



**higher education  
& training**

Department:  
Higher Education and Training  
**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

## **Congratulatory Message by Minister Nzimande during the Inauguration of Former President, Dr Thabo Mbeki, as the Chancellor of the University of South Africa**

27 February 2017

**His Excellency, Dr Thabo Mbeki, Chancellor of Unisa**

**Programme Director: Dr Fikeni**

**Prof Makhanya, Principal and Vice Chancellor, Unisa**

**Mr Simelane, Chairperson: Unisa Council**

**Deputy Vice Chancellors, esteemed guests and Students**

It is a great honour for me to present the congratulatory message on this occasion inaugurating former President of South Africa, Dr Thabo Mbeki, as the Chancellor of the University of South Africa.

### **The Position and Role of the Chancellor of a University**

In accordance with the Statute of the University of South Africa the Chancellor is elected and appointed from nominations by members of Council, staff, students and the Convocation of the University as the ceremonial and titular head of the institution. Such nominations must be made with the consent of the nominee. I therefore wish to thank the Former President Mbeki for accepting this nomination and therefore the responsibility as the titular head of the largest and oldest university in our

country. Dr Mbeki is a person of stature far exceeding the required attributes to fulfill the particular functions and ceremonial roles; is completely equipped to face the challenges that may confront the University; has had extraordinary influence in society that will be to the benefit of the University; and has proven both his commitment and independency to be able to fulfill the crucial role of opening and dissolving the congregation of the University of South Africa.

Through his nomination, Unisa has recognised Dr Mbeki's vast contributions to our country and its people, most notably in the areas of leadership, intellectual discourse, philosophy and the very identity of the society he continues to serve. Dr Mbeki has distinguish himself as a philosopher and leading thinker, known for his ground-breaking revitalization of the African Renaissance, the repositioning of Africa and South Africa as prominent international economic and political role-players, and continues to actively contribute to the revitalization and development of leaders for Africa in his position as patron of the Thabo Mbeki Foundation and the Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute hosted here at Unisa.

No matter what our differences may have been, former President Mbeki is one of the greatest intellectuals produced by our movement.

Unisa is arguably the most befitting South African university at which Former President Mbeki is now Chancellor:

- as the largest open distance learning institution in Africa and the longest standing dedicated distance education university in the world, the institution enrolls nearly one-third of all South African students.

- founded in 1873 as the University of the Cape of Good Hope, the institution became the first public university in the world to teach exclusively by means of distance education in 1946. Throughout the years, Unisa was perhaps the only university in South Africa to have provided all people with access to education, irrespective of race, colour, creed or social economic status. The institution's vibrant past is mirrored in our rich history as a country, more particularly their massive and impressive database of alumni, some of whom are to be found in the most senior levels of society not only in South Africa but across the world.
- given their rootedness in South Africa and the African continent, Unisa today can truly claim to be the African university in the service of humanity.

The vision of Unisa is to serve every country on the African continent regardless of language and cultural barriers. As its core values this University embraces ethical and collective responsibility, integrity, innovation and excellence and its belief in dignity in diversity. This vision and these values positions Unisa in its endeavour to prove its fitness for purpose for its own academic community but also its fitness of purpose in the context of globalised higher education and an African university with a world-wide footprint.

As an African university Unisa focuses on moving towards truly African scholarship, effecting cultural change for diversity and transformation, rethinking systems, asserting ethical, transformative and intellectual leadership, and discourse for change.

Decolonising the curriculum is no small matter currently in our discourse, and entails closely examining systems of knowledge production, epistemologies, methodologies and the impact and role of languages in producing new knowledge. At Unisa various initiatives are in place to deal with the issue of curricular and research reforms.

A major pillar in the institution's programme for change is the decolonisation of scholarship to assist the university in its effort to become the African University shaping futures in the service of humanity, led by a Change Management Unit in the Office of the Principal and Vice-Chancellor. Their work is guided by curriculum policy "*to promote African thought, philosophies, interests and epistemologies through inquiry, scholarship and partnership.*"

Unisa is therefore poised as an African university in active and deliberate pursuit of the ideals of the African Diaspora as a meta-narrative, and manifestations of the African Renaissance as a global conceptualization of African people and nations overcoming the current challenges confronting the continent.

### **An International Chancellor for an International University**

Honourable Chancellor, you are internationally renowned and recognised for activating and repositioning the African Renaissance as a global driving force for Africans towards achieving cultural, scientific, and economic renewal. You are now Chancellor of a South African university that is in a pivotal position to respond to the drivers and impact of the African Renaissance as a conceptual ideal and operational reality.

The University has publicly stated its commitment to transformation in South Africa and the institution's pertinent role in the process where necessity before change spawn invention, in as much as change drives progress. Embracing the belief that transformation offers a variety of powerful mechanisms can define the future of this institution. It is therefore befitting that the University has called upon a visionary leader and intellectual such as Dr Mbeki to serve as its Chancellor.

In addition to the Research Chair in Development Education, Unisa hosts several specialist institutes and programmes in African scholarship and knowledge production. These include among others and I name a few:

- The Institute for African Renaissance Studies, which studies multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary paradigms.
- The Institute for Open and Distance Learning, which undertakes ODL research in Africa and internationally.
- The Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute, which encourages debate on the continent's future and invests in the training of tomorrow's leaders.
- The Archie Mafeje Institute for Applied Social Policy Research, which conducts applied research into the discourses of the family and family life, and the impact of poverty in South Africa and beyond.
- The Institute for Global Dialogue, which was originally established as an independent South African-based foreign policy think-tank dedicated to the analysis of and dialogue on the evolving international political and economic environment and the role of Africa and South Africa. Driven by the motto : *'Towards a better Africa. Towards a better world'*.
- The Institute for Dispute Resolution in Africa, which conducts research on global and African knowledge systems relating to dispute resolution, thus utilising law as a structural foundation and community knowledge as an empirical foundation.

- The *WIPHOLD*- Brigalia Bam Chair in Electoral Democracy in Africa, shaping Africa's future through research, capacity building for African electoral officials, and collaboration with scholars in the continent and in the African diaspora.
- The Institute for Social and Health Sciences, which is an Africa-centred institute of excellence devoted to safety, peace, health and equality.

Honourable Chancellor, Unisa has made major strides towards establishing a truly changed culture as an African university over the past decades. The university's student demographics now closely approximate those of the country: more than 73% of Unisa students are African, 15% white, 6% Indian and 6% coloured. The number of female students has shown steady year-on-year growth and currently females account for 63% of the student population. Unisa's staff profile has also shown a major trend towards true transformation in recent years. Since 2010, the proportion of African staff has seen significant growth from 55% to close on 64%. Unisa has consistently maintained headcount enrolments of approximately 362 000 students, and almost 400 000 should one include enrolments for non-degree purposes and short courses.

Members of the Convocation and Congregation of the University of South Africa, your new Chancellor, Former President Thabo Mbeki, as a South African and International Leader, is known as the Philosopher King. He is widely recognised for his intellectual voice of reason, and well known for his position regarding corruption, the role of the law therein, but mostly the importance of social morality as the primary weapon against corruption, underdevelopment, and the struggle against the perpetual state of deprivation, marginalization and oppression.

The African Renaissance under Dr Mbeki is characterised by a specific emphasis on the revival and preservation of the cultures, indigenous knowledge and value systems of all those who contributed to the history and development of who we are today, all of us, as South Africans and Africans. No individual who embraced his or her identity as an African and South African was excluded from Dr Mbeki's vision of an African Renaissance.

Col AH Louw, in his publication "THE CONCEPT OF THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE AS A FORCE MULTIPLIER TO ENHANCE LASTING PEACE AND STABILITY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA" states the following: *"The approval in July 2001 by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) of the "New African Initiative" and a commitment soon afterwards by the world's richest countries (G8) to launch a detailed development plan for Africa over the next year, can justly be regarded as a major boost for South African President Thabo Mbeki's vision of an "African Renaissance" as the cornerstone for an "African Century". Although this latest revival plan for Africa, aimed at stabilising, reconstructing and redeveloping the world's poorest continent, is the result of a merger between President Mbeki's Millennium African Recovery Program (MAP) and President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal's Omega Plan, it is not difficult to recognise the golden thread of the African Renaissance initiative in the final product. President Mbeki's strategy to secure high level support for his initiative before he tried to sell it to his African peers, proved to be highly effective.*

*In this regard, the visible assistance of Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria in crafting and marketing MAP, as well as the full backing of President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, largely*

*contributed to the general acceptance by African leaders of the idea of an African recovery plan. His successful effort to secure global support from developed Western countries such as Japan, America, Britain and Germany, further contributed to convince members of the newly formed African Union (AU) to throw in their weight behind his initiative. Most important, however, was his insight and willingness to, as one of Africa's new generation leaders, merge his plan with that of the Francophone African countries and share the credit with them. This not only made the plan more credible and acceptable, it allowed him to remain in the driver's seat as the effort to market the New African Initiative gains momentum."*

([http://www.africavenir.org/fileadmin/\\_migrated/content\\_uploads/LouwAfricanRenaissanceForceMultiplier\\_03.pdf](http://www.africavenir.org/fileadmin/_migrated/content_uploads/LouwAfricanRenaissanceForceMultiplier_03.pdf))

In his well-quoted speech "I am an African" (referred to by fellow speakers at this occasion) Dr Mbeki states in 2013:

*"Being part of all these people (in which he refers to the plethora of different peoples who conglomerated together, forming the South African and African nations), and in the knowledge that none dare contest that assertion, I shall claim that - I am an African.*

*I have seen what happens when one person has superiority of force over another, when the stronger appropriate to themselves the prerogative even to annul the injunction that God created all men and women in His image."*

Honourable Former President Mbeki, I wish to congratulate you on your inauguration as the Chancellor of Unisa, and recognise in advance the

significance of the contribution you will make in this position to this University, to South Africa and the people of Africa.

**I thank you**  
**Ke a leboga**  
**Siyabonga**  
**Enkosi**  
**Ngiyabonga**  
**Dankie**

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**Issued by the Ministry of Higher Education and Training**

**28 February 2017**