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## **Universities South Africa welcomes Dr Phethiwe Matutu as the new Chief Executive Officer**

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Universities South Africa (USAf), Professor Sibongile Muthwa, USAf's Chairperson, has welcomed Dr Phethiwe Matutu as the new Chief Executive Officer at the USAf Office in Pretoria. Dr Matutu succeeds Professor Ahmed Bawa, who has been at the helm since May 2016. She assumes office with effect from Monday, 3 October 2022.

Dr Matutu is no stranger to higher education. For the past five years, she was the Group Executive: Strategy, Planning and Partnerships at the National Research Foundation, where she was responsible for strategy, strategic planning and performance monitoring, strategic partnerships, and information and analysis. For nine years prior to that she had occupied the position of Chief Director: Human Capital and Science Promotion in the former Department of Science and Technology (DST).

A mathematician by discipline, Dr Matutu holds a PhD in Mathematics from the University of Cape Town. She obtained a Master's in Science, Mathematics with distinction from Rhodes University, an Honours in Science, Mathematics, from the same institution and a BSc in Mathematics and Chemistry from the former University of Transkei. She attended the "Insight into King IV" at the Institute of Directors in South Africa to advance her governance capabilities, and her competence in equity, diversity and inclusion has been broadened by obtaining an "Equity and Transformation Facilitator certificate" from Wits University.

She brings with her solid academic and policy-making credentials, having taught mathematics for 16 years until 2008, at no fewer than five of South Africa's universities and worked in a policy environment for another 14 years. Her teaching career culminated in a senior lectureship in Rhodes University's Department of Mathematics in 2004, a position she held until 2008.

At the former Department of Science and Technology, Dr Matutu successfully led the strategy development in research priority areas of Government, science promotion and Human Capital Development, leading to transformative change and maximising of research impact. Among her notable achievements was the growth of the Human Capital Development budget, particularly, for researchers and post-graduate student support from the National Treasury. This was a culmination of ongoing direction setting through guiding documents for entities, and evidence-based case-building. Her leadership of the portfolio led to its growth, so much that it was split before she left the Department.

At the NRF, Dr Matutu successfully drove the formulation of the macro-organisational strategy, led the conceptualisation of the establishment of a Research and Development Information Platform for Research and Development data for the National System of Innovation (NSI), and had oversight of the management of key strategic partnerships that are instrumental in leveraging knowledge, human, and financial resources from partners. Among other notable achievements, her division spearheaded the research impact agenda within the NSI, a relatively new initiative, conceptualised and positioned the African Open Science Platform, a continental, multi-partner initiative to put African scientists at the cutting edge of data-intensive science.

Dr Matutu has served at various committees and structures. They include being a Ministerial appointee to the Walter Sisulu University Council until 2011; a Ministerial Task Team member for the Drafting of the Implementation Plan for the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training in the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) from 2016 to 2017, a Ministerial Appointee to the Council for South African Natural Scientific Professions in the former DST, from 2010 to 2017, to name a few instances.

Welcoming the new CEO aboard the USAf ship, Professor Muthwa, who is also the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of Nelson Mandela University, says Dr Matutu is undoubtedly joining an organisation punching above its weight, and is poised to achieve even more by placing students at the centre of all its endeavours. Referencing the upheavals that have engulfed SA's universities in the past, such as the #FeesMustFall movement of 2015 and the CoViD-19 pandemic, of late, Professor Muthwa said she looked forward to Dr Matutu steering USAf forward by applying the lessons learnt from these crises and adapting the organisation to the swift changes that universities have had to undergo.

“As we transition to more stability – with our new CEO at the helm, I, on behalf of the Board, declare our strong support to ensure you succeed in this role. As you strive to uphold the cause of Higher Education in South Africa, remember to work with us as a collective. What sets USAf apart from other organisations is the senior leadership working as a collective across the higher education ecosystem. Our collective strength lies in relationality.”

In turn, Dr Matutu expressed appreciation to the USAf Board “for trusting me with this responsibility. Recognising the many challenges currently faced by the sector, including the aftermath of CoViD and water and energy security threats, we need to take cognisance of the environment we're operating in, in taking the sector forward. Thanks to the roadmap and the implementation plan that my predecessor, Professor Ahmed Bawa, has left behind, we have a solid base to work from, in assessing how we proceed from here.

“I look forward to being a significant part of this organisation as the Board and staff at the USAf Office hold my hand in steering this ship into the future.”

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