

## Principal and Vice-chancellor of Unisa visits Brazil

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In December 2004, I received an invitation from the UNESCO Brazil Regional office to participate at the International Seminar, *Exits from Slavery and Public Policy* which was to be held in Brasília from 28 February to 2 March 2005. The seminar was co-sponsored by various Brazilian government ministries, the Special Secretariat of Policies for the Promotion of Racial Equality (SEPPIR), the Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy and Diversity (SECAD) from the Ministry of Education, the Cultural Palmares Foundation of the Ministry of Culture, the Special Secretariat of Human Rights, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the First Vice Presidency of the Federal State, the Parliamentary Front for Racial Equality, and the Centre for Black Parliamentarians.



The purpose of the seminar was to examine the commitments that Latin American nations made at the United Nations 3<sup>rd</sup> World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban in 2001. The seminar was to assess the extent to which South American nations had implemented the Durban Declaration, especially with relation to the removal of all vestiges of slavery, particularly as this applied to Afro-descendants. The seminar would also review policies that have been adopted to overcome racism and to promote equality; especially it would look at effective policies like affirmative action and reparatory policies.

Besides the very strong involvement of various Brazilian Government ministries in this initiative, delegations of anti-racism, and black cultural activists from Brazil and from across Latin and South America gathered in Brasília for this event. Also participating were researchers, black scholars, and government officials, presumably with responsibility for the policies. That made the seminar an excellent forum for the exchange of ideas and for seeking practical solutions to the prevailing problems of racism in the Americas.

My special interest in this event was the fact that I had been involved in the organisation of the World Conference against Racism in Durban in 2001. I was just as keen to see how other nations were grappling with the Durban commitments

because I have not seen any action to date in South Africa as a follow-up to Durban. I also have a continuing interest in Brazil and the question of racism since South Africa is developing a close partnership with Brazil on many fronts, and I have an abiding academic interest in racism.



Prof Pityana, forefront, left, in Brasília at the Seminário Internacional Saídas da Escravidão e Políticas Públicas

The seminar was opened with some high-level presentations by all the above sponsors. All the government speakers emphasised the commitment of the Brazilian government to seek implementation of the Durban Declaration. It was also explained how Durban was reflected in government policies. Of particular interest in this regard were statements that Brazil was promoting new relations with Africa, confronting Brazil with its African identity which it had denied for so long. It was said that public policies were aimed at eliminating inequality. The main keynote speech was given by Dr Christiane Taubira-DeLannon, a French parliamentarian of French Guyanan descent, a member of the European parliament since 1994. Dr DeLennon outlined the history of slavery and racism in South America, and how Durban sought to address racism and the history of inequality. She explained the difficulties that confronted Durban and the fact that there was no political will to make a success of Durban from some powerful nations. Nonetheless her message was that communities of the oppressed people must seize the opportunities presented to them by Durban. The rest of the seminar was divided into parallel panel discussions where presenters were drawn from all over Latin America, from Africa and from the United States. Among the topics for panel discussions were:

- Impacts of Durban: Implementation of Policies to Combat Racism;
- Exits from Slavery and Post-abolition Policies;
- Current Pan Africanism Formulations and International Co-operation Policies;
- Racial Inequality in Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, Uruguay;
- Experiences of Affirmative Action;
- Education and Training.

I participated in a panel on Affirmative Action in education with speakers from Brazil, Peru, and Cuba. The seminar ended with a Final Statement.

On the fringes of the International Seminar, I held discussions with Minister Matilde Ribeiro of SEPPIR who briefed me on the approach of her secretariat and the partnership she believed was very critical with Africa especially South Africa. She was keen that the partnership be further enriched and focused, especially joint study and research projects. A similar meeting was also held with the Secretariat for Education, especially Higher Education. At these meetings the strategy of Brazil was outlined. This included the research into Black history and culture, African studies, new policies to enhance black access into higher education, promote black learners attending school and staying to complete their studies, increase participation rate at universities by black Brazilians; affirmative action policies and a national Policy to promote Racial Equality was being devised. In the end these policies will promote greater diversity in the professional ranks and at universities. I also visited the UNESCO Office in Brazil, where I was given an outline of UNESCO programmes to counter the spread of HIV/AIDS, a project on weekend schooling in poor communities and other anti-poverty initiatives.

An invitation to the National Assembly by Senator Cristovam Buarque gave us an insight into the political systems and issues in Brazil. Dr Buarque was the first Minister of Education in the PT government, a former Governor of the Federal District of Brasília, and a former Rector of the National University of Brasília. He had also visited Unisa in January 2005 and, hosted by the Centre for Latin American Studies, he spoke at seminars at Unisa. Nonetheless, Senator Buarque's interest was to see how Unisa would co-operate in a project he was involved in of a virtual university concerned with development studies. With him there was the executive Director of the Council for Higher Education, or its equivalent, and the Director of the Centre for Development Studies at the National University of Brasília. I was accompanied to this meeting by Ambassador Lindiwe Zulu, who will follow up on this discussion with the Senator.

## **Farewell**

Ambassador Lindiwe Zulu who had taken considerable personal interest in the visit, and who accompanied me on several visits, and also made available Ms Bernice Henry, the First Secretary (Political) to assist with this visit, organised a dinner on

the eve of my departure from Brasília. At the dinner, there was also a visiting delegation from the National Council of Provinces, the select Committee on Education led by Mr Tolo. Invited guests included many of those I had visited, the diplomatic corps, as well as some senior government officials. I therefore had an additional opportunity to observe the intensity of the partnership between Brazil and South Africa.

## Universities

*Catholic University of Brasília:* Met with Dr Debora Pinto Niquini, rector of the Catholic University. The meeting was plagued by problems of understanding. First, Dr Pinto did not have an interpreter and I had to rely on the assistance of Ms Bernice Henry, the Political officer at the South African Embassy. Second, the Rector was hardly prepared for the visit. She had no idea of distance education, and indeed, harboured some prejudices about distance education. So, a great deal of time was spent trying to deal with her ignorance as well as suspicions. This got the meeting off to a bad start. Dr Pinto is new as a Rector of the university. Indeed, her predecessor had already contacted the Embassy seeking collaboration with Unisa. Towards that end a draft memorandum of understanding had been prepared, which set out various areas of possible collaboration. It was only later in the meeting that she was joined by an official who has responsibility for international programmes, and who spoke English. He then tried to interest us in collaboration and he was able to outline possible areas of sustained contact with Unisa. We then agreed to design a memorandum of collaboration in research, health studies, and teacher education.

*National University of Brasília:* This is among Brazil's most prestigious universities, with a very strong research record, and a renowned international culture. The rector is Dr Lauro Morhy. Dr Morhy has served as the Chairman of the University Rectors' Association. In this regard he has a great deal of interest in higher education policy, and participates in several international higher education research projects. He has published books on comparative studies on higher education. He was very aware of the international dimensions of higher education, especially as regards higher education funding. He was also committed to establish the UnB as a major international university in Brazil. Already the university attracts a large number of students from Angola and Mozambique, and they are very pleased with their partnerships with universities in those countries. The university is also conscious of Brazil's foreign policy, especially as regards South-South partnerships, as well as the special relations with India and South Africa in the India-Brazil-South African Dialogue Forum (IBSA). In attendance at the meeting was Dr José Flávio Sombra Saraiva, perhaps Brazil's foremost Africa specialist. Prof Saraiva is professor of International Relations at UnB, and Director-General of the Brazilian Institute for International Relations based at the University of Brasília. He also serves as the university's adviser on international partnerships. Dr Saraiva knows South Africa very well having been a regular participant in academic conferences on South Africa here and abroad for some 10 years. The university also seeks to

respond to the government's concern about access and success of Afro-Brazilian students in the higher education system, and as such, is committed to delivering on the government's programme on the teaching of African history and culture, although the programme is hampered by the scarcity of resource materials.

There was a warm reception here to the idea of partnership, and a commitment to move swiftly to design a memorandum of understanding, set out terms of collaboration especially in areas like research partnerships, partnership with our Centre for Latin American Studies, English Studies for Portuguese students, as well as collaboration in health studies and teacher education in Angola and Mozambique. In fact such a draft agreement has already been made available to Unisa. We also explored the possibility of Unisa contributing to the university's African Studies programme either as guest lecturers, academic exchanges and joint publishing.

## **Rio de Janeiro**

I was met at Rio by Mr Derrick Moyo, the Consul-General to São Paulo. In fact, my visit must have been Mr Moyo's final official function in that posting as he was departing immediately thereafter to take up a new posting at the South African Embassy in Washington, DC. Even with his very busy schedule, Mr Moyo accompanied me to the Cândido Mendes University where Prof Cândido Mendes, the Rector had gathered other Rectors from the Rio de Janeiro Forum of Rectors with which Unisa seeks to forge a joint partnership. At the meeting I gave an address on policy developments in higher education in South Africa. I drew largely on my address at the AAU General Assembly. The address elicited comparisons with Brazil and a realisation that our countries faced similar challenges.

That address presented a context for the discussions that followed about partnerships that were important and necessary between South Africa and Brazil. There seemed to be a clear commitment to advance the Brazilian government's partnership with Africa. Once again, the question of African history, and culture studies emerged as a strong point. I made reference also to our Centre for Latin American Studies, which was well known among the Rectors present. It was, however, thought necessary to formalise these relationships. Again, the IBSA partnership was considered to be a valuable setting for our collaboration. It appears that the bi-national commission is scheduled for November 2005. I then undertook to arrange a visit to Brazil to coincide with the meetings of that Commission.

## **São Paulo**

In São Paulo, I could only visit the University of São Paulo (USP), one of Brazil's most prestigious and largest universities. I was received there by the Pro Rector in the absence of the Rector, Dr Adolpho José Melfi. We were introduced to the history and character of the USP. Of special interest was to note that the university had won many prestigious awards, and is engaged in many collaborative research projects

with many universities in Europe and North America. We were taken on a tour of the city campus, and we noted the large number of research centres. We also noted that USP has a large distance education section, which accounts for the strong interest they have in collaborating with Unisa.

## Findings and recommendations

1. that Unisa explore as a matter of urgency partnership agreements with the universities of Brasília and São Paulo, and with the consortium of universities in Rio de Janeiro.
2. that an academic delegation visit Brazil in the near future to sign formal agreements and to operationalise the partnership. The delegation, led by the Vice Chancellor, should consist of the Vice Principal Planning & Partnerships, Vice Principal Academic & Research, Two Executive Deans, and the Centre for Latin American Studies.
3. the Vice Chancellor should write to the Minister of Foreign Affairs to declare our interest in participating in the IBSA processes; and to enquire about South Africa's responses to Durban 2001. It is suggested that Unisa offer to co-sponsor with the Departments of Justice and Constitutional Development, Foreign Affairs and the South African Human Rights Commission, a national colloquium on the Durban Declaration and its implementation in South Africa, as a preparation to what one presumes will be a Durban+5 event in 2006.
4. that Unisa pursue the two projects proposed by Senator Buarque and by Prof Cândido Mendes.

Pretoria, 30 May 2005