is to train graduates with high-level skills, ready to enter the labour market, the research community and the enterprise sector.

Your second challenge is to provide a clear vision of university education that is decolonized, dedicated to the pursuit of excellence, and relevant to Africa.

You will know that universities are associated with elitism. Not everyone goes to university, not everyone can, not here, not anywhere in the world, no matter how much effort we put into widening access.

Given that universities are not for everyone and given our emerging post-school education system, universities and the TVET sector need to collaborate better in expanding opportunities for young people and to reach our economic and social ambitions.

We have embraced the need to act on the demand for free higher education. The policy we have begun to implement this year creates the opportunity to reverse the exclusion and marginalisation of the poor in our country.

We have increased access to higher education. However, as I'm sure Vice-Chancellor Marwala will remind us, the tasks the higher-education sector should address go beyond access and are far more complex. They include getting the mix of undergraduates, postgraduates, and other researchers right. In the course of your tenure, we will grapple with these issues and the challenge of differentiation in the sector.

I believe you have the experience to assist us in successfully resolving these deep challenges.

I rely on the University of Johannesburg to lead and support South Africa in setting out a new and refreshed trajectory for higher education in South Africa.

Vice-Chancellor Marwala, I wish you every success in leading this university from strength to strength.

I thank you.