

**DR JOANNA NEWMAN'S INTRODUCTORY REMARKS AT THE
USAF-ACU SYMPOSIUM, CHINUA ACHEBE AUDITORIUM,
UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG, 18 MARCH, 2019**

Symposium on developing the capacity of early career researchers

I am delighted to be here, at an event that has been in planning for over a year. Firstly, I'd like to thank the University of Johannesburg, and Professor Marwala for hosting us, and his team led by Prof Judy Peter for their assistance in organising the workshop.

I'd also like to thank USAf - Prof Thandwa Mthembu (Chair of USAf) and Prof Ahmed Bawa for supporting the event (we're sorry Prof Bawa can't be here). And the USAf team, led by Janet van Rhyn for their hard work and assistance in helping to organise the programme.

I would like to thank all the colleagues here who have taken the time to come to this two day event, where we look forward to sharing good practice, exploring what has worked, and what we might need to think about changing, in the crucial area of developing capacity for early career researchers.

I would especially like to thank Minister Pandor for taking the time out of her schedule to be here this morning and I look forward hugely to her keynote speech.

In fact, the last time I was in Johannesburg, was to speak at the USAf's Research and Innovation Group meeting, where I heard Minister Pandor talk about the Commonwealth being an important network to support South Africa's ambitious higher education and internationalisation strategies.

I represent an organisation that has over 530 members in 53 commonwealth countries. Over 66 % of our members are in low and middle income countries, and the ACU is proud to have supported mobility and support for students and early career researchers for decades now, working with our partners across the Commonwealth, many of whom are in South Africa and here today. The Commonwealth is indeed a powerful network to effect change and create opportunities. A population of 2.4 billion where over 60 per cent of the population is under the age of thirty.

Young people are our future, but there has never been more uncertain times than those we live in today. Huge progress has been made in alleviating poverty and disease, and gross tertiary enrolment across the world has grown exponentially – the world average is now about 30% - but that doesn't change the fact that access to quality education, let alone higher education, is still patchy and access still relies on to a large extent geography and wealth. Yet it is clear that societies that build strong tertiary education sectors are societies that are stable, open, prosperous and secure. The ACU makes this argument in common cause with other global networks of universities, through our accredited status with CW governments, and through UN forums. There is not a single one of the 17 SDGs that could be achieved without the benefit of Higher Education playing some role, whether it is supplying good quality content for primary education, to cutting edge applied and blue sky research.

Last week on Friday, the ACU launched its new strategy – the road to 2030. This strategy makes explicit our desire, through the work we do with and through our members, to build a better world through higher education. In the strategy, we commit to five strategic priorities, to champion the power of higher education to improve lives; to support the long term vitality of universities, to engage and connect universities across borders and promote collaboration among them, to deliver educational opportunities that make a positive and lasting difference, and to uphold the ACU's reputation for excellence and demonstrate our impact. One area the ACU has always been

committed to be support of early career researchers. In South Africa, there are many examples of post docs who have come to SA institutions or from them to spend time in other CW ACU universities. The most recent examples of this is our Blue Charter Fellows, an initiative that came out of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Blue Charter. The ACU has received funding for 38 fellows initially, now growing thanks to a donation from the Waitrose Foundation. In South Africa, this has meant that 3 postdocs from University of KwaZulu-Natal have gone to Memorial University, Canada, Birmingham and Plymouth universities to study toxicity of microplastics, ingestion of microplastics by fish, and microplastics in sediments. The University of Johannesburg is hosting a PhD student from Federal University of Technology Akure, Nigeria studying green chemistry. We have also been involved in programmes in partnership over the last ten years with USAF, with NRF, with SA Universities, and I believe the next two days will be the perfect opportunity to look at the changing landscape of research and teaching needs, and how best to support and nurture early career researchers, who will become the next generation of university leaders, who will inspire the next generation of students to do great things, and who will continue themselves to discover and teach new knowledge.