



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PRINCIPAL'S STATEMENT TO SENATE

I sincerely regret that, once again, family circumstances have conspired against my presence at Senate today. I am attending a funeral in Kimberly. I wish to thank the Pro Vice Chancellor, Prof Neo Mathabe, Deputy Chairperson of Senate for assuming duty as Chair of Senate today.¹

As the academic year draws to a close, on behalf of Management, I wish to record our appreciation to those many members of staff in academic and student administration, academic and professional staff and all levels of administrative staff, who have spared no effort to make this university a success, and to offer our students a learning and academic experience they deserve. In particular we wish to thank those researchers and academic staff who continue to support students and to undertake their research duties with singular devotion. I believe that 2007 signals a significant change in the character and ethos of Unisa as an academic institution of note.

It must be remembered that 2007 is only the second year of application of our 10-year 2015 Strategic Plan. We learnt some lessons last year, we may even have made some

mistakes. This year we sought to identify those areas where improvements can be made and to correct mistakes where such have been identified. At the same time it is necessary to affirm that the 2015 Plan constitutes the only policy platform and strategic instrument for this university. This suggests that our operational processes must be viewed against the targets and orientations we

¹ After Professor Pityana had prepared this statement, it transpired that Professor Mathabe was not well and would not attend Senate. The Principal requested Professor David Mosoma, the Deputy Vice Chancellor, to take the chair, and I am sure the same sincere word of thanks is due to him – Dawid van Wyk (presenter of the statement).

have set for ourselves in the Plan. The Plan makes provision for periodic reviews at key milestones in order to test progress against the changing climate both within Unisa and in the higher education landscape. Granted, that process must include continuous critique and evaluation which might secure improvement. I therefore must assert with all the force that words can muster that the 2015 Plan constitutes the only basis for this university's strategic direction.

During the course of this year, therefore, we undertook a number of key initiatives. First, we secured the services of Accenture to seek to address the administrative and operational deficiencies that have dogged our operations over two years. An Ops-Room was set up, institution-wide investigations undertaken, systems tested and a diagnosis made. I can state that there is evidence that there are improvements judging by the flow of complaints, and the student satisfaction index. A lot more work, however, needs to be done and is being done.

A process to ensure the implementation of the CoL Trial Audit Report and to prepare Unisa for the 2008 HEQC Audit is already underway. Council has approved a Management Plan for the implementation of the findings and recommendations of both the Accenture and the CoL Trial Audit Reports. This has now become consolidated in the strategic management plan that will form the basis of the 2008-2010 multi-year operational plan. Now that the critical human resource matters are nearing resolution: the Conditions of Service, the staff placement and staff adjustment programmes, the stage is now set to attend to the next critical element in the continuing drive towards becoming *the* African university in the service of humanity.

This begins with a programme of training and development of staff, ensuring that systems and resources are available, technology, plant, machinery and processes that will enable staff to achieve their objectives, and to place the Open Distance Learning Model at the centre of our institutional life. Towards that end the Change and Transformation Workshops have been held, the Employment Equity workshops as well as preparations for the institutional Employment Equity Plan are in process with a view to presentation to Council at its March meeting 2008. The Office of the Advisor on ODL, Prof HA Louw is now ready to present a preliminary plan for the re-engineering of our university as an ODL institution. Council has approved a plan to have a joint Council/Senate Committee to review the plans for submission to Senate and Council respectively. In tandem with this development, a new academic strategic human resource allocation model will be presented to Senate for adoption. It will allow Unisa to factor learner support and a comprehensive tutorial system into our academic funding. I am also pleased to note that sufficient consensus has been reached about an appropriate tuition model. That suggests to me that the

stage is now set for that bigger and more exciting task of re-modelling our academic programmes, restructuring and rearticulation that should make room for a dynamic, vibrant and appropriate programmes and qualification mix for the new Unisa. That should be our sole task for 2008.

The university is also focusing on the development of learning and research facilities. At Sunnyside, Building 15 is now ready for occupation, and work is underway in Buildings 13 and 14. This should provide improved facilities for students so that all student support services can be concentrated at this precinct. That should relieve pressure on Muckleneuk by the beginning of the 2008 academic year. The Chancellor's Dinner this year saw the launch of an ambitious fundraising drive for the further development of the Sunnyside Complex. The university remains committed to and has reaffirmed its decision to establish a Science Centre at the Florida Campus. Work should begin during the course of 2008. I am also pleased to report that after inordinate delays, the contractors are moving onto the site at Preller Street for the construction of the new entrance buildings. The attention that is

being paid to university estates and development is an integral part of the changing face of the university to reflect its new character and its mission.

I am aware that many colleagues have grown rather weary of these changes and the demands that they place on all of us. I ask only that everyone should understand that we are laying the foundations for an exciting future for this university and for higher education in our country. These are changes which South Africa has been rather shy to make, but which can now no longer be delayed.

I now wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Professor Neo Mathabe, the Pro Vice Chancellor and Deputy Chairperson of Senate who ends her service to the university on 31 December 2007. Professor Mathabe has spent a lifetime as a professional educator and many years in higher education. Having served as Vice Chancellor of the TSA she led in the processes towards the merger and the establishment of the new Unisa in 2004. As Pro Vice Chancellor Prof Mathabe has given leadership to the academic programmes of the university and has done much to address the challenges of integration attributable to the merger. Indeed, she has begun to work with colleagues on a new academic vision for the university. The university owes Prof Mathabe a deep debt of gratitude for her support and shared leadership in the new Unisa. I trust that there will be occasion for the university to say farewell to Prof Mathabe at an appropriate moment.

I am also pleased to report that at its last meeting in September Council appointed Prof Mandla Makhanya pro Vice Chancellor to succeed Prof Mathabe. Prof Makhanya will assume duty on 1 January 2008. Prof Makhanya is a worthy successor as pro Vice Chancellor. He brings with him a vast knowledge of this university. His prodigious drive is legendary. He is enormously creative and energetic. He will surely bring into the Office of the Pro Vice Chancellor his own character and into the vision of the university his own style and sure touch. I trust that the university will welcome and support Prof Mandla Makhanya in his new role as Pro Vice Chancellor.

May I also take the opportunity to bid farewell to other members of Senate for whom this is their last attendance as they are due to take retirement this year. I wish them all well in their respective futures and I trust that they will continue association with Unisa in other capacities.

N Barney Pityana GCOB
PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR
University of South Africa.
Pretoria, 30 October 2007.