



**MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Message of support from Dr Blade Nzimande, Minister of Higher Education and Training, to the National Doctoral Conference of the National Institute of the Humanities and Social Sciences

03rd November 2016

The South African Humanities Deans Association –represented by Dr Rene Smith;

The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) represented by Professor Ibrahim Oanda,

The Board of the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences and its Chairperson Ari Sitas, the CEO of the Institute Professor Mosoetsa, and all staff members;

The Mentors who serve as part of the National Doctoral Schools Programme;

The NIHSS-funded doctoral candidates, members of Academia, members of the media – Ladies and Gentlemen...

What an honour and privilege to be addressing you on this special day in the life of the Institute and the country.

The National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences was established in December 2013 – to ensure that teaching and research in these areas take their rightful place; at the leading edge of our struggle for transformation and development in South Africa. The Institute was established through a special project of my Ministry, with the aim of broadly enhancing and supporting the Humanities and Social Sciences in South Africa and beyond, as well as advising government on related matters.

Recently the Institute was also given the mandate of leading the South African BRICS Think Tank on behalf of government.

The Institute was created against the backdrop of the decline in the teaching of, and research in social sciences and humanities globally, including in our own South African

universities. One key way in which it is providing support is through the Doctoral Schools and Doctoral funding. This important National Doctoral Conference is part of the support programme and complements these efforts.

We are very proud that the Institute has already awarded scholarships to 374 South African doctoral students who enrolled in 2014, 2015, and 2016, as well as awarded fellowships to 74 students from other African countries. A few students have already completed and/or have submitted their final PhD theses. I have looked at the impressive programme, read the titles and abstracts, and I am assured we are well ahead in building the next generation of humanities and social sciences scholars in South Africa and the continent, relevant for the world.

The Humanities and Social Sciences are crucial for ensuring that we understand our world, understand where we come from, and are able to shape our futures. As philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues, the Social Sciences and Humanities teach us how to distinguish a good argument from a bad one, and to empathize with the lives of other people, when policies are being debated and social problems are being tackled. Subjects taught in these areas refine the ability to think critically and examine the arguments of politicians, to keep them accountable, and promote civil and reasonable styles of debate. This does not mean that the Social Sciences and Humanities don't need any transformation: they can best transform society and our understandings of our complicated world. The works studied should draw from many times and places, and not just a narrow European tradition; although not everything European is bad.

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, and other subjects that build our understanding of the natural world, are crucial, but they are at their best when allied with the Humanities and Social Sciences. They need to draw on insight into the social world, as well as the creativity and humanistic understanding, and ability to think critically and rigorously, cultivated in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Africans, including South Africans, together with other developing societies, such as our BRICS partners, have to play a leading conceptual and scientific role to solve our local and global challenges. Improving our insight into the social and economic complexities of our past, our present, and our possible futures is essential.

This is your job, as doctoral students in the Humanities and Social Sciences. We hope you will research and write about our own history, colonial and pre-colonial, including the heroic struggles of the people of our continent against racism and gender discrimination and violence. We hope you will also be forward looking in assisting us as a country and continent on how to build better lives for our people and better societies. This task falls on your shoulders, as emerging researchers in various aspects of the Social Sciences and Humanities.

PhD studies are the highest level of education. The road is a difficult one, and you will be frustrated and exhausted at times. But it is also one of the most rewarding things you will ever do. The reward is not just the physical dissertation that you will produce, but also the changes in you as a person, as you demonstrate to the world and yourself that you are an independent researcher, by answering an important question in a novel way.

Part of doing a PhD is becoming part of a community of researchers. I urge you to take advantage of all available forms of support, including important programmes like this National Doctoral Workshop and the Mentoring Programme offered through the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences. The Doctoral Schools, which are being organized on a regional basis, as well as the various forms of support offered at your institution are also crucial to participate in.

Go to conferences and intellectual gatherings such as seminars and symposiums whenever you can, to learn from others, and make friends in your research community, and get practice presenting your work to as many audiences as possible. Read as widely as possible—don't stick narrowly to your research topic. This will enable you to think laterally, as well as giving you a broader understanding of the field in which your research is located. Contribute to teaching wherever possible, as it is rewarding, and gives you a broader perspective of your field.

Although some of you will end up working in research institutes, and other places, I hope that many of you are aiming for a career in one of our universities.

Achieving quality in all the roles of a university (teaching, research and social engagement) depends to a large extent on the availability of adequate numbers of capable staff at our universities, who are fully representative of a democratic South Africa. We all know that our country and continent have a particular challenge to produce especially black scholars, as many of them were denied access to high level and high quality education under colonialism and apartheid. It is also no secret that the higher education sector currently finds itself in somewhat of a crisis in relation to the size, composition and capacity of its academic staff. The challenge is multi-faceted, having to do with the slow pace of transformation, regeneration and change, the ageing workforce, developments in higher education worldwide that demand ever greater levels of expertise from staff, the relatively under qualified academic staff workforce, and low numbers of postgraduate students representing an inadequate pipeline for the recruitment of future academics. It is calculated that the sector will need to recruit at least 1 200 new academics per annum to respond to historical backlogs, cater for staff attrition, and to accommodate planned growth.

South Africa is known as a global centre of excellence in progressive humanities and social sciences. I am encouraged by the work of the Institute in nurturing the many important domains and aspects of African experience that are either subtly, or very

distinctly, different that need comparable research, analysis, theorisation, publication - not just for use in Primary, Secondary and Higher-education classrooms in South Africa and the greater continent, but for the rest of the world to reflect on as well. As such the students' abstracts and papers presents confidence that upon completion of their PhDs, these will provide unique African narratives, theories, perspectives, and histories. Not only are these unique aspects important for Africans to recognise, understand, appreciate, and even celebrate, but they are aspects of African societies and cultures that people in other parts of the world also need to understand, appreciate, and even engage with as critical mirrors or alternatives to issues and problems in their own societies. As such it is our view that African scholarship is needed not only in and for Africa, but in the rest of the world as well.

I wish you all the best for the remainder of the National Doctoral Conference, and I hope that your studies are fascinating and fruitful. You have my full support and that of my department, as you go out and be producers rather than consumers of knowledge!

I wish to thank all role players, Deans, mentors, students and institutions.

Students, you have my unwavering support, I love you all.