**REMARKS BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF COUNCIL**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE INSTALLATION**

**OF THE VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRINCIPAL**

 **OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND**

**ON THE 29TH OF APRIL 2021 IN THE WITS GREAT HALL**

The Chancellor of Wits University, Dr Judy Dlamini,

The Former Chancellor of Wits University, and retired Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke,

The Former Vice-chancellors of Wits University, Professors Loyiso Nongxa and Adam Habib (joining virtually),

The Chairperson of Universities South Africa, Professor Ahmed Bawa,

The Vice-Chancellors and Rectors of our fraternal universities,

The Director-General in the Presidency, Ms Phindile Baleni,

Mary and members of the Vilakazi family,

Members of the Board of Governors, the Council, the Senate, the Forum, the Executive, and Convocation,

Donors, alumni, staff, student leaders, fellow Witsies,

Members of the media, and guests watching online,

Good evening.

It is with great honour that I address you this evening on the occasion of the installation of Professor Zeblon Zenzele Vilakazi as the 16th Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of the Witwatersrand.

Wits University is a national treasure that occupies a special place in the heart of South Africans. Renowned for its academic and research excellence, Wits has a rich history steeped in social justice, and is known for advancing the public good. Over the last 100 years, it has been at the forefront of change, in the economic heart of the country, and has impacted in many ways on society.

The thousands of illustrious alumni who have walked across this stage, know that they carry a part of Wits in their hearts - including our incoming Vice-Chancellor and Principal (and some of the other vice-chancellors in the audience). But the best is yet to come. Whilst Wits belongs to all of us, it will take an extraordinary person to lead this great institution into its next century.

It therefore gives me great pleasure to congratulate Professor Zeblon Vilakazi on his appointment as the 16th Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of the Witwatersrand.

**(ADDRESS TO THE VC)** Professor Vilakazi, we are placing the future of Wits University in your capable hands. By accepting this position, you are not only responsible for the future of one of the best universities in the world, but you are now responsible for our collective futures. I say this because there are many imminent challenges that we will have to face as a community, as a society, as a country, as a continent, and as humanity. Many of these challenges are still unknown, and this university will play a critical role in reimagining our collective futures.

Serving as the vice-chancellor of a higher education institution in South Africa, and especially of Wits, is probably one of the most challenging jobs on the continent. Yet, my fellow councillors and I have full confidence in your abilities to lead Wits to greater heights in the coming decade. We are certain that you will ably lead Wits to its centenary in 2022 and beyond, steward a new vision for the academy, and reinvigorate the academic project in a higher education context that is rapidly changing.

I must admit that many people - including me - are sometimes daunted by your knowledge and expertise of nuclear physics, military history, art, quantum computing, space exploration, and the social sciences, and your ability to switch between 10 languages instantly. You are the epitome of a world-class researcher, globally recognised for your scientific work, and for your contribution towards developing higher education in Africa. You are a truly talented individual and an inspiring exemplar for all Africans. You represent hope for our students, for our young researchers, for Wits, and for broader society.

I think that I speak for all of us present today, when I say that we embrace your vision and that we look forward to working with you to achieve your ‘moonshot’.

However, it will be remiss of me not to remind you of the challenges that lay ahead as you embark on this journey to lead our great institution. You witnessed firsthand the #FeesMustFall protests in 2015 and 2016. The higher education funding crisis played out on the streets of Braamfontein and around the country in the last two months, even before you had the opportunity to be inaugurated. The instability in our country, the floundering economy, and the coronavirus pandemic are all unprecedented challenges that impact on the University in one way or another. They present a range of issues that may require you to consider a recalibration of the status quo, to develop creative solutions to perennial problems, in order to move Wits forward. As an institution it will take our collective efforts – the Council, the Senate, the Senior Executive Team and all other University stakeholders – to continue to make this great institution a beacon of hope on the hill, that you talk about so eloquently.

**(TURN TO AUDIENCE)**

Ladies and gentlemen, this ceremony is important because it provides us with a moment to pause, and to reflect on the role of the academy in society, and in particular **our** society. It allows us to value the university as the intellectual hub of society, where ideas are born, tested and debated. It allows for cross-disciplinary thinking, for new discoveries, for the creation of new knowledge, and for the development of innovative solutions to the pressing problems of our time. It serves as a cultural centre which breaks down racial, gender, class, age, cultural, religious, and other biases. It teaches us to be human, and how to better serve humanity.

This ceremony allows us to value the abundance of talent and the high level, scarce and critical skills developed by this University, to advance our economy and to transform our society. It allows us to celebrate some of the best thinkers in the world who walk on our campuses every day – critical thinkers who challenge the status quo, innovators who are problem-posers and problem-solvers, and originators who change the world for good.

More importantly, this University signals hope for the people of Africa, and inspires us to believe that the impossible is closer than we imagine.

For 100 years Wits has advanced the public good, and our legacy remains for good. Professor Vilakazi, I am inspired by your passion for progress and I look forward to working with you and your A-rated team as you catapult Wits into its next century.

Again, I extend my hearty congratulations to you on this prestigious appointment.

I thank you.

**Mr Isaac Shongwe**

**Chairperson of Council**

**University of the Witwatersrand**