



INAUGURATION PROGRAMME
TSAMAISO YA TLHOMAMISO
INHULDIGINGSPROGRAM
UHLELO LOKUGCOTSHWA KUKASHANSELA

PROF BONANG FRANCIS MOHALE
EIGHTH CHANCELLOR

4 | 11 | 2021



*Inspiring excellence, transforming lives
through quality, impact, and care.*



UNIVERSITY OF THE
FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE
VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA
FREISTATA

4 NOVEMBER 2021

ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF THE
INAUGURATION OF
PROF BONANG FRANCIS MOHALE
AS
EIGHTH CHANCELLOR OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

EMINENCE
EXCELLENCIES
MOST DISTINGUISHED PARTICIPANTS

GOOD AFTERNOON
DUMELANG
GOEIEMIDDAG
SANIBONA



Today, being day 592 of national lockdown, none of us can claim to be normal! This has been a truly challenging year for universities. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, universities have been tested by pivoting to fully remote or hybrid learning and facing the financial constraints of the pandemic. It is unlikely that anyone among us here today has not felt a sense of loss – with some of you losing family or friends to COVID-19. To those of you who have experienced immense loss, my heart goes out to

you. Many of you are also feeling the loss of freedom – with restrictions imposed on travel, access to university and its facilities, and general socialising. In fact, many first-year students have not seen the walls of this institution as yet. The general ecology of university and academic life has changed immensely. I am eternally grateful to you for convening today in an environment in which we are obliged to spread ourselves across the vast Odeion Theatre to minimise the risk of spreading infection.

To the Chairperson of the Council of the University of the Free State, Mr David Noko, I am deeply humbled by this ceremony and honoured to stand before you as the newly installed Chancellor of this distinguished university. It is an honour to address you as the eighth Chancellor of the University of the Free State, and I am grateful to see so many of you here to celebrate this occasion. My deepest gratitude to you and fellow members of the Council of the UFS for entrusting me with the role of Chancellor.

To the various constituencies that make up the Council of the UFS, among others, the Senate, the Institutional Student Representative Council, the staff associations, as well as the Convocation – thank you. To Prof Francis Petersen, the Rector and Vice-Chancellor of the university, and members of the Executive and Senior Management, I have already experienced the warmth of your welcome and faith. To the staff, both academic and non-academic, as well as the students on the Bloemfontein, South, and Qwaqwa campuses, I look forward to leading with the heart of a servant. It has been 17 months since I stepped into this role.

Mr Chairperson of Council, I would not be standing here were it not for the support, encouragement, and guidance of many people provided over many years. My sincere gratitude to those who have been especially important in shaping my life and my career and bringing me to this place. I regret that my mum, Koki Edith Chiota, and the entire Mohale clan are not physically present here today to share in this event – however, they are watching via livestream. To my lovely wife of 40 glorious years, Susan – you are the best decision I have ever made; your overflowing love, dedication, support, unwavering encouragement, sharp insights and perspectives have been the source of my growth and indispensable to my success. You continue to be a kind, tolerant, and supportive partner, devoted mother to our two divine daughters, Tshepiso and Maneo, and a deeply selfless, considerate, and good-hearted human being. Ezme, my sister-in-law, Isaac and Ikageng Basimane Thekiso, I couldn't have prayed for a better family!

South Africa, in particular, is in the midst of a full-blown crisis. It has often been recognised that an educated workforce would drive an economy and therefore warrant public investment. Universities have been imperative in contributing to the development of society and our economy and essential to a successful democracy. However, in recent years, the belief that higher education is a public good and worthy of investment is no longer commonly held – in fact, education is now known to fulfil a personal benefit. Moreover, the explosion of the information age and exponential rate of the growth of technology has been the most disruptive force. The impact of this rapid change on our students is immense. It is now estimated that today's college graduate will need to shift careers – not jobs – seven times in their lifetime. The question remains, how equipped are we to prepare students for these careers?

Despite the vast changes due to the developments in technology and major breakthroughs across various sectors, we have not progressed as human beings. The many years of advances has not reduced the struggles we face with social equity – this has worsened, with extreme inequality, poverty, unequal access to quality education, health care, and climate change. We are seeing an unusual rise in mental-health issues and suicide rates. As a society, we are confronted with complex problems. Already, the inequalities in access to digital technologies and online learning are apparent, which will further affect social disparities both at national and global levels.

As South Africans, our issues are further compounded by the painful past. Twenty-seven years into democracy, we have not collectively succeeded in eradicating the legacy of apartheid. The challenges facing higher education are linked to the broader challenges facing South Africa, namely, poor economic growth, high youth unemployment, and the paralysing effect of the 'nine wasted years' of state capture. The student protests and service delivery protests are a

symptom of many societal ills and failures. While government may have had the resources – financially and technically – to map a way forward for the higher education sector, its ability to implement is severely constrained by political leadership and insufficient capacity.

South Africa has 26 public universities with nearly one million students, while 700 000 students are registered at the more than 50 technical vocational education and training (TVET) colleges. An additional 90 000 students can be found at various private institutions. University enrolment has increased from about 500 000 in 1994. Enrolment at the colleges has increased from around 200 000 in 2000. The vast majority of students are now Africans. This is a dramatic increase, although the number of students in the higher education system in relation to the size of the population of 60,1 million is still far too low compared to other middle-income, developing countries.

As if this is not enough, COVID-19 arrived on our doorstep and exposed these deep, systemic and systematic structural inequalities. It has revealed that we have not transformed socially and economically and that the disparities in income, wealth, and opportunities continue to hit the 15- to 34-year-olds the hardest. Our institutions are simply a microcosm of these broader socioeconomic fissures and fault lines.

In thinking about the shared predicament that we find ourselves in, it is difficult not to see the potential of higher education to function as an agent of change and a means of serving the greater good. This is, after all, the hallmark of an education, whereby, through our collective success and enlightenment, all people must have the opportunity to be educated so that they can assume positions of prominence and leadership in our society and effect positive change in the world. How will the University of the Free State continue to serve that end and build on the many years of excellence by educating to provide students the right skills to be productive members of society, inspire students to continuously learn and develop, and instil passion, the desire to make a difference in the lives of others, and make the world a better place?

The pandemic has revealed a number of fundamental issues in higher education, such as the purpose of higher education; the relationship between higher education and the world of work and the other areas of life; the role of higher education in the well-being of society; and the role of higher education in making a greener and more just world. It has also revealed new opportunities, such as the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of our world, and the importance of understanding what is beneficial for the common good of all society. As we see an increase in the share of population that is being vaccinated, plans for the return to a better normal have started and institutions are now planning for a return to campuses.

More than anything, we must empower universities to become inclusive centres of excellence:

- to be awake to persistent inequalities and how these continue to shape a sense of belonging, ownership, identity, access, language, symbols, attitudes, and expectations;
- to support the emergence of institutions that nurture young people to come out of these institutions not only with hard skills, but with a sense of social justice, critical thinking, and curiosity;
- to conceptualise ethical frameworks that will guide societal engagement with universities;
- to promote public ownership of higher education institutions, where the public recognise their role as both beneficiaries and stakeholders in the accomplishments of universities;
- to develop a social justice approach to higher education, where universities propel democratic engagement and advocate for academic freedom, which nurtures success of the higher education system through assessments of different perspectives.

It is apparent that one of the biggest obstacles standing in South Africa's way of moving forward to achieve the NDP 2030 targets (and the UN Sustainable Development Goals), is state capture (and systemic corruption) that has seen state institutions purposefully hollowed out, final accountability faltering, democracy severely undermined, and the economy destroyed!

As South Africans, we must not and dare not give up on our dream of a truthful, incorruptible, and capable leadership! Leadership of astonishing courage and unquestionable integrity – fully committed to upholding, respecting, and protecting our constitutional principles of social justice, democratic values, and fundamental human rights. Leadership that will deliver on the promise, even though we are currently in a perilous state – where civilisation is on a path to self-destruction and where extreme poverty lives side by side with obscene affluence, bad outcomes live side by side with good outcomes, disease lives side by side with well-being, and competition lives side by side with collaboration.

It is self-evident that the current economic model is hopelessly outdated, where the system does not recognise the creation of any other value except economic value. What is needed now is deep structural transformation to deal decisively with most people's lived experiences in order to better inform agreements to change outcomes. We must create a much better society where the workforce is treated as family members by companies that are socially minded and environmentally aware. In an era of the decline of dominant parties – even though South Africa has been a one-party dominant state since the dawn of democracy in 1994 – the share of the votes won by the African National Congress (ANC) has been gradually declining and it has been apparent for a while that it is dropping towards the all-important 50% mark. We now hold the world record for the most unequal society, with the highest unemployment, highest SME failure rate, and worst educational outcomes.

My point of departure on where higher education should be in the future is the UNESCO report released in May 2021, titled *Thinking Higher and Beyond: Perspectives on the Futures of Higher Education to 2050*. The report is the result of a collective and creative process of discussions around the role of higher education globally, which focuses on how one would like higher education to be in 2050 and how higher education could contribute to a better future for all in 2050.

The report revealed that values such as respect, empathy, equality, and solidarity should be at the core of future higher education institutions and their missions;

- that higher education can be shaped as a public good and as a driver of social and economic development in countries and regions;
- that in order to democratise digitalisation, higher education should advocate for the right to connectivity, to a device, and to networking, for instance through learning hubs, etc.

It suggests that higher education institutions should be at the forefront of tackling the climate crisis and other global challenges through knowledge production and technology incubation and transfer, and by integrating climate-change education into learning.

It highlights four key messages for higher education, being:

- to take active responsibility in developing the potential of all humans;
- to promote well-being and sustainability, oriented towards justice, solidarity, and human rights;
- to draw strength from interculturality and diversity, respecting cultures and identities and creating spaces for dialogue;
- to create and uphold interconnectedness, forging collaborations between local and global communities, and bonding higher education with other levels of education, including non-formal and informal learning.

Extending on the UNESCO report, we can all agree that universities not only play a role in finding solutions in science and graduating scientists, but also play a pivotal role in creating value. This value does not lie in the high-paying jobs and companies that graduates create, although these are important. The value lies in the ability of universities to generate networks that power enlightenment, enable relationships of service and selfhood in community, and global responsibility.

Universities need to strike a balance between the pursuit of knowledge and vocational relevance. Of concern is the inability of many graduates to understand issues in a much broader context – therefore, a modern university should be able to impart skills that will be valuable in employment, such as problem-solving skills, teamwork, and communication.

We need the creativity of free young people to run the heart of a productive knowledge-based and digital economy:

- giving them space to have crucial, critical, but nonetheless, courageous conversations, because woman's/man's greatest accomplishments are through talking, and woman's/man's greatest failures are through not talking;
- giving them our support and resources to not only conduct rigorous research on management knowledge, champion business education, and to be a leading influence on management thinking and best practice, but to describe, define, and shape their own new world that is co-crafted and co-created in their own image and brand.

There is a need for more humane higher education, to include more of the most vulnerable and traditionally excluded groups, to be more responsive to diversity, and to reduce the digital divide.

Collaboration is an essential ingredient of success, and we must continue to collaborate closely with business, industry, government, and the non-profit sector. We must learn how to educate differently – by identifying and investing in new modes of delivery and new ways of engaging and supporting our students. The ability of a university to engage with the general community is just as important as teaching, research, and fostering new ideas.

The fundamentals of future higher education institutions should be values such as respect, empathy, equality, and solidarity that support and prepare learners for life, to be better citizens, to be more aware of their societal and civic responsibilities and role in the environment and not only for livelihood. We cannot have enough of critical thinkers and more tolerance, irrespective of gender, class, language, ethnicity, sexual orientation, among other identities.

We have to start by trusting these young leaders to be intellectually capable; to survive COVID-19; to maintain focus; to get it; to be the ones on whom stuff is going to land; to walk the very delicate tightrope between being radical and respectful, as well as internally assertive and externally loyal; to understand themselves more deeply; to be themselves and be authentic.

We would only have succeeded if we, collectively, could imbue these institutions of higher learning and, by definition, the next crop of leaders with a higher purpose, palpable ethical leadership, a demonstrable set of values, and thereby create an unambiguous cohesive culture. A culture in which they feel needed and wanted; in which they feel free to speak their mind without any fear of retribution or reprisals.

As I conclude, a special thank you is extended to the musicians for their outstanding performance here this evening.

Thank you.