

Welcome Address  
by  
**Prof Khehla Ndlovu,**  
**VUT Vice Chancellor and Principal**  
on the occasion of  
**Researchers Symposium on Climate Change**  
9 May 2024 | Desmond Tutu Great Hall | 09:00

Thank you, Program Director.

- Distinguished guests from the Presidential Climate Commission.
  - Ms Makoma Lekalakala – Commissioner and Director: Earthlife Africa.
  - Dr Shafick Adams – Commissioner and Executive Manager: Water Research Commission
  - Mandy Jayakody – Commissioner: Just Urban Transition
  - Ms Simphiwe Ngwenya – Programme Manager: Mitigation
  - Jurgen Olivier – Project Manager: Mitigation
  - Mr Blessing Manale – Head of Communications & Outreach
- Our Facilitator, Prof Godwell Nhamo – Research Professor: University of South Africa
- Members of the VUT Management Committee present here:
  - Prof Maggie Linington – Deputy Vice Chancellor for Teaching and Learning
  - Dr Speech Nelana – Acting Deputy Vice Chancellor for Research, Innovation, Commercialisation & Internationalisation.
- Executive Deans of our 4 Faculties:
  - Prof Chenedzai Mafini: Faculty of Management Sciences
  - Prof Christa Grobler: Faculty of Applied and Computer Sciences
  - Prof Lazarus Maleho: Faculty of Human Sciences (acting)
  - Prof Khaled Abou-El-Hossein: Faculty of Engineering & Technology
- Dr Susanna Burger – Acting Director: Research
- Ms Ndumi Lufele – Director: Stakeholder Engagement
- Our esteemed and dedicated researchers and scholars whom I look forward to their contribution to building a solid foundation for climate action in South Africa.
- The Organising Committee that worked tirelessly to ensure the success of this day.
- VUT Staff and Students

Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Morning.

As the Vice Chancellor and Principal of the Vaal University of Technology, it is my greatest honour and privilege to welcome you all to this Researchers Symposium on Climate Change – a

collaboration between VUT and the Presidential Climate Commission. This is what I regard as a gathering of brilliant minds and passionate individuals dedicated to addressing one of the most pressing challenges of our time – climate change – impacting global ecosystems and communities.

Today, we convene under the theme: “Harnessing research and innovation for climate change action” – a befitting theme underpinned by the Sustainable Development Goal 13, which calls for urgent actions to combat climate change and its impacts. I believe that if we are to achieve this successfully, we need to foster an interdisciplinary approach to research and innovation that addresses these complex challenges – hence, we have gathered here.

But before I do what I have been requested to do, please allow me to pay homage to His Excellency, President Cyril Ramaphosa, who saw it befitting that, due to its complexity and potential to affect livelihoods, food and water security and ultimately increase the cost of living for South Africans, climate change challenges be addressed at the highest office of the land. His commitment is evidenced in his establishment of the PCC to oversee and facilitate a just and equitable transition towards a low-emissions and climate-resilient economy. It is such leadership that inspires us all to strive for excellence and to make a positive impact on the world around us.

Thank you to the PCC for showing confidence in VUT as a potential partner to aid you in this endeavour. Let me assure you that your confidence in us will not be in vain because we have ample research and innovation expertise at VUT to support the Commission in developing sustainable solutions to this challenge for our country, planet and future generations.

Although uncoordinated, the Vaal University of Technology has significantly contributed towards climate-related SDGs over the past years with 272 articles on SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation; 151 articles on SDG7: Affordable and Clean Energy; 113 articles on SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production and 78 articles on SDG 13: Climate Action. These are colleagues’ SCOPUS Indexed articles demonstrating the university’s commitment to climate action.

Several efforts and inroads have been made concerning greening initiatives and transforming the curriculum to ensure the streamlining of climate change into a responsive and relevant curriculum that is responsive to industry and societal demands across the four faculties.

The VUT’s footprint in the climate change space has been quite visible in the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 6<sup>th</sup> Assessment Report (AR60), which cited several research from the University’s leading rated researchers who, under very difficult conditions, can produce locally and globally relevant research which demonstrates resilience and craftsmanship.

As we grapple with the growing impact of climate change, the University is a willing and able partner to the cause of Just Energy Transition (JET). We raise our hand to foster collaboration in technological innovation, climate change education, research and indeed in the development of green jobs through a robust and responsive curriculum and offering of short courses in some of the emerging green jobs, be it in the green hydrogen, solar and biodiversity economy to mention but a few.

Speaking of expertise, at VUT, we pride ourselves on being associated with NRF-rated world-class academics, scholars and researchers alike who have proven themselves with high standards of research in their respective fields including in climate change – here, I am referring to research that has shaped and expanded on an existing body of knowledge in South Africa and Globally.

As I step away from the podium, may I borrow from the late former Secretary General of the United Nations and a Nobel Peace Laureate, Kofi Annan, who understood too well the dangers of climate change, when he said, “We often don't fully appreciate that climate change is a problem. We think it is a problem waiting to happen.” I am, therefore, glad to be among a collective of astute individuals who do not only understand the dangers of climate change but are equally taking action to discuss innovative strategies to mitigate its impact – for even the famous American Science Communicator, Bill Nye cautioned that “The less we do to address climate change now, the more regulation we will have in the future.” Today, we are gathered here precisely for what these great men alluded to in yesteryears.

Let this symposium catalyse change, inspiring all involved to return to their respective fields with renewed vigour and a clear direction for contributing to the global agenda against climate change and for climate change. We can effect real change through our shared knowledge through the envisaged introduction of a Centre of Excellence that will rally the university community towards Climate Change Action.

Once again, I welcome you all and look forward to the fruitful outcomes that will emerge from this Symposium. Let us work together, with urgency and purpose, to harness research and innovation for climate change action.

**I THANK YOU.**