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**Speech On The Occasion Of Inauguration As Vice-Chancellor OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE, ALICE, 03 MAY 2017, ALICE**

Chancellor of the University of Fort Hare, Advocate Ntsebeza,  
Chairperson of the University of Fort Hare, Advocate Thandi Orleyn,  
Premier of the Eastern Cape Province, Honourable Phumulo Masuale,  
Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Honourable Mduduzi Manana,  
Distinguished guests,  
Members of the University community,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is indeed a great honour for me to address you this morning at this great centre of higher education that has produced generations of leaders in all diverse fields of knowledge. I entered University for the first time as a student 37 years ago with mixed feelings. On the one hand I was excited to have been admitted to do my first degree at the then new University of Transkei. After all the University was a mere 45 kilometres from my home and it would be easy for me to stay in touch with my sick mother. But most importantly, all the costs of my University studies (all R670 per annum) would be covered by the then Transkei Department of Education. Without that form of financial support, I would not have afforded University education and I would have had to settle for a career as a lowly clerical worker in the civil service, a prospect that terrified me after reading Ayi Kwey Armah's classic novel, the *Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*.

On the other hand, I was very sad that I was not able to take my degree at the iconic institution, the University of Fort Hare. The University did admit me for study in the 1980 academic year and I was looking forward to joining my former school friends in Alice at the beginning of the new decade. However, a brief letter arrived at the beginning of January that year informing me that that the bursary was only tenable at the University of Transkei. It devastated me that after all the preparation and research about the University, I would not be able to study there. Seven years earlier I was part of a primary school choir that sang at the graduation party of the



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first Fort Hare (and University) graduate in my village who had earned his BSc (Agriculture) in Alice. The son of the shopkeeper in my mother's home village was a student at Fort Hare. And, my brother arranged for me to meet the younger brother of his friend who was studying Fine Arts in Alice.

But my disappointment did not last beyond the first couple of weeks at the University of Transkei. As a matter of fact, I discovered two traits about myself which I was not conscious of up to that point. First I became aware of my love of ideas intellectual dialogue and I enjoyed studying humanities and social science subjects even though I did not have a chosen career at that stage. I thrived in an environment occupied by intelligent and inquisitive young people and the meaning of University became clear to me in those early youthful days of my life.

Second, University awakened and nurtured in me my rebellious instincts and I soon learnt that being contrary in thought and action was not bad or negative. Indeed, I came to believe that raising contrary views and going against the grain of popular opinion serves to enrich public discourse and is the essence of democratic practice.

Thus, since my first year at University I have found the operating in the University irresistible. Since that year I have only been away from the University for five full years, that is, those years during which I was not registered as a student and I did not maintain and real contact with its staff or students. But I have retained my rebellious instincts ever since!

At this point I need to explain how I understood the term 'rebel' with reference to my own life. I have always understood rebellion as a series of thoughts and actions that seek to *challenge the status quo*, that aim to *oppose unjust or unfair conduct by individuals and institutions* and that are intended to *change the conduct of individuals, institutions and society* for the better. Apart from the instrumental roles of earning academic qualifications and performing work roles in pursuit of careers, I have spent the last nearly four decades interacting with ideas and 'rebellious' against people, institutions and social systems. Most of these acts have been individual and low profile. I derive the greatest satisfaction when the impact of my actions remains unrecorded and when the beneficiaries are able to effect changes to benefit others they encounter.

When I became aware of the vacant post of Vice-Chancellor at the University of Fort Hare I spent a long time agonising over whether or not to apply. I was aware of the difficulties that the University had been going through over the last few years and, relative to where I was, the position did not sound like a good proposition at all. However, after speaking to a very small circle of family and friends (two to be precise), I decided to apply. I had not been able to fulfil my ambition of studying at Fort Hare and here was an opportunity me to work for the institution!

In preparation for my interview last year I did some research on the University. When my appointment was confirmed in November 2016 many colleagues and friends congratulated me, but also made it a point to tell me how difficult the University of Fort Hare is. One colleague jokingly offered to buy me a bullet-proof vest! These conversations prompted me to find reading material to prepare me for the what I was told would be a



bumpy ride. I chose two texts, namely, *The Principal: Alan Paton's Years at Diepkloof Reformatory* by Roy Sargeant and *The Art of War* by Su Tzu and I am very happy with the choices!

I have been working for 92 days today and I would like to share with you some of my observations about the institution and how I see the future.

In 2016 the University celebrated 100 years of its existence. The first century of the University had been a turbulent one, particularly for entered the University seeking knowledge and qualifications to build their careers. The institution's history is littered with instances of hardships and protest by students. Under apartheid, including the years the institution was under the Ciskei bantustan, the University's management responded with repression and expulsion of hundreds of students. But many Fort Hare students, including those who were expelled before completing their degree, persevered and played prominent roles in South Africa and in the rest of the African continent.

I would like to highlight a few milestones that the University has achieved as it enters the second century. From the humble beginnings of 1916 when the South African Native College registered its first students (20 of them), the University has grown to the current all-time high figure of 15 401. Full-time employees have grown from the two who started the College (Mr Alexander Kerr, the principal and Mr D.D.T. Jabavu) to the present 1000 or so permanent staff. Table 1 below shows the growth of student numbers from 2016 to 2017. Of the total students registered in 2017, 3 833 (25%) are post-graduates, a figure that we hope to raise in the next five years.

The majority of our students (over 8 600) are based at the main campus in Alice, while about 6080 are in East London and 764 in Bhisho. About 60% are from the Eastern Cape Province and the rest are from other provinces and from other countries on the continent.

**TABLE 1: Total Registered Students, 2016 and 2017**

Category of Registered Students	2016	2017
All undergraduate students (including 1 <sup>st</sup> time entering and Foundation students)	10 618	11 568
All postgraduate students	3 371	3 833
<b>Total number of all students registered</b>	<b>13 989</b>	<b>15 401</b>

Our graduation figures also show a steady increase in the number of students completing their qualifications. Of particular significance are increases in undergraduate, masters and doctoral graduates where in May 2017 we are going to graduate the largest numbers per cycle. For example, in 2015 we graduated 225 masters, in 2016 it was 220 while in 2017 we will be graduating 168 students in just one session (May). In addition, in



2015 we graduated 73 doctoral students, in 2016 we had 80 and in May 2017 alone we will graduate 71 doctoral candidates!

**TABLE 2: Graduation Statistics, May 2015 to May 2017**

	May 2015	Sept 2015	May 2016	Sept 2016	May 2017	Sept 2017
<b>Undergraduates</b>	2056	224	2164	218	<b>2219</b>	.....
<b>Honours</b>	502	28	507	40	344	.....
<b>Masters</b>	143	82	129	91	<b>168</b>	.....
<b>PhD</b>	51	22	40	40	<b>71</b>	.....
<b>Total</b>	<b>2752</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>2840</b>	<b>389</b>	<b>2802</b>	.....
<b>YEAR TOTAL</b>	<b>3108</b>		<b>3229</b>		<b>2802</b>	

On the research front, we have been making progress in claiming and consolidating our position as a serious research-led University. Our research outputs have been growing consistently over the last couple of years and our academics continue to receive accolades for being leaders in their respective fields.

I must point out that, notwithstanding the successes achieved over the decades, including the ones referred to above, the University continues to face numerous challenges and difficulties.

1. We continue to feel the effects of decades of underfunding across the different parts of the University. This manifests itself in the form of decaying infrastructure, particularly in Alice and East London. We also face a shortage of office space and teaching venues large enough to accommodate the growing student population.
2. Student accommodation remains one of the biggest challenges for the University. In Alice we have nearly 8 600 students and only some 4 800 beds, all of this in a context where there is no accommodation rental accommodation to house the remaining 3 6200. In East London we do not own any building for student residence and we end up having to lease buildings from landlords in the city. Currently we are leasing 30 buildings to house over 2000 students.
3. The distance of 120km between the two large campuses, Alice and East London, remains a big challenge for the University. It results in duplication and inefficient use of staff and resources and the fragmentation of the administrative and academic functions.
4. The dilapidated state of the town of Alice presents us with monumental difficulties. Not only does the town lack proper recreational and social amenities to serve the University communities, including visitors, it also lacks good schools, proper housing and shopping facilities.
5. The University struggles to recruit from the top end of the student pool as best achieving students tend to move to the better resourced and stronger universities in Gauteng, Cape Town and KwaZulu-Natal.



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6. We also have to compete with bigger and better resourced Universities, the civil service and the private sector for high calibre administrators and academic staff, all of whom offer better remuneration packages and working conditions. The poor state of our towns makes this even more difficult.
7. Up to now we have not succeeded in raising funds in any significant way for priority projects of the University. Although the goodwill towards the University is there, our department responsible for fund raising has performed dismally. In addition, the revenue generation entities of the University have so far failed to generate a surplus.
8. The university does not have a good reputation when it comes to administration and exercising controls over resources. Indeed, there are many who hold the perception that the University is a lost cause that does not deserve any financial support
9. Our management and administrative systems and procedures are extremely weak, with the result that our processes are excruciatingly sluggish. It takes weeks, and even months, for a very simple transaction to be carried out and for a very clear decision to be implemented.
10. Systems to hold people accountable are incredibly weak, even in cases where the University has suffered heavy financial losses. Linked to this are poor performance systems which make it possible for serial poor performers to escape accounting for their actions or inactions.
11. The University's marketing and communication is extremely poor, with the result that very few of the good news stories are disseminated internally and externally. We have failed to take advantage of electronic and social media platforms of communication to showcase success stories by member of the University.

At this point let me move and present what the future of the University of Fort Hare might look like and how we should pave the way to that future. My point of departure is the recently adopted Strategic Pan 2017 – 2021 entitled “*Beginning our Second Century*” which identifies four core transformation values, namely, **Integrity, Excellence, Ethics** and **Innovation**. It is my view that these have to be embraced by all staff and students of the University and that all of them should be made accountable for practising them in their areas of operation.

The new Strategic Plan contains all the element required to address some of the above-mentioned challenges and weaknesses. It is my belief therefore that the principle issues are addressed in the plan and that the main focus during my term is going to have to be ensuring the implementation of the plan and monitoring progress on a regular basis. Here I therefore lay out the main elements of an implementation programme over the next five years.

1. The University will work closely with the Raymond Mhlaba Municipality and other authorities in the province and nationally to devise strategies to regenerate the town of Alice. We will be working with the mayor to convene an investors' conference to advise potential investors of the needs of the town and the University and to encourage them to take advantage of available investment opportunities.



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There is consensus between the University and the municipality that we need each other and that one cannot survive without the other.

We are delighted that the municipality and the provincial government have aside funds for the regeneration of the town.

2. We are planning to meeting the Department of Higher Education and Training to request that funds be set aside for the completion of the remaining 12 units of the 17-unit Student Village on the Alice campus. We will also appeal to the Department to support the construction or purchase of a large residence in East London.

We will also ask the Department to authorise us to enter into partnerships with state-owned who operate in the financial service sector to develop more student and staff accommodation in Alice and East London. There are also opportunities for us to approach other state departments such as Human Settlements and Public Works to explore forms of assistance with staff housing in Alice.

3. Current forms of transport between Alice and East London (minibus taxis, University shuttle and private cars) are not sustainable in the long term. We look forward to the day when Transnet will revive the train line linking East London, Fort Jackson, King William's Town, Dimbaza and Alice. Historically that railway line served the University so well and there is no reason why it can't do the same in the present period. A train line would go a long way towards mitigating the long distances separating our three campuses.
4. The legacy of underfunding of our University will take many years and billions of rands to eliminate. We will hold an infrastructure discussion in the University to discuss the needs in the short, medium and long term. Water supply to the Alice has already been identified as a priority and a dedicated water supply reservoir will be completed by July 2017. We will also have to assess the state of the underground water supply infrastructure, sewerage, storm water and electricity infrastructure to ensure that it is adequate for the needs of a growing campus.

Other areas that have suffered as a result of underfunding Alice are the library, large teaching venues, office space, upgrading of the great hall, a post-graduate centre and other facilities. In East London there is a crying need for large teaching venues, office space and communal/social spaces for staff and students. I'm pleased to report that the collaborative library between Fort Hare, Walter Sisulu University and UNISA is on target for completion and commissioning early in 2018.

5. The University has to double its efforts to recruit top students in the Eastern Cape and in other provinces. The office responsible student recruitment has to be proactive and imaginative in the way



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it exposes the University to top school leavers. It is true that many students do send applications to our University. In 2017 some 30 000 applied for the 3 500 spaces available for first years. However, most of these applicants were drawn from the middle and bottom ends of the student market.

There is an also recognition that we need to diversify the student body by, among others, race, social position and other provinces of SA and other countries on the continent and the world. At present, around 90% of our students are dependent on financial aid from the National Students' Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). We need to also attract students whose families are able to finance their studies.

6. The University of Fort Hare competes with other Universities, the civil service, the private sector and non-governmental organisations for administrative and academic staff. In many cases we lose staff because of the relatively low salaries we pay and the poor conditions in the town of Alice. We need to be more imaginative in the way we attract staff. But most important of all, we need to work with the municipality to improve the condition of the town.

In the past, some in the University seem to have responded to this challenge by relocating units and administrative functions to East London to accommodate those staff members who are reluctant to live and work in Alice. It is my view that this approach is neither desirable nor is it sustainable. I will initiate an open debate about this matter with a view to achieving some consensus about the best way to organise functions of the University. In the meantime, I wish to make a call to academics from all walks of life, particularly young, highly qualified South Africans, to look out for job advertisements by Fort Hare and to send their applications to join us in this exciting venture.

In the meantime, we will continue to explore the best ways of attracting and retaining administrative and academic staff.

7. Fund-raising will be a top priority starting this year. To do this we will need to make sure that the Institutional Advancement department has the capacity, including personnel, to undertake this important task. I am aware that there are many people who are willing to offer one form of support or another to the University and I will take on direct oversight over the department to ensure that it reaches as wide a spectrum of potential donors as possible. We will also open discussions with our income generation entities and partners to explore the most efficient ways of boost income generation for the University. The current state of affairs where we are almost entirely dependent on government subsidy and student fees makes us extremely vulnerable. Government subsidy continues to drop and student fees are a sensitive area, particularly after the student protests of the last two years. We are going to have to think imaginatively about finding other sources of income generation.



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8. Work has already started on efforts to strengthen our management and administrative processes and procedure to ensure that they contribute to the efficient running of the University. We will be embarking on a general revision of policies that govern management and administrative process and as we do this, efforts will be made to benchmark with other universities in the country. The development of these policies will include mechanisms to tighten controls over financial, administrative and academic decision-making.

We have also adopted a compliance framework for all departments and entities of the University to ensure that we comply with all legislation and other regulations applicable to higher education institutions. Senior managers will be held accountable for all instances of non-compliance by their departments and divisions.

9. Like all other successful institutions, the University of Fort Hare will have to put in mechanisms to ensure accountability of all staff, particularly those in managerial positions. Performance assessment processes will be aimed at monitoring implementation of decisions and accountability of all for their allocated responsibilities.
10. Once it has been reviewed and vacant positions filled, the Institutional Advancement will be expected to develop a marketing and communication strategy and to implement that strategy as soon as possible thereafter. The strategy will be aimed at improving the visibility of Fort Hare and to create a better awareness of the institution's strengths and achievements.
11. All members of the University agree that we should cultivate strong links with the communities in our region. However, the links that exist at present are not always structured and co-ordinated, and the benefits to communities are often unclear. The Centre for Community Engagement will have to ensure greater co-ordination of all efforts by individual staff members, centres and departments.
12. Dialogue will be the cornerstone of our approach to processing conflict, disagreements and misunderstanding among the various sections of the University community. For this reason, it is going to be important for all sides to improve their negotiation and conflict resolution capabilities to ensure speedy and efficient management of all conflicts.

I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the new Chancellor of the University, Advocate Dumisa Ntsebeza SC and say that it is an honour to serve with him at this great institution. I first hear of Mr Ntsebeza from my elder brother who was a student at Dilizintaba Senior Secondary School in Tsolo where he taught in the early 1970s. I then met him when he joined our school, Jongilizwe College for the Sons of Chiefs and Headmen in 1975. He was popular among the boys who fondly referred to him as The Cat. I soon realised why the boys so nicknamed him. He was an unconventional teacher who was friendly with the students. In modern



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youth lexicon, Mr Ntsebeza was 'cool', he was a cool cat! But he could also pounce like a cat when provoked. His ability to tackle students who bunked the study period to go and smoke or to sit around in their rooms was legendary. One evening a tall skinny boy who smoked like a chimney bunked the study period to go and satisfy his craving. The following morning at assembly it was Mr Ntsebeza's time to read the scripture and say some wise words. As soon as he was done reading his favourite scripture he related his encounter with the skinny chain smoker the previous evening. The only part the boys remembered were his words, "Poor Tyali, I tackled him...". He went on to tell the whole story and of course Tyali was thoroughly embarrassed and never forgot the lesson.

Unbeknown to us at the time, The Cat was stealthily engaging in other acts. Of course the boys had their suspicions but they never knew for sure what he was up to. He never taught me that year, but his classes were known to be robust and engaging. He also made a point of encouraging selected boys to voluntary study sessions when they would be given newspapers to read and discuss. I joined the newspaper reading sessions because they gave me access to vast amounts of information about what was going on in the country, the continent and the world.

The boys were also intrigued by The Cat's other movements. He and one or two other men (we did not know their names at the time) bought the old beige Toyota *Corona* bakkie of the vice-principal of the school, Mr Meier, who the boys had nicknamed *Vangendleko* because he was partially deaf and used a hearing aid. The Cat and his friends used *Vangendleko's* bakkie to sell fruit at school sports events, further fuelling the curiosity of the boys about The Cat's activities and movements. Then, one cold June 1976 afternoon (I have since learnt from him it was the 11 June) I saw The Cat being escorted by two white policemen out of the school premises. Even then, The Cat, wearing a heavy brown '*Dlamini*' overcoat, seemed to be unfazed, and carried himself with dignity and confidence as he was being led away. Cowering under some bushes and through the windows we were at once proud of our teacher for his bravery and scared of what would happen to him once he was away from our prying eyes.

At last the truth was out in the open. The Cat, his younger brother Lungisile, Matthew Goniwe and Godfrey Silinga had been arrested for clandestine political activity and were eventually sentenced in 1977 to seven years. With the arrest many of The Cat's movements and activities began to make sense to us, including his favourite scripture he read to us at morning assembly every time his turn came. "*Isidiliya sikaNabhodi*" ("Naboth's Vineyard" from the book of 1 Kings 21: 1-29) was his favourite reading from the bible, so much so that it was a popular joke among the students outside of class times. But we all knew there was a moral to the story, which dawned on us fully after the arrest in 1976, namely that birthright is sacrosanct, in the same way that Naboth refused to sell or exchange his vineyard to King Ahab.

Mr Chancellor, the story of Naboth's vineyard assumes a particular resonance when I think about the University of Fort Hare. Like Naboth I can feel the weight of the responsibility I carry to ensure that this institution is never sold to the highest bidder in exchange for a few coins of silver. It is part of the educational



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heritage that should be preserved, protected and nurtured with the greatest care for current and future generations.

Mr Chancellor, let me therefore conclude by stating that I have no illusion about the enormity of the task ahead of me in the next five years. I do not have a magic wand to make all the challenges of this University to vanish. I do not bring any special wisdom into this position. All I am able to promise for all of us is sweat, blood and tears by all of us so that this great institution can rise again and reclaim its place among the top Universities of our country. To achieve our goals, we have to ensure that we are always guided by our core values of ***Integrity, Excellence, Ethics*** and ***Innovation***.

Thank you.

Professor Sakhela Buhlungu  
Vice-Chancellor