



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

## **PRINCIPAL'S ADDRESS TO MARK THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2010**

As we begin this academic year 2010 we cannot but be aware that some thousands of miles away in the midst of the Caribbean Sea, on the night of Tuesday 12 January, a small island state was rocked by a powerful earthquake. As we speak it has now been confirmed that some 200 000 people perished in the earthquake, thousands are still nursing disabling injuries, millions have been left homeless, even more destitute than they were at the time of the earthquake, and for years to come the trauma will scar the psyche of the people of Haiti more deeply than words can tell. The infrastructure of Haiti has been destroyed to the extent that there are very few buildings and homes left standing, and those that are have been declared unsafe for human habitation. Among those who died, are school children, and college students, teachers and college professors – from higher education institutions like ours. The people of Haiti must now muster enough strength and confidence in the future to roll up their sleeves and start again to rebuild their future. Haiti is an African Caribbean republic – populated by descendants of African slaves cast away on a remote island.

At Unisa we sought to respond to this human tragedy by mobilising support for the South African humanitarian effort through the South African Society of the Red Cross. We commend the South African heroes and heroines who took part in the search and rescue teams, especially the work of the humanitarian organisation Gift of the Givers, and the efforts of the Government

of the Republic of South Africa to stand with the government and people of Haiti in their hour of need. Our hearts must, first, go out to our colleagues Dr Jean Bertrand and Mrs Mildred Aristide, both honorary fellows at our university. I wish to thank staff and students who have supported this appeal in ways that one may never be able to tell – a demonstration of the vision of this university: *towards **the** African university in the service of humanity.*

It is always a genuine pleasure for me to welcome you to this hallowed tradition in our university life – the official opening of our academic year. I know that I speak on behalf of our management when I say that we are as usual, delighted to have members of Council, friends and supporters of the University, alumni, donors, staff and students with us today. This assembly provides us with an opportunity to publicly restate our commitment to academic and institutional industry and excellence, and to formally welcome staff and students back into the fold. And so, an especially warm word of welcome is also extended to our new staff and students, to those in our regions who are joining us via satellite, and the many who are in our centres across the country and even as far afield as Addis Ababa in Ethiopia. It goes without saying of course, that this welcome includes our students in their homes and at their workplaces.

I have stated on previous occasions that far from being a mere ritual, the opening assembly provides us with the opportunity to reflect on what we have achieved, renew our energies and commitment to the Institution and refocus on what needs to be done to achieve our institutional objectives. More than that, this assembly is an acknowledgement and acceptance of the role of higher education in the growth and development of our nation and our Continent and the very important role that each of us must play to that end. Put simply, we are asserting quite boldly and openly that education is both the saving and the future of our country. In a world that is undergoing such upheaval and rapid transformation, we are called to look beyond the here and now to the kind of world we would wish to bequeath to posterity, and to accept our role and responsibility in its realisation.

Reviewing 2009 has been both an exciting and a sobering experience: exciting in the vibrancy and activity that increasingly characterise our institution, but challenging in recognising the

significant challenges that we face as we forge ahead into the next decade. The year began with the publication of our review of the 5 years since the merger that created the new Unisa in 2004. The *5-Years of Transformation* publication has chronicled the journey that we have undertaken since the merger. It was thrilling to note the transformation that this Institution had undergone. One gained a real sense of a merger being left firmly behind and of an institution that is moving confidently forward. Much of the success that has been achieved thus far must go to a very dedicated Management team at the helm of this institution since 2004, and to an equally visionary Council, and also to the staff who embraced the vision first prescribed by the Minister of Education in the *National Plan for Higher Education* in 2000, but which at Unisa we sought to make our own. I wish to thank Council and staff for the support and enthusiasm that has got us this far in our journey.

### **The HEQC Audit Final Report**

As we begin this academic year, we cannot but turn our attention to the Final Report of the HEQC Audit Panel which was submitted to the university this January. The HEQC undertook an institutional quality audit on the University of South Africa in 2008. On behalf of the University, I wish to publicly thank Dr Lis Lange, the Executive Director of HEQC and her team for the effort that went into the report: the endeavour to understand a truly complex mega institution like Unisa, and to enter into the spirit of our vision captured in our strategy document *Unisa 2015: An Agenda for Transformation*. We thank them for the cooperation and spirit with which the audit was conducted. We take special comfort in that our plea that the Audit Panel should include reputable international distance education experts if it was to be of any help in the development of world class distance education in our country and Continent, which our people deserved, was heeded. We also wish to thank members of the panel who assisted us by engaging the university about our vision and mission, our theory and practice, our systems and processes, our infrastructure and resources. We have resolved that we will engage the Report critically but with integrity, but not in a defensive or apologetic posture. We undertake to use the Report as a platform for institutional and creative deliberations, and to prepare improvement plans to be submitted to HEQC in the course of the year.

There is much that the HEQC Report has commended Unisa for: good governance and management, vision and mission, strategy and planning and financial and resource management. There is also much that the Panel identified as challenges which the University must confront and made substantial recommendations on: the logic of its size and its compelling vision, the embedded theory in the practice of ODL, the conceptualization of research in an ODL environment, understanding technology in ODL, and building among staff competencies to deliver effective teaching and learning. All these are to become the bases for further reflection and planning.

### **After HEQC**

As a matter of fact that work has already begun. We began immediately upon the completion of the CoL Institutional Audit which we initiated in 2007. We recognized then that the challenge facing our university was to provide a credible ODL experience that works. As is the case with other universities, Unisa also needs to deal with issues of high failure rates, drop out and delayed completion. We identified many of the reasons for this and moved to set processes in place to address them. Fundamentally for us, has been the reality of the changing demographics of our student population, the socio-political factors that are resulting in more and more students being out of work, instances where students enter university study without set goals or ambitions, seeking to study with us full-time, without understanding the demands of ODL, the maturity and the discipline required for self-study, and the adequacy of the facilities designed for a different kind of student in mind.

With the help of Council and with the support of the Department of Education (as it then was) we embarked on a programme of infrastructure development here in Pretoria and Florida and at our regional centres across the country. Last year we established a new registration centre, the award-winning architectural masterpiece, named after the legendary late Prof Es'kia Mphahlele, to change the manner in which the University conducts student registrations. We embarked on an enrolment plan which required students to apply before they registered at Unisa to allow us better planning, counselling and delivery of services, and to utilize technology to greater effect. This year we have begun to appreciate the effect of this environment: the

smooth processing of applications on line, registrations on line, and the ability to effect more streamlined enrolment planning. The atmosphere conducive to cordial relations, professionalism, and that accords dignity to our clients has been much appreciated by students. The efficiency of service has been remarked upon thanks to the staff [see congratulatory letter from student]. Management wishes to commend the supportive role of the national SRC who deployed themselves in registration centres across the country to offer assistance to students. After some initial scepticism, I am pleased to report that the student leadership at this institution have now embraced the new registration environment.

One must pause here and observe that we are alarmed that while the delivery of parcels by the SAPO this year has been prompt and excellent (77% of students opted to use the SAPO delivery system, 138000 parcels were delivered by SAPO), we are alarmed, however, that some 60 000 of those parcels remain uncollected by their student addresses, despite reminders. What this may signal is that students do not begin their study sessions promptly, a matter contributing to absenteeism, drop-out, and failure at examination time. Once again, we are expecting a growth of 18, 5% as of 25 January, in our new registrations, to 219 993 students registered by 25 January. More than a third of the higher education student population in our country are enrolled with Unisa. What is gratifying to us is the modest growth in our Colleges of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, and of Science, Engineering and Technology. At about 15 000 for CSET, and 3 500 for CAES this makes Unisa one of the largest science education centres in the country. It is in order to advance quality science teaching and research that we have embarked on an ambitious project of constructing a centre for advanced studies in the sciences at our Florida Campus. We remain hopeful that this project will get underway this year.

We are also pleased to announce that Unisa is experiencing improvements in success, throughput and research outputs. Last year the university graduated 21 550 diplomas and degrees, among them 654 Masters and 113 doctoral degrees. The School of Graduate Studies has now been established. The School will stimulate and support research and graduate studies at Unisa by ensuring quality supervision, and provide facilities for support to students. In that regard the development at Sunnyside will create a campus for graduate studies and research

second to none. Sadly, the project is much delayed as we need to meet some bureaucratic hurdles.

This year we are also anticipating continuous improvement in our results. We have observed an improvement in our examination pass rates, from 51, 84% in 2005 at the time of the merger, to 55,75% for the October/November examinations season. We are expecting final results for supplementary examinations, as well as postgraduate studies in Honours and Masters coursework and dissertations later this year. That success rate is within reach of the target of 56% provided for us by the DoHET and which we expect to exceed this year. I wish in particular to commend the College of Human Sciences on a consistently excellent pass rate of 71,92%, as well as the College of Economic and Management Sciences that is improving on its graduate throughput, especially in the accounting sciences. We have noted sadly that last year about 10% of students who qualified to take the examinations were absent from the examination sittings. This is a matter we are currently investigating.

Unisa continues to improve on its research outputs. In the report published by the DoE in December 2009, based on the research outputs for 2008, Unisa's research production increased by 5.84% year-on-year, since 2005, although it was noted that staff productivity (including research masters and PhD graduations) had decreased slightly over the preceding 3 years. And yet Unisa is considered among the top in social science research, including in the research Master's and doctoral graduations. Even with the improvement, however, we are conscious of the fact that Unisa still produces well below the expected norm output, hence new initiatives at supporting research activity at Unisa, including the campaign to improve the qualifications of academic staff up to doctoral level.

### **Academic Transformation**

2009 saw the continuation of the institutional programme of academic transformation. Fundamental to this process is the Annual Management Summit of the University's management corps at all levels; the initiatives on assessment planning and curriculum revision driven by the Pro Vice Chancellor, and on centering the Institution on ODL and transforming the entire manner in which the University does business, and the continuous efforts at positioning

the University as a world class ODL institution. We have resolved that the University must re-think its assessment systems and utilize diverse methods of assessing learning. Proposals are being considered to extend the curriculum in order to allow greater flexibility and to address the deficit caused by inadequate schooling. More excitingly, with the support of CIES/IIE, a programme of curricula reform through exchange of scholars is underway. A Planning Conference was held in December and it sensitized the Institution to the imperatives of context-based education and relevance if the University was to achieve its goals as set out in its Mission Statement.

Academic transformation at Unisa is reflected in four initiatives which are already underway: the Briteside of Sunnyside, the Thabo Mbeki Institute for African Leadership, the Unisa Learning Campaign and INSET. Briteside is an initiative of the Department of Social Work to provide services to the under-resourced area of Sunnyside. Colleagues have already undertaken a study, to give just one example, of the environment and conditions for Unisa students living in Sunnyside; they are engaged in activities with foreign nationals, especially refugees and asylum-seekers, in projects aimed at building community cohesion in Sunnyside to counter the threat of xenophobia; and offering advice, counselling, and crime prevention. Social Work has now been joined by colleagues in other departments like law, education and psychology who are collaborating in this endeavour. This project has now been adopted as a strategic project by the University. I wish to thank Prof CJ Schenk and her colleagues for privileging the poor with their service and expertise. Of course, besides this being a community engagement exercise, it also provides a setting for teaching, for academic participation and research.

I am pleased to report that after much deliberation and planning, the Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute is now ready to be launched. Dr Maureen Tong serves as the Coordinator of the Institute at Unisa. The launch will take the form of a major international conference in October in Johannesburg. The series of lectures under the auspices of the Institute will be launched this year in May to mark Africa Day. It is expected that the first cohort of students to undertake short course and postgraduate degrees will be enrolled in 2011. We are already receiving enquires from interested researchers and students.

I am equally proud of the advances we have made in another exciting initiative. What began as an idea of a Summer School is now set to be launched this year as the Unisa Campaign for Learning. What is proposed is that Unisa will run a series of informal courses, training and learning opportunities to advance skills and learning, especially for those in non-traditional environments, or who are outside the learning sphere. Dr Genevieve James has conceptualized this programme and it is ready to be launched early this year. Of particular significance for us in this regard, is a programme we are engaged in in partnership with the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam to undertake lectures and seminars on a variety of topics alongside the World Cup 2010 in June. This will attract, we believe, those who wish to explore more than just football, during their visit to our country, and, I suppose, others who may be bored stiff with being immersed in nothing but football for a whole month wherever they turn!

To contribute to a national effort to advance education in our country, especially the quality of teachers, Unisa has established the In-service Training and Development Centre for Teachers. In the absence of Prof RH Nengwekhulu on secondment to the Eastern Cape Department of Education, Dr SJ Mohapi has been engaged this year in securing partnerships with provincial governments. The reception of INSET has been very encouraging. We expect to launch the Centre early this year. Supplementing the work of INSET, is ISTE which is concerned with the teaching of mathematics, science and technology competencies for teachers at our schools. Last year, 28 September to 2 October, ISTE organized a Winter School, attended by 42 teachers from across the country, to facilitate effective teaching and learning of Mathematics, Science and Technology in South African schools, and to help teachers enhance their knowledge of the subject content, and overcome problems they face in teaching the subjects.

#### **UNISA 2015 Revisited**

Probably one of the most exciting undertakings last year was the review of the *Unisa 2015: An Agenda for Transformation*. It was rewarding to see how this original strategy, crafted during a time of uncertainty and change, had retained its relevance and how well it had served the institution as a guiding document. In the light of this, we needed only to eliminate those issues that had been achieved or had become redundant and introduce new and/or amended goals to



reflect the new realities facing the Institution. The review of the strategic plan was completed by the end of the year, and would have been presented to Council for adoption in November. Council, however, wisely resolved that the matter required a dedicated workshop to consider the policy implications of the strategy. It is now hoped that Council will be able to adopt the revised strategy at its next meeting in March.

There are some innovations and shifts in the draft revised strategic plan, but the essence of the Mission and Vision for the University remain. Of particular note is the fact that the Statement simplifies the Values section. The University is called upon to champion one set of values a year. This year we are enjoined to embrace “Social justice and fairness” in our behaviour and conduct at the University. It requires of us that we recognise the potential in each of us and in our students. It means that we accord the dignity due to each of us in our ordinary dealings among ourselves and with the public. It suggests that “social justice and fairness” are core and fundamental values that define our identity as a progressive higher education institution. This is a value we seek to inculcate in all of us and which expresses who we are.

We have added a value proposition: *accessible, flexible and globally recognised*. A value proposition is, if you like, a term of contract with government, with our students and with the public. It also speaks to the qualities or attributes expected of all Unisa graduates and it seeks to meet public policy objectives that form the bases for the establishment of the Institution. Our Mission Statement has been shortened and sharpened, and the Goals and Strategies have been streamlined. We have made provision for new developments like our commitment to sustainability by being signatories to the UN Global Compact, we have prioritised organisational architecture and we are making strong commitments to enhance our provision of services to people with disabilities in line with the proclamation establishing the new Unisa.

### **Establishing Open Distance Learning**

Unisa is conscious of the privilege of driving ODL as a method of learning and achievement in our country and Continent. We are aware of the imperatives of ODL especially in developing

talent and skills for a growing economy. We know that ODL succeeds best by being innovative and creative in its course design, imaginative in the use of technology and sensitive and committed to the idea of the student being at the centre of the learning project. We continue to be in consultation with the DoHET about the imperative to have a policy framework to enable the practice, development, management, regulation and funding of ODL in our country. As Unisa we produced a Policy Framework for ODL, and established an institutional mechanism for the implementation of ODL at Unisa. And yet we know that we cannot take ODL for granted, and that our students deserve more. We are therefore resolved to elevate Teaching and Learning in ODL as a platform to undertake educational reforms in the way we teach and advance learning. We also seek, through research and practice, to establish conceptual underpinnings of ODL practice at Unisa. We are committed to training all staff at Unisa to become ODL practitioners of excellence.

For that reason the following initiatives are proposed:

- 1) That the focus for the next three years will be on Teaching and Learning;
- 2) That the management structures of the University will be reviewed in order to reflect more accurately this institutional commitment;
- 3) That the Institute for Open Distance Learning is charged with the task of undertaking institutional research, benchmarking our practices with international standards and training Unisa staff in ODL practice;
- 4) That an international conference on Teaching and Learning will be convened at Unisa in 2011 which could serve to promote international collaboration on teaching and learning philosophies and methods, and advance teaching and learning practice at Unisa;
- 5) The Office of the Pro Vice Chancellor has been charged with the task of establishing an International Reference Group on ODL which will promote dialogue among ODL experts across the globe. The Open Distance and eLearning International Reference Group will be made up of scholars and practitioners from across the globe. They will undertake virtual seminars, and probably hold an annual contact seminar or workshop.

With Teaching and Learning, the University also wants to elevate Research and Innovation. By this we mean that we wish to establish Unisa as being among those institutions where innovative and creative learning methods are developed by the use of technology, through creative assessment methods, and by being sensitive to the various pathways to learning in the multi-cultural environment we live in. To achieve this purpose, Unisa has resolved to establish its own Training Academy for staff at its Irene premises. The plans for the Irene Training Academy are advanced. The facility will ensure that continuous training and improvement for staff becomes the norm, and that staff competencies aligned to ODL will be constantly under review and enhanced.

We look forward in 2010 to the revitalised implementation of ODL in Unisa. What is clear is that we need to ground the philosophy of teaching and learning more deeply in Unisa, and that of course, means the pedagogics of ODL teaching and learning. It is my sincere hope that this year, 2010, and the dawning of a new decade, will galvanise us all into a complete immersion in Open Distance Learning.

It is our conviction that this development is in keeping with international trends. For example the Government of India established a National Knowledge Commission in 2005 chaired by an industrialist Mr Sam Pitroda. It was charged with the task to, among others, "Build excellence in the educational system to meet the knowledge challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and increase India's competitive advantage in fields of knowledge." In its Report to the Nation 2007, the NKC makes significant proposals regarding distance education. It calls for the establishment of a new standing committee for the regulation of ODE, the setting up of a research foundation to support research activity in ODE, and the creation of a national ICT infrastructure for networking ODE institutions. This demonstrates both that ODE is a vital resource for nations that seek to advance knowledge and technology, and that adequate resources need to be provided to enable ODE to deliver what it promises. One can only hope that South Africa takes note of these developments, establishes its own Knowledge Commission, examines its own distinct knowledge and innovation gaps and set its own targets.

## **Corporate Governance**

Having said that, there can be no denying that in order to remain sustainable Unisa must ensure sound and prudent financial management in line with the King III principles of sound corporate governance and approved accounting practices. In the eye of the storm caused by the global financial crisis in 2009, Unisa was not unaffected by collapsing investment returns. And yet the finances of the University remain sound and no staff cuts were considered necessary. Nevertheless we made a vigorous commitment to cost saving measures and implemented risk managing and cost-cutting measures, an undertaking that will continue into 2010 and beyond. We are proud of the fact that we have been able to keep our student fees at a very reasonable level, and indeed, we stand by our commitment to assist as many students as we can by setting aside resources to assist indigent but deserving students.

However, sustained financial security and quality education provision require commitment and responsibility from all stakeholders. In this regard our students will also need to meet their obligations. This year the University has managed to allocate in full the money provided by NSFAS to needy students. 2009 also saw the establishment of an Efficiency /Accountability Model at Unisa, as well as the inception of Unisa's Ethics and Risk Management Committee, lending impetus to our commitment to both the King III Principles and the United Nations Global Compact (of which Unisa is a signatory). Our annual staff assembly at which we present the Financial Statements/Budget was held on 12 October and was well received. Financial management accountability and sustainability at Unisa are strongly assured, even in the tough global financial climate that the University has not been immune from. Sound corporate governance is the responsibility of Council. I therefore give tribute to the Council of the University of South Africa, under the leadership of Dr Mathews Phosa, as well as the Committees of Council, for their vigilance and application of best practices in the governance of the Institution.

## **Institutional Climate**

It is common knowledge that the beginning of last year saw unprecedented protests and efforts at disruption by some students affiliated to YCL and staff belonging to NEHAWU. In some

respects this was unsurprising, given the teething problems of the registration system, the suspension of the SRC in the wake of poor participation at the preceding elections, and of course, the fact that 2009, was General Election year and the political climate was heightened to an extraordinary extent. While, happily, the SRC elections have been held and an SRC established, matters concerning NEHAWU do not appear to be resolved. We are hoping that APSA will sign the Recognition Agreement later this year and thus become part of the Bargaining Forum, and thereby, a majority of the staff of the university will be represented therein.

Regarding NEHAWU, various efforts on the part of Council, Management, and the regional office of NEHAWU, have not yet yielded fruit despite the fact that it was agreed last year that a relationship building exercise with management be undertaken. Council completed its year-long investigation of the allegations by NEHAWU against the Vice Chancellor at the end of last year. Suffice it to say that there are lessons to be learnt all round: about the nature and character of the University and its traditions of free expression and contestation of ideas with ideas, that must be honoured. There does not appear to be a common understanding about the role and authority of the Vice Chancellor in a modern University; about honour and integrity in the conduct of university affairs and the respect due to all actors in the process; about scholarship and intellectual finesse in an argumentative democracy; about truth and the contours of asserting the truth and examining contesting truths; about standing for the truth as a value discipline; about culture and honour in common intellectual and academic spaces. In sum, the politicisation of the academic spaces in our country (using “politicisation” in its narrowest meaning) must be avoided. One expects that both Council and Management of the University will constantly keep these matters on their radar screen if the Institution is ever to navigate its course in ever choppy waters. Council shares the view that academic freedom must be guarded jealously if the University is to retain its reputation as an academic institution of excellence.

We are resolved as Management to continue to seek better and affirming relations in the workplace, to uphold the policies of the universities and the laws of our land, and to guard jealously the integrity of our Institution.

Importantly 2009 saw the approval of the Employment Equity Policy by Council on 3 April 2009, the Anti-Racism and Racial Harassment Policy by ManCom (to serve the Institutional Forum shortly). The EE Plan with clear targets has been negotiated across all sectors of the Institution. We are satisfied that the University has far exceeded its own EE targets and it has the challenge of creating an institutional culture and environment that is conducive to enabling the retention and success of those recruited to the Institution. However, challenges in some primary support departments such as ICT remain, especially for post-grade levels 6 and upwards. The Women Empowerment & Gender Equality Framework draft has also been concluded and has begun its path through the approval process.

Unisa has submitted to the DoHET an Institutional Response to the Ministerial Committee on Racism, Racial Harassment and other Forms of Discrimination in Higher Education and it conducted the first ever systematic investigation into the GYOT 2007 – 2008 project at Unisa, with the aim of arriving at a purposeful academic intervention to provide support for the advancement of younger academics, Black as well as African female academics. This has proved to be a successful strategic intervention in relation to advancing the institutional vision and mission. We have had reason to address instances of misconduct relating to sexual harassment and there remain concerns about racism in some pockets of the institution.

### **Africa and International Partnerships and Collaboration**

Unisa is a proud member and participant in various international forums. A strong delegation attended the World conference of ICDE in Maastricht, NL. I was privileged to be invited to be a panellist in a plenary session at the 2<sup>nd</sup> UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education held in Paris in July last year. I continue to serve on the Executive Committees of ICDE and the ACDE. We are looking forward to welcoming the next annual session of ICDE SCOP at Unisa in

September. It is hoped that the SCOP will become the occasion for convening the first-ever conference of student leaders and Deans of student of open universities in Africa affiliated to ACDE. We wish to commend the Ministry of Higher Education and Training of South Africa for giving financial support to ACDE to undertake its programmes of collaboration and to support the quality assurance agency in ODL that is proposed. These funds are administered on behalf of the government by Unisa and we were privileged to sign the Agreement with ACDE recently. We are also pleased to report that after some false starts the programme of support for academic development in partnership with the Federal Government of Ethiopia seems to have taken off. The registration of postgraduate students now seems to be proceeding well. We have been joined in partnership by SANPAD who are undertaking training of supervisors, and preparing students for participation in research studies. I am also pleased to report that among the Masters students, the success rate of our Ethiopian students is very pleasing indeed.

### **Some Challenges**

I mentioned earlier that our new registration process seems to be generating the rhythm and momentum that we had hoped for. We are finding increasingly that the kinds of queries that that we need to deal with are of an operational matter – and that is very encouraging in its normalcy. In fact what has been achieved literally from the “ground zero” of an empty piece of ground in 2008 (no pun intended), is quite remarkable and I would like to thank all of those involved for the work and effort that went into turning a very necessary dream into a vibrant and working reality. I know that the same concerted effort is being put in on a daily basis, by many people to ensure the ever increasing efficiency of the processes.

There is a time-bomb waiting to explode in higher education, that of students who have qualified for degree studies finding that doors are closed at higher education institutions. That is often because, universities are increasingly increasing their admission requirements over and above those prescribed by the NSC. Students then turn to Unisa in a desperate bid to secure a place to study. We have had reason to believe that it is definitely not in all instances that the NSC is an accurate guide of ability to study at university. We have had instances where those who may have under-achieved at NSC end up performing remarkably well at Unisa. The

concern we have, however, is that this is a matter of public policy, and about the role of Unisa in higher education. This development may probably lead to the development of private higher education institutions, but Unisa will never be able to absorb every student who cannot be accommodated in contact institutions. Unisa is just as bound by the Ministerial Enrolment Plan as any other university, and we continue to carry the risk of unfunded students.

### **Personalia**

May I welcome the Chancellor of the University, Judge President BM Ngoepe and congratulate him on being reappointed by Council as Chancellor for another five-year term. Judge President Ngoepe has been an exemplary head of this University and has discharged his duties with dignity and dedication that has added stature to Unisa.

In the course of the year we were pleased to welcome Prof Hellicy Ngambi as Executive Dean of the College of Economic and Management Sciences upon the retirement of Prof Mrad Shahia who had served the university for many years. We also welcome Proff Valiant Clapper and E Sadler as Deputy Executive Deans of the College. Prof Greg Cuthbertson has assumed the position of Director of the Unisa School of Graduate Studies with effect from 1 January 2010. I am also pleased to report that a School of Education was established in the College of Human Sciences and Prof Loyiso Jita was appointed in an acting capacity as Director of the School of Education.

Mr I Mogomotsi has been appointed Director of the Florida Campus and Prof RHT Dolamo has assumed the position of Director of the Ethiopia Learning Centre in Akaki, Addis Ababa.

We mourn the death of Prof DG Geldenhuys of the Department of Art History, Visual Arts and Musicology who died after a short illness early December. Advocate AS Mlonzi, the University Ombudsman, died in a tragic motor vehicle accident on 28 December.

May I take this opportunity to congratulate all the colleagues who are to receive the Chairperson of Council Awards this morning, and those who are to receive awards for excellence in tuition and research.



## **Finally**

On a personal note: I would be less than candid if I did not end this address by confirming a public secret – that, with my pending retirement at the end of the year, this is my last appearance in the capacity of Principal and Vice Chancellor of Unisa. The process for the appointment of my successor is already underway, advertisements will be out in February and Council expects to make the appointment at its June meeting. I suppose I shall have an opportunity to say farewell to Council, staff and students of this university, to donors and all our partners with whom I shall have had the privilege to work with over 9 years. For now I only wish to say that I am looking forward to a great and exciting year at Unisa. The Chairperson of Council has been magnanimous enough to charge me with the task of preparing a Hand-over Brief for my successor. I shall be pleased to do so and look forward to being of some assistance in securing an enduring future for the University of South Africa.

N Barney Pitsoyana GCOB

PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

Official Opening of the Academic Year 2010

Pretoria, 28 January 2010.