

Welcome Address  
by  
**Prof Khehla Ndlovu,**  
**VUT Vice Chancellor and Principal**  
on the occasion of  
**Public Colloquium on Climate Change**  
22 May 2024 | Quest Conference Centre | 09:00

Thank you, Program Director.

- Executive Mayor of Emfuleni Local Municipality: Cllr Siphon Radebe
- Distinguished guests from the Presidential Climate Commission.
  - Dr Shafick Adams – PCC Commissioner and Executive Manager: Water Research Commission
  - Ms Makoma Lekalakala – PCC Commissioner and Director: Earthlife Africa
  - Ms Simphiwe Ngwenya – PCC Commissioner and Programme Manager: Mitigation
  - Ms Mandy Jayakody – PCC Commissioner and Manager: Just Urban Transition
  - Ms Yuri Ramkisoan – PCC Commissioner and Climate and Research Analyst
- Members of the VUT Management Committee present here:
  - Prof Maggie Lington – Deputy Vice Chancellor: Teaching and Learning**
  - Dr Speech Nelana – Acting Deputy Vice Chancellor: Research, Innovation, Commercialisation & Internationalisation.
- Faculty Executive Deans
  - 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
- Heads of Department and Directors in our midst
- Our Facilitator, Mr George Mvalo – Director: Social Justice and Transformation at VUT
- VUT Research Professors and dedicated Academics and Scholars
- Representatives from the VUT Convocation
- Representatives from the VUT Labour Unions: NTEU and NEHAWU
- Representatives from NEHAWU Regional Executive Committee
- Representatives from the VUT SRC and its Sub-Structures
- Representatives from the civil society groups
- VUT Staff and Students
- Members of the surrounding communities
- The Organising Committee that worked tirelessly to ensure the success of this day.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Morning

My task this morning as the Vice Chancellor and Principal of the Vaal University of Technology is an easy one – to welcome you all to this important Public Colloquium on Climate Change. But Program Director, before I do that, let I remind everyone in this house that climate change is not just an environmental issue; it is a matter that affects every aspect of our lives – from the air we breathe and the food we eat to the stability of our economies and the health of our communities.

Unfortunately, unlike in the distant past where we used to only see these incidents on TV or read about them on newspapers; in recent times, these kinds of occurrences have hit our shores and are now closer to home. Despite an overall drying trend, the intensity and frequency of heavy rainfall events has also increased. Climate change doubled the likelihood of the intense rain that hit parts of South Africa in April 2022, which led to hundreds of people being killed and many thousands losing their homes.

Today, you have gathered here as a diverse group of experts, activists, policymakers, and concerned citizens to have a dialogue and collaboration to address this challenge. Your presence here today can only mean one thing and one thing only – that you all have a shared commitment to understand and ultimately address one of the most pressing challenges of our time which is climate change.

Having said that, let me once again extend my heartfelt gratitude to the President of the Republic of South Africa, His Excellency Cyril Ramaphosa, who understood too well what is at stake and saw it befitting that this challenge be tackled from the highest office of the land. This, by forming what we've come to know today as the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) with a clear mandate to oversee and facilitate a just and equitable transition towards a low-emissions and climate-resilient economy.

The PCC, in turn, showed confidence in VUT as a potential partner to assist in this endeavour – for that we remain grateful and aim not to disappoint. Let me assure you that we have ample research and innovation expertise to support the PCC in developing sustainable solutions to this challenge.

Commissioner Lekalakala, this house would be happy to know that over the years, the Vaal University of Technology has significantly contributed towards climate-related SDGs. To demonstrate our commitment to climate action: we have published:

- **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.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I need to emphasise that these are SCOPUS Indexed articles by VUT scholars.

Also, 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.

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.

Last week we were in Sweden for the South Africa-Sweden University Forum (SASUF) Conference, and one of the key takeaways from that five-day gathering is that a new programme is on the pipeline to include a focus area on Green Transition. This will enable VUT to provide staff and students exchanges with scholars and researchers in Swedish Universities in areas such as the promotion of digital applications and green technologies, development of renewable energy solutions and more importantly engaging citizens and key stakeholders in implementing climate adaptations measure.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I believe these align with the work we are gathered here for today – of answering a question of whether technology can play a role in addressing Just Transition and Loss and Damage. Former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon understood this too well when he said: "Innovation and investment in new, sustainable technologies are crucial in addressing climate change and achieving sustainable development."

Dr Shafick, you would recall that today's public colloquium comes hot on the heels of the Researchers Symposium which we held two weeks ago at the Desmond Tutu Great Hall on our campus under the theme; **"Harnessing research and innovation for climate change action"**. The agenda on that day was filled with insightful presentations led by some of the foremost thinkers and practitioners in the field – researchers and scholars alike who explored in detail some of the latest scientific findings, cutting-edge research, successful case studies as well as ongoing studies around climate change.

Most importantly, these great men and women shared innovative solutions; took a closer look at some of the policy frameworks that have made a difference and, in the end, discussed actionable strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I hope we can all agree that, that symposium was a great build-up towards today's public colloquium where we will explore the **Role of Technology in Addressing Just Transition and Loss and Damage Running Up to COP29**. Without a doubt, technology is a key enabler in fostering a sustainable and resilient future by supporting both the transition to a low-carbon economy and the mitigation of climate-related losses and damages.

Technology can play a pivotal role in ensuring a Just Transition by enabling the shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources. Innovations in clean energy technologies, such as solar and wind power, help create new jobs and industries, thereby reducing the socioeconomic impact on workers and communities dependent on traditional energy sectors. Additionally, advancements in digital platforms and smart grids enhance energy efficiency and accessibility, supporting equitable growth and reducing energy poverty.

In the context of climate change, technology is essential for addressing Loss and Damage. Advanced early warning systems, satellite monitoring, and data analytics improve disaster preparedness and response, mitigating the impacts of extreme weather events. Furthermore, technologies for climate adaptation, such as resilient infrastructure and sustainable agricultural practices, help communities recover and adapt to climate-induced damages. Innovative financial technologies (fintech) also facilitate more efficient and transparent distribution of climate funds to affected regions.

Now, as we embark on this day of learning and exchange, let us remember that the fight against climate change requires a concerted effort from all sectors of society. It calls for a blend of individual responsibility and community action. Each of us has a role to play, and together, we can drive the change needed to protect our planet for future generations. It is for this reason that President Ramaphosa in his 2024 State of the Nation Address, said: "Climate change is an existential challenge that confronts us all, and South Africa is committed to playing its part in reducing global emissions."

I welcome you all to this colloquium! May it be an opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations that can spur collective action by working together with urgency and purpose.

**I THANK YOU.**