

In the foreword of 1999 State of the World's Children report on education the then Secretary General of the United Nations Kofi Annan wrote a powerful declaration "Education is a human right with immense power to transform. On its foundation rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development"

These words capture the place of education in our long journey of development and our hopes for our country. I could not agree more with Kofi Annan even as I accept that education is not a panacea. With that, I am overjoyed to join the University of Johannesburg (UJ) as its third chancellor. As we emerge from an unimaginable winter of despair precipitated by the global pandemic. In the last two years, the University proved a safe haven for many students, who like many of us, were confused and distressed by the havoc created by Covid-19. Common amongst us was the need for safe places to isolate ourselves in. Going home for many students was not a desirable option as their homes were not set up to deal with this ordeal. Thank you to UJ for allowing your students to stay on campus if they needed to and for making sure they had access to medical support, food, water, and energy when Eskom allowed it. You kept them safe and YOU lightened anxieties. You successfully enabled studies to continue in this new environment. At every tier, the experience of the pandemic forced us to reimagine the world and I am impressed that UJ has demonstrated that it can help us imagine the future we want. Thank you to the lecturers for rising to the occasion AND TO THE STUDENTS FOR DOING THEIR PART,

In the SDGs we committed to fight for universal access to quality education, gender equality, good health and well being, decent work and growth, reduced inequality, managed climate change, peace justice and strong and reliable institutions. These are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as conceptualised by all countries at the United Nations (UN), including South Africa, which they signed on to deliver measurable results by 2030. Nothing could have prepared them for a pandemic and disruption of this magnitude. We live in the most trying times and amid a constant state of flux and disruption that has demonstrably offset our trajectory. If this is a moment to pause and redefine our path forward, it is painfully apparent that a lot more is needed from us to achieve these goals and our desirable national objectives. This University has demonstrated that it has the agility, curiosity and responsiveness to deal with our current age of uncertainty and it is not naive to the challenges that come with this ambition. This is part and parcel of the University's transformation story.

Antjie Krog in *Country of My Skull* refers to being scorched 'by a thousand stories' responding to the narratives that surfaced at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on the horror of apartheid. We now carry failures of apartheid and failures of the democratic government. As time has demonstrated, our historical memory of the unimaginable complex years of damage inflicted on the country through the weapons of apartheid may fade. This cannot be an enduring reality even though we cannot forget. We now also carry the regrets from the mistakes committed in our new and democratic South Africa.

For many of us we have lived under apartheid, joined the fight against apartheid, seen the victory against apartheid, seen the emergence of the democratic project, worked in a free South Africa, seen state capture, and seen the destruction of progress the country has made. In a tiny frame of our history, our hard-won victory and years of painful triumph seemed to erode in front of me. At this point, we do not have even a single political party in South Africa that stands ready to govern and deliver services for the people. We are now at risk of allowing our hard-won freedom go to waste. We are on a slippery slope and sleepwalking ourselves to a failed state, which would hurt all the good work done by our universities. If our state fails, it affects all of us, so we cannot be bystanders we have to use what we have to defend our democracy in the same way universities fought apartheid.

Democracy world over is under assault often by the same people who are supposed to be protecting it. In our own country, we see grand corruption and total disregard for the law. The situation of corruption and collapse of corporate governance robs citizens of the resources they need. Most critical is the number of graduates from our universities who are in the civil service and private sector who now treat corruption as a way of life. Clearly education did not prepare them for honest and ethical leadership and service.

This has to concern us. I believe this is a value that has to be instilled in all our students even before they qualify. One only needs to take a cursory glance at the State Capture report, which only scratches the surface, to realize how devoid of ethical leadership we are. As Universities we represent the creation of knowledge and there is social responsibility that accompanies this endeavor. It represents a service to society that extends beyond campuses and communities and is equal to educated people without consciousness, who go on to steal from the poor, waste the hard work and contribution that was made by lecturers to help them to qualify. The status quo calls on us to consider placing more emphasis on the teachings of ubuntu, responsibility, good governance, equitable ruling practices and ethical leadership. We could have done more to ensure that these certificates held more weight for the people of South Africa not just for the graduates. We need to consider what we can do to instill an ethical framework pre graduation and post graduation. We cannot and should not walk away from this situation. The important intervention UJ already provides by offering a compulsory AI course to all new students is one example of making sure all UJ students have the same benchmark. This represents education reimagined and transformed to address the prevailing conditions.

At this juncture, we can, of course, also take a leaf from UJ, its hard work and impressive results. The birth of UJ signalled that the ideals espoused in the White Paper 3 aimed at addressing social justice and the social and structural inequality and fragmentation in higher education were achieved. As this institution demonstrates, the future belongs to those who can reimagine it, who take the time to reflect and make the necessary changes. UJ now is a university with a total of 50,000 students, 80% of whom I have been told are first time graduates in their families. The QS World University Rankings indicated that UJ is now ranked second nationally and on the continent. Additionally, UJ is now ranked second in the country for research output, according to the Department of Higher

Education and Training. These are heartwarming achievements that can only mean we have hard-working staff and a dynamic student body. These incredible feats serve as a personification of shaking of the shackles of our past and opening new vistas.

Whilst we acknowledge these indicators of success, our journey is only beginning as we continue to pursue our dream and the vision that we had for our country in 1994. Important in that journey is our collaboration with other universities. Let me take a moment to thank representatives from our sister universities present here this evening for honoring us with your presence. Just as we need healthy competition, we also need collaboration in our scholarship and to allow for triangulation and peer review at various levels to ensure the quality of our education system is as best as can be. UJ, like all other higher education institutes, are places where the cream in our society emerges. We must take measures through these institutions to make sure our work impacts the reconstruction of our country in every way possible and to scale our impact. As the African proverb goes, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

Alongside this challenge, we find ourselves in a complex world with mega trends and changes. We are witnessing the largest number of displaced and desperate people that the world has ever seen, who are in desperate need and are putting stress and strain on receiving countries, global humanitarian support and the budgets of countries. We have a world that is short of global solidarity, which was tangibly experienced with the vaccine distribution, where developing countries were initially left to fend for themselves. We suddenly had to confront the dangers of reduced productive capacity in many countries, the scramble for personal protective equipment, medical supplies, and other essentials, which ideally every country should produce for itself. Globalization at its best encouraged and delivered just in time delivery at the expense of self-reliance in many cases. It is no surprise globalization is now considered an option for some. The war in Ukraine compounded the situation and the supply was further compromised. Countries could not get deliveries just in time, putting pressure on the cost of living and causing widespread food insecurity.

Here at home in South Africa, we have seen the scramble for fertilizer and cooking oil, coming from Ukraine, while energy prices have climbed to unprecedented level in Europe. We find ourselves betwixt an intriguing dichotomy. This has spurred views on the correctness of Globalisation, as we know it, The global energy crisis we are faced with has worsened the picture in South Africa. Our own crisis is not a new one but it has emerged alongside all these other problems, and it has emerged from our own failures, our incompetence corrupt practices and the state of our utility Eskom. This is a challenge that will stay with us and the generation of green energy will be the task of our students.

Water scarcity is another megatrend that plagues the world. In South Africa, the challenge is again compounded by inefficiency in the management of water systems, ailing infrastructure and failure to have mitigating interventions. Alongside climate change, increased population, deforestation, reports suggest that 'South Africa is approaching physical water scarcity in 2025'. We are dealing with climate change with extreme

weather patterns and diminishing resources, which have an exaggerated impact on women and rural populations.

I have learnt of some encouraging developments at UJ that speak specifically to these challenges. For example, there is a constant exploration of other sources of energy such as solar power. Similarly, research at the Water and Health Research Centre at UJ deals with the relationship between water and human health based on the premise that no other advancement in the field of medicine and health have attributed more to increased lifespan and improved general health than access to safe water as well as improved domestic hygiene and sanitation. The Institute for Nanotechnology and Water at the University explores the potential of nanotechnology applications to alleviate many of South Africa's water problems, the results of which can be applied to other countries in Africa. Though we seem to have many of the solutions, we must now contemplate how we scale this up.

Africa also now boasts the largest young population in the world, which is a feat we must respond to. In 2020, Africa's population under 35 was almost a billion and 40% of the population is aged 15. In South Africa, 20.6 million of the population is youth. This is our constituency as a university. Many of these young people need us to create a safe path for them to navigate life. With the growing number of out of work and out of school youth in the country, we have to concern ourselves with employment, access to training and customised skills for jobs alongside tertiary options. It is for this reason that I applaud UJ for its investment in the school sector which is the pipeline to university. UJ's Funda UJabule primary in Soweto and UJ Metropolitan Academy high school in Crosby, both stand out as exemplary models in a world where education has to reinvent itself in order to respond to a world that is swiftly changing. These schools signify that UJ's investment in the learning project is from Grade R to a post doc level, which is commendable. The UJ schools are model schools that produce model university students. These schools give support to other schools around them as they provide the highest quality education, which could be likened to private school education at the cost of public schools offered to children from families with modest means.

Building on these models, our reimagined education system needs to recognize that the future will increasingly be for those who embrace life-long learning and understand and use technology. It will be for those who are not objects but players in the 4IR. This is something UJ knows very well as it is in the DNA of the university. The enthusiasm for the STEM subjects and use of technology beyond STEM transform all our students at UJ into digital natives. The UJ student population speaks to this rapid growth. It is encouraging to see the number of students who qualify for university even though sadly not all the students who knock at the door of the university every year can be admitted. Too many students are missing out on a university education and we have to consider expanding access to education with the full use of technology so that no one is left behind.

The summit of the UN on 'transforming education' at the 2022 UN General Assembly

highlighted these diverse demands and needs, and urged member states to look carefully at the unfolding reality globally regarding the demand for skills and education systems that are not changing fast enough. 180 countries attended, 80 represented by heads of state. Consultations were conducted in 115 countries who were keen to reimagine their education systems. The need for the inclusion of green education and gender awareness was echoed, technology was placed front and center of reimagined education and unequal education systems were lamented. These redundant education systems were found to be far from the quality education demanded by SDG4. Given the importance of digital skills, communities who are deprived of technology are left behind. This is further compounded by the digital gender divide, which still leaves many women and girls behind especially with regards to the access of gadgets and use of technologies; distribution of skills to enable participation; and the role of women in leadership and decision making of technology institutions. This entrenched differentiation between the digitally haves and digitally have-nots only further deepen inequality. Of course, while technology is a significant enabler of equality, it also enables inequality. Covid-19 showed us the depth of inequality within and between countries and the role technology already plays in driving inequality.

South Africa is an appropriate case study for these divisions. According to Statistics South Africa, in 2020, only 37% of South African households having consistent access to the internet through cell phones or computers. The data indicates, even though there was increased access to internet connections in households, rural areas lag behind significantly compared to households in urban areas – highlighting another stark digital divide. A study from North Western University in the United States in the same year found that only around 10% of South Africans have computers at home, 16% still lack electricity in their homes, and capped data plans are prohibitively expensive for most South Africans. In a world which is increasingly becoming digital, we cannot equate technology with privilege. The impact of this inequity of access has been worsened by the glaring gaps in digital literacy. UJ has made great strides in capturing the essence of the digital era and responding to it with tenacity. The TechnoLab at this campus, for instance, has made great strides in bridging some of the awareness and literacy gaps through their skills initiatives. The emphasis on skilling girls is an important initiative and is certainly a programme I hope we will be able to scale up. At the Soweto Lab, children of the township are given a unique opportunity to do experiments they cannot do in their schools with the guidance of scientists and this intervention has made sure they perform exceptionally well. In my interactions during my visits to these labs, I met so many young doctors and I do not mean honorary graduates! Even at the primary and high schools, the qualifications of teachers is impressive and something to be truly proud of. I commend UJ for the efforts of taking these skills to lower quintile schools nationally. While I am impressed with the steps taken to support our own students on campus and in the schools we are associated with, it is apparent that our interventions need to be explored on a much wider scale that it speaks to these national deficits.

Of course, our divide begins long before we have even considered the digital implications. World Bank data from earlier this month shows that South Africa country has an 87% adult literacy rate, ranking below countries such as Mexico (95%), Brazil (93%) and

Azerbaijan (99.8%). The figure for South Africa represents a decline of around 7% over the period of the pandemic. This gap we have to close. This phenomenon of adult illiteracy has a direct and profound impact on child illiteracy. According to the 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), eight out of 10 Grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning across any language in South Africa. Nationally, teachers are struggling to teach literacy and this is leaving swathes of our population behind. This lingering and persistent gap exacerbates many of our other inequalities. This is a challenge that needs the collaboration of universities as no one university can tackle this epidemic alone. This has to be done at scale and soon. The reading panel has requested that universities review whether the BED degree adequately trains foundation level teachers for teaching learners to read and write. Too many teachers struggle to teach literacy and too many teachers have no access to adequate training. In the reimagining of education, this very basic need in the architecture of education cannot be left unattended.

Another concern in South Africa is GBV, which is enabled by underlying gender inequality. Gender Inequality in education is one way in which patriarchy thrives from generation to generation and is weaponized. A university which fails to address discrimination of women or gender non-conforming people, and has no clear GBV policies in place creates an environment that normalises discrimination. As the HRSC states, schools continue to be the context for gender inequalities. While policies have led to gender parity in enrolment and increased participation, there is disparity in the quality of education. A review of the 2012–2013 Commission for Employment Equity Annual Report indicated that although policy has made provisions for girls to remain in school, this has not directly translated into more women occupying top positions of leadership and decision-making in the employment sector. The spike in child pregnancy following Covid-19 dealt a fatal blow to gender equality. The latest crime statistics show that more than 900 women in South Africa were killed in just three months and 11,315 rape cases were reported, which on average translates to 123 cases a day. I have learnt that UJ is focused on eliminating rape and sexual harassment on campus. We have to make sure that a University experience is an enjoyable journey. The education of young men about positive masculinity is an important investment to make as the gender complexities require us to work with both men and women. I commend the work of the University in promoting gender studies and fighting GBV. However, we still have to figure out what we need to do beyond research to stop this evil tragedy and to heal and make sure perpetrators are held accountable.

Finally, as we explore what it means to be Pan-African, we must be sensitive and ensure our students understand we are affected by developments around us, and we need to build solutions together. As the continent comes out of the pandemic with higher levels of poverty, unemployment and vast economic challenges including the devastating and exacerbated impact of climate change on the already present developmental gaps and infrastructure deficits, we have to shape a new narrative. I commend the university for the study trips you have taken with students to neighboring countries through Africa Bus so that our students have firsthand experiences of the challenges in the region. Decolonization of our world view and the impact of this on the curriculum and research has been another tangible shift and has deeply entrenched our pan-African identity. It has

been crucial that UJ is aligned with sister universities and institutions on the continent. We have to ensure we are preparing Africans for this era of uncertainty as well as the positive disruption, if we manage to turn around the governance of our country. The talent Universities produce places us in a prime position to contribute intellectual capital that benefits us and our neighbors. While we acknowledge that our ability to achieve the 17 SDGs, which emphasizes partnership, has been compromised by the pandemic and economic fallout, it is apparent that many of the solutions must emerge from institutions such as UJ that speak to the continent.

My journey with this university begins today. It is with exhilaration and excitement that I join you in the reimagining of our future. UJ's story is exemplary and is rooted in the transformation agenda of our country. I want to express my sincere gratitude to Prof Marwala, Mr Teke and Prof Ndebele for sailing UJ to safety and to all the council members for making this such a formidable institution and welcoming me with such open arms. As I take up this new position, I must also thank my family for their unwavering support and guidance over the years. I am certain that in this new chapter, UJ's footprints will be visible globally and that is the dream that we must collectively pursue. I leave you with words of former President of Burkina Faso Thomas Sankara who once said, "You cannot carry out fundamental change without a certain amount of madness... we must dare to invent the future."