

UNISA VC GIVES A COMMENCEMENT SPEECH AT MAKERERE UNIVERSITY'S 75TH GRADUATION

By Sarah Kaddu and Lindi Nhlapo

On 13 January 2025, Professor Puleng LenkaBula, Unisa Principal and Vice-Chancellor (VC), delivered the commencement address at Makerere University's 75th graduation ceremony, sharing her thoughts on the resilience, actions, and leadership of African women in the quest to shape the continent's future and its position in the world.



(From left) Prof Puleng LenkaBula, Unisa Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Prof Barnabas Nawangwe, Makerere University Vice-Chancellor, and Dr Crispus Walter Kiyonga, Makerere University Chancellor

Makerere University is Uganda's largest and oldest institution of higher learning, and the oldest currently active university in East Africa.

Two venerable African institutions

The VC thanked Makerere University's Dr Crispus Walter Kiyonga, Chancellor, Professor Barnabas Nawangwe, Vice-Chancellor, and Lorna Magara, Chairperson, for the invitation to speak at the ceremony. "I am truly appreciative to be associated with this august institution, a beacon of academic excellence in building a transformed society, and one that celebrated a centenary milestone in 2022," she said.

In the introduction to her address, the VC pointed out the many similarities between Unisa and Makerere University. "In addition to the remarkable feat of both our institutions having existed for more than a century," she said, "they also contributed immensely to the anti-colonial and post-colonial reconstruction and development era of the rebirth of Africa."

The VC continued by paying tribute to Makerere University's eminent scholars who contributed immensely to the African academy, and the profound and unforgettable contribution of the institution in the education and development of freedom fighters from the Southern African region, South Africa, and the African National Congress.

Lest we forget

In a heartfelt message that hit home especially with the many women graduates in attendance, the VC said that memory is a constant struggle against forgetting. She continued: “The idea of going back to engage in the exercise of ‘rememory’ – to borrow Toni Morrison’s phrase – is to engage with our being, social reproduction, and the construction of society and its futures. I believe that the African woman has always been resilient and sought to define the destiny of Africa.”



Prof Puleng LenkaBula, Unisa Principal and Vice-Chancellor, delivering the commencement address at Makerere University's 75th graduation ceremony

Against this background, the VC cited the many African women who sought to define the anti-colonial struggles and post-colonial decolonial struggles, including royalty, political leaders, and activists on a range of issues. “Today,” she said to resounding applause, “we have a new generation of young people who must understand, redefine, and shape the past, present and future.”

The VC told the newly-minted graduates that, in the context of an Africa in desperate need of an army of knowledgeable and skilled workers and leaders, their academic success and graduation should mean something to Africa and her people.

She concluded: “As you step into the world you have already sampled during your many years of learning, research, and community engagement, I wish to implore you to remain as grounded in your communities as much as you are in your global outlook. I hope that you find the strength and courage – with all the acquired knowledge and skills – to reclaim your generational mission and redefine your worth as the new generation that must help us realize the African Renaissance.”