



The Office Of The Principal and Vice-Chancellor

PRINCIPAL'S STATEMENT TO SENATE

It behoves us as an institution to reflect, I believe, on our essential message to the world and how that message is lived and experienced in the life of our university. I was reminded that such introspection is warranted when I read an article by Stephen K Mittelsett, President of Richland College, Texas in the Winter 2009 edition of *The Presidency*¹, the magazine of the American Council on Education (ACE). Dr Mittelsett recalls Mahatma Gandhi's quip to an enquiring journalist that it was important to be the change we wish to see in the world. To the question what his message to the world was, Gandhi replied "My life is my message." Mittelsett observes that that is as true of the individual as it is of the institution. Institutions project a moral message about their values, their significance and their vision. To paraphrase Mittelsett, if we intend our students to be builders of a sustainable world, of a caring society, of excellence and achievement characterised by social justice and equity, economic sufficiency and a healthy environment then the manner in which we relate to one another, conduct our personal and institutional relations, and our attitude to our work and to society must not be at odds with what we believe. I am reminded that we have used this message from Gandhi in some of our advertisements, to be the change we wish to see in the world.

What President Mittelsett was rallying his institution for, was a moral and transformatory leadership in higher education. During the last quarter we have had reason to retrace our steps through the five years of the existence of Unisa as a 'single, dedicated distance education institution' and a comprehensive university. We have reviewed the merger

¹ "Building Whole People, Whole Organisations, and Whole Communities", *The Presidency*, Winter 2009, p24ff

process of our new university through its milestones and achievements; we have taken note of the impact of our Unisa brand on students and our various publics. Our vision, '*towards the African university in the service of humanity*', is abiding. Of course, precisely because we have stated our aspiration up front we are being judged by that statement. In other words the consistency of our message will be reflected in what and how we do our business: the extent to which we seek to reflect the African personality and thought, our practice as a university in the best traditions of a university, and the manner in which our institution is devoted to service of the other rather than the self in our programmes, in our intellectual preoccupations and in our knowledge agenda. Our staff and students, as well as the public at large, expect some moral consistency between the various assertions and our programmes and organisation.

I am often made aware of this responsibility when I am invited to be the keynote speaker at various international events, such as the PCF 5 Forum in London last year, the recent 23rd International Conference of ICDE at Maastricht, and the forthcoming UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in Paris from 5 – 8 July 2009. At every place Unisa is expected to be the thought leader for higher education in Africa and to advance especially, our well-known assertions about the social imperatives of higher education. That is the reason that we shall always implore colleagues to do everything possible to deliver on our undertakings to the Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia and to repay the confidence he has placed on this institution in the face of competing claims by other institutions like the OU UK. Our reputation is at stake in Ethiopia and we need to do that much more to help the postgraduate students in Ethiopia. Some units of this university, such as the SBL are far advanced in their offerings and in their activity in Ethiopia, but others could do better. In August Prof David Mosoma and I will be visiting Ethiopia to review the programme with the Ministry of Education there and perhaps sign a new Agreement.

The June series of planning meetings set the scene for this critical reflection to take place. With the assistance of Mr Clem Sunter we undertook scenario planning at Kloofzicht. We recognised that the environment in which we operate has changed in the five years since the 2015 Strategic Plan was crafted. We now live in a world bedevilled by a financial crisis that is bound to affect the resources available to higher education; we now have a new government which has not been slow in asserting a new brand of priorities for higher

education; we live in a society where critical questions are being raised about higher education, its purposes and achievements. In the face of that we cannot afford to wallow in the mud of mediocrity and self-satisfaction. We are called upon to make good our values of *integrity, excellence, fairness and justice*. Much of this can be easily tested in the quality of our graduates, in the relevance of our research, in the relations between staff and students and in our essential interpersonal relations within the institution.

Walking with the Vice Chancellor of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) through the new Esk'ia Mphahlele Registration Halls as I did the other day, one is filled with a sense of achievement when one speaks to staff and senses the appreciation of staff in their new more affirming work environment, when one talks to students who assert with pride that the new facility makes them proud to be Unisa students, and when one senses beauty and creativity in the practical architectural brilliance of the building, as it projects the image of an institution that is progressive, even trend-setting and humane. On the other hand one is filled with a sense of shame and revulsion when one gets, as one does, messages where students believe that they have been treated in a manner that is unnecessarily brutish by one or another of our colleagues. Yes, perhaps, it is all in a day's work!

At Kloofzicht we examined the challenge and opportunity of technology in driving the change we want and our human inadequacy in being ready to meet that challenge. Looking at the world of open distance learning we recognised that we can barely afford not to be instruments for the extension of access to higher education to meet the developmental needs of our country and Continent. We therefore proposed that Unisa should be able to grow its active student numbers to about 300 000 by 2015 and then focus on consolidating its systems and provisions to ensure that each of those students has a quality experience of higher education provision and is excited about the intellectual promise of higher education. In other words what we promise about critical learning must be reflected in our learning environments, in our affirming relationships, in our programmes and qualifications which should be both progressive and relevant, and in our achievements as an institution. Aware though, that at times our systems fail us, that the culture of resistance remains strong at Unisa, we have resolved to make a concerted effort to build our organisational architecture, which should go a long way to ensuring joined-up, integrated processes and systems-flow, accountability and efficiencies.

The Unisa Management Summit was held at Gallagher Estate on 26 May. Once again we were able to gather all the colleagues who exercise forms of management in the institution. At a basic level we need to do that from time to time if anything so as to test whether we are articulating common messages in the management of the institution but more substantially to set new priorities, empower one another and take common responsibility for the health of our university. The message that came out of Gallagher, as was the case with Velmoré, was the need for more communication and consistency of messages from all levels of management. There were calls for more devolution of responsibilities and more accountability. More especially, from my point of view there was this sense that we need to own our university with pride. I wish to assert what I said in another context, that managers, especially at the operational level, from Director and below, should be engaged daily with all aspects of their units/directorates: engage with just about everyone and all activities daily, be visible in every nook and cranny, and be 'hands-on' in advancing the objectives of the unit. It is as simple as that!

As was so clearly stated at Gallagher Conference Centre, we have begun a process of reviewing the 2015 Strategic Plan. DSPQA is already at work preparing for the management retreat that should further refine our set strategic objectives in the light of our experience and practice since 2006. This process will culminate in the Council *bosberaad* to be held end of August to approve the review programme and set new benchmarks for 2015, if necessary.

We were honoured to have the Vice Chancellors or senior executive leaders of the six comprehensive universities in South Africa, the new institutional type introduced by Prof Kader Asmal, then Minister of Education, as part of the package of reforms introduced by the National Plan for Higher Education 2001. Prof Asmal himself gave a riveting account of the merger process at a congregation of the university on 20 April 2009. The Comprehensive University Colloquium held on 1 June 2009 was part of this university's celebration of five years of the merger. The colloquium provided comprehensive universities with the opportunity to assess progress in the establishment of this institutional type, the challenges faced and prospects for the future. A ringing demand was heard from all the universities that the comprehensive type will only become viable once appropriate regulatory

mechanisms were put in place to give effect, especially given the constraints of the HEQF. It is hoped that the papers presented at the conference will be published later this year.

Meanwhile, I am glad to report that the much-awaited HEQC Audit Draft Report has now been submitted. Frankly, there is nothing in it that we did not know about this organisation. In many respects it is good that some of our weaknesses have been identified by such a process and our strengths commended. We have requested Prof Narend Baijnath to prepare a summary report and action points. We shall then prepare our institutional response to the report and submit to Council and hence to the HEQC. It is hoped that the Final Report will be issued by the end of the year. Senate will, of course, have a role in the preparation of our response to the HEQC. At our August Meeting we shall debate the report and finalise our response in time for Council later in the month.

We have now come to the end of the Autumn/Winter Graduations Season 2009. I understand that the graduations went very well. I wish to take the opportunity to congratulate colleagues in the Graduations Division and Prof Divya Singh, the Deputy Registrar once again, for the professional manner in which our graduations are always conducted. Many colleagues, from Pro Vice Chancellor and all the Vice Principals, Executive Deans and a growing number of academic colleagues have supported our graduations very well. I understand that our graduation output continues to improve and this year we are expecting to graduate about 20 000 students. None of that would have been possible without the commitment of a growing number of staff to quality teaching, sustained tuition support, efficient academic management and administration and , of course, learners motivated to learn for success. The recent report from the School of Accounting in the College of Economic and Management Sciences is just the kind of inspiration one is talking about. Following the release of the results of the Part 1 Qualifying Examinations for CAs, Unisa graduates have performed admirably. Not only does Unisa account for 33% of the successful candidates, but one of the students in the Top 10 is a Unisa product and the majority of the Unisa graduates are from the designated groups, black and women. Colleagues in the School of Accounting deserve our warmest congratulations on this achievement.

One always takes pride in our graduation ceremonies for honorary degrees. This year was no different. Our crop of honorary degrees this year included some of the this country's most eminent scholars and public personalities: Archbishop George Daniel, the retired Catholic Archbishop of Pretoria, Dr ATM Mokgokong, former chair of the Unisa Council, social activist and business woman, Dr Otty Nxumalo, the educationist, Dr Ishmael Noko, General Secretary of the Geneva-based Lutheran World Federation and a graduate of this university, Dr Tom Karis, the historian and the Hon Justice Kate O'Reagan, due to retire soon as a member of the Constitutional Court. All in their different ways deserve the honour bestowed upon them by this university.

I am pleased to report that at its meeting on 26 June Council approved the redeployment of Prof Narend Baijnath to concentrate on the construction of the organisational architecture for a period of six months beginning on 1 July. Dr TND Sidzumo-Mazibuko has been appointed Acting Vice Principal: Strategy, Planning and Partnerships with effect from today until 31 December 2009. Council also confirmed the appointment of Prof Hellicy Ngambi as the Executive Dean of the College of Economic and Management Sciences. She has served in the leadership echelons of that college for many years. Prof Ngambi may well be the consummate insider but she has a clear mandate to take the college to new heights, especially in regard to transformation and in research. We wish her well in her new responsibilities. The appointment of Prof Pamela Ryan as Executive Director in the office of the Pro Vice Chancellor was also confirmed. Prof Ryan will serve largely as the project manager in the Office of the Pro Vice Chancellor to advance the strategic projects that the Pro Vice Chancellor is currently driving: the implementation plan for ODL, the establishment of the School of Graduate Studies, the continuing review of the curriculum including a possible expanded undergraduate programme leading to a four-year degree, the introduction of new assessment methods, some of the initiatives on research centres like the proposed Archie Mafeje Institute for Applied Social Science Research, among many others. The Office of the Pro Vice Chancellor, as everyone can observe, is very busy. Without any fear of contradiction, I can say that Prof Ryan has her work cut out for her!

Council also took account of the fact that the term of office of the Chancellor of the university, Judge President Bernard Ngoepe, comes to an end in November. The Secretary of Council will, in due course, invite nominations for this high office at the University of South

Africa. Judge President Ngoepe has served Unisa with distinction as the first black titular head of this university, first before the merger, and later confirmed as the first Chancellor of the newly merged university in 2004. Council hopes to formally elect the Chancellor at its November seating. Council is also beginning to turn its attention on the appointment of the new Vice Chancellor. Management has been requested to present Council with a succession plan and time-table at its August Meeting. Council hopes to finalise the appointment process by June 2010 and allow some overlap with the retiring Vice Chancellor towards the end of his term.

The challenge in an organisation like Unisa remains: that we must operate to become a sustainable economic and social organism, and, as Mittelsetz puts it, “we must operate as authentic, credible institutional laboratories for our students and collaboratively leverage resources to accomplish our student learning goals...” To conclude, here is a sobering and yet inspirational thought from Stephen K Mittelsetz, which I quote *in extenso*:

Whole people will not come to work in an institution where systems and processes are undependable, inequitable, and otherwise dysfunctional and where competent, passionate people fail through organisational default and are unfairly penalised.” In such institutions, people begin to protect their vulnerable souls by bringing only a part of themselves to work, playing it safe, going through the motions, and avoiding the responsible risks necessary for teaching – learning innovations we need to help our students acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes requisite in global citizenship. Richland’s organisational values – developed by students, faculty and staff- have set behavioural standards for our teaching, learning, and community building: integrity; mutual trust; wholeness; fairness; considerate, meaningful communications; mindfulness; cooperation; diversity; responsible risk taking; and joy.

N Barney Pityana GCOB

Principal and Vice Chancellor

University of South Africa

Pretoria, 1 July 2009.