

# World experts unite in SA to discuss global environmental issues

NALEDI HLEFANE

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU), in partnership with Chang'an University in China and funded by the National Research Fund (NRF), recently hosted more than 300 delegates at the Durban International Convention Centre for the third biennial International Conference on Earth and Environmental Sciences (ICEES).

Launched in 2021, ICEES is part of a memorandum of co-operation between UNIZULU and Chang'an University. The conference serves as a vital platform for multidisciplinary problem-solving where science, policy and industry can converge to address pressing planetary challenges.

This year's conference attracted world-leading scientists, policymakers and industry experts in the fields of hydrology, hydrogeology, climate change, water security, biodiversity loss and pollution. Participants travelled from 70 countries located across five continents with the singular objective of deliberating on and potentially devising solutions to the world's most pressing environmental challenges. These problems were framed into key areas: climate change, water security and sustainable resource management; pollution and environmental degradation;



The third biennial International Conference on Earth and Environmental Sciences attracted world-leading scientists, policymakers and industry experts. | Xolani Ncube

and biodiversity loss and ecosystem services decline.

Leading the conversation was Professor Xoliswa Mtose, UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor and Principal, who hailed the event as a significant platform for fruitful discourse to chart the path to an eco-friendly planet for future generations. She said attendees would get the opportunity to share their experiences and research findings, discuss prevalent problems and establish

productive new academic and industry research collaborations.

"It is worth restating the obvious that the planet Earth, our home, is entrusted to us by the past generations and borrowed from the future ones. As custodians of Earth, it is our responsibility to protect, preserve and sustain its ecosystems for the well-being of all life forms. The security of future generations hinges on our ability to address these challenges

with innovative, collaborative and trustworthy solutions," she added.

Professor Bonginkosi "Blade" Nzimande, Science, Technology and Innovation Minister and one of the keynote speakers during the conference, concurred with Prof Mtose's sentiments on the major role ICEES plays in the higher education sector. According to the minister, historically disadvantaged institutions need to be at the centre of knowledge

production in South Africa and the world - and ICEES undoubtedly serves this purpose.

Nzimande also delved into the triple planetary crisis, detailing the interconnected challenges of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. Amid these glaring global problems, he found solace in knowing that ICEES had the "potential to contribute to the production of new research, data and modelling tools, and the development of new climate resilient technologies that will prevent environmental calamities and save lives".

Water and Sanitation Minister David Mahlobo, who joined the gathering on the second day, was also of the view that institutions of higher learning are the cornerstone of society as they produce knowledge that can and should influence government policy. His talk was an overview of the world crisis around the social, political and scientific aspects of it. He touched on the matter of consumption, stressing that South Africans were consuming approximately 300 litres of water per person per day - almost twice the amount in comparison to other countries. These, together with the issue of water pollution due to mining activities, were some of the problems he flagged. Furthermore, he said

investment in young scientists and engineers would be advantageous for the development of the nation.

This coincides with one of the objectives of ICEES: imparting scientific knowledge to emerging researchers and propelling them to become change agents in society. This is at the heart of the conference, according to co-ordinators Professor Vetrinurugan Elumalai, UNIZULU SARChI-Tier 1 Chair of Hydrology holder, and Chang'an University's Professor Peiyue Li.

Reflecting on the successful event, Prof Li said his highlight was attending the plenary sessions where expert panellists interrogated critical topics such as climate extremes and resilience, emerging contaminations, water security and SDG 6, as well as technology and AI in earth sciences.

Prof Elumalai, who founded the plenary sessions equally exciting, said many of the unanswered questions that had emerged from these discussions call for more research to be conducted as a means of finding solutions to control global issues. He also noted that the conference has prompted attendees to start thinking about how health sciences, particularly hydrological and hydrogeological sciences, can move towards technology-based research.

## UNIZULU webinar honours Mangaliso Sobukwe's legal and political thought

NALEDI HLEFANE

THE Office of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal at UNIZULU held another thought-provoking webinar this month titled "The legal and political thought of Mangaliso Sobukwe and the liberation of the African university".

Dr Ndimiso Dladla, a lecturer at the University of Pretoria's Department of Jurisprudence in the Faculty of Law and a keen follower of the late struggle icon Mangaliso Robert Sobukwe, was invited as the guest presenter.

Introducing the topic, UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Xoliswa Mtose explained that the theme was chosen as a celebration of Africanism, a notion which resonated deeply with Sobukwe. Citing Kenyan thinker Professor Joseph Munyoki Mwinzi's words, she contextualised Africanism as an awareness of and a state of pride in one's African identity.

"Africanism is thinking that arises out of and within the context of African concrete experiences. It thus produces ways of knowing and knowledge that are relevant and meant to address the challenges in everyday lives of African people. Some of the principles that capture the thesis of this theme include that Africanism is a dynamic assertion of African thinking that represents the aggression of the historical, cultural, spiritual, artistic, scientific and philosophical identities and legacies of Africans



from antiquity of the present. It is a theory of agency which views an African self as an actor rather than as an observer in historical changes," Prof Mtose elaborated.

This mentality, she said, correlates with Sobukwe's Africanist thinking which opposed the colonial race myth designed to perpetuate a false narrative that there were inferior and superior races, thus sowing divisions within humanity.

Dr Dladla, whose entire presentation was centred on commemorating the brilliance and legacy of Sobukwe, launched his talk by lamenting the skewed and one-directional manner in which black intellectuals are often referenced in literature. He expounded that "their lives, scandals, struggles and spectacles replace the careful study of their contributions to the universe of thought and history".

Against this backdrop, he deliberately drafted his talk on Sobukwe's legal and political

thought. He used three historic events to display Sobukwe's relevance: the founding of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and its distinctive ideological and political characteristics; the Sharpeville Massacre as a purposeful expression of its political thought; and the trial of Sobukwe as an oral study in the legal thought and constitutional theory of the PAC. The presentation concluded with some ideas on the value of this heritage for the struggle against neo colonial constitutionalism today, and the place of the university within it.

"The point is that we cannot take the common sense of the transition (from the apartheid government to the democratic order) as the starting point to the establishment of the curriculum. And the outstanding problem of liberation needs to be the starting point of how we teach. In closing, I say towards the abolition of the South African constitution," Dr Dladla emphatically expressed.

## UNIZULU and IIT Roorkee sign landmark academic co-operation agreement

SBHALE DUMAKUDE

UNIZULU, under the visionary leadership of Vice-Chancellor and Principal Professor Xoliswa Mtose, has marked a historic milestone by formalising an academic partnership with the Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee (IITR).

The two institutions signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) this month at the UNIZULU Council Chambers - signalling a new era of international collaboration. This strategic agreement acknowledges the shared strengths of both universities in the fields of science, engineering, management and social sciences. In addition, it reflects a mutual commitment to advancing academic excellence through joint initiatives, knowledge exchange and global engagement.

The MOU is designed to promote collaborative research and academic development, facilitate international exposure for students and faculty, and encourage

reciprocal efforts and mutual benefits through regular interaction. Under the agreement, both institutions will identify and invite faculty members to participate in externally funded research and development programmes. Faculty exchanges during sabbaticals or vacation periods will be supported to enhance cross-cultural academic enrichment. A structured student exchange initiative will allow up to five students from each university to study at the partner institution for up to one academic year. Exchange students will pay tuition fees at their home university, and will be exempt from tuition fees at the host institution. Supervisors from both universities will co-ordinate funding for international travel to support student mobility.

Beyond mobility programmes, the agreement includes the exchange of scientific and technical materials, including research data, teaching resources

and educational literature. Both institutions have committed to respecting intellectual property rights, while exploring innovative ways to share academic content. To ensure effective implementation, each university will appoint a faculty member to oversee the partnership, and a joint co-ordination committee comprising representatives from both institutions will meet periodically to evaluate progress and identify opportunities to strengthen collaboration.

The MOU took effect immediately and will remain valid for five years, with the possibility of renewal upon mutual agreement. The signing was officiated by Professor Mtose and IITR Director, Professor Kamal Kishore Pant.

Professor Vetrinurugan Elumalai, Head of UNIZULU's Hydrology Department and SARChI-Tier 1 Chair of Hydrology, will serve as the primary liaison for UNIZULU in this collaboration.



Xolani Ncube

## A NODE FOR AFRICAN THOUGHT



University of Zululand

@UNIZULUongoye

@unizulu\_official

UNIZULU Official

www.unizulu.ac.za

@unizulu\_official



UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND

A NODE FOR AFRICAN THOUGHT