

International Cultural Diversity Festival 2023

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To celebrate Heritage Month, the University of the Free State Office for International Affairs hosted its annual International Cultural Diversity Festival outside the Centenary Complex on the Bloemfontein Campus on September 22, 2023, from 12:00 to 20:00.

This year's ICDF theme was 'Internationalising Institutional Culture,' an ambitious concept aimed at fostering a greater understanding and appreciation of the diverse cultures that make up the university. The event was a testament to the university's commitment to inclusivity and unity. The festival commenced with an hour-long dialogue session, an intellectual discussion facilitated by Dr. Molapo Qhobela, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. As a distinguished scholar who is passionate and an advocate for diversity and inclusion, Dr.

Molapo laid the foundation for a stimulating dialogue. In his opening remarks, Dr. Molapo is quoted saying, "***What is it we are trying to within our university to inculcate a culture of diversity but with a specific focus today of an international dimension.***"

Four exceptional student representatives were taking their seats on the stage and were about to share their perspectives on institutional Culture, diversity, inclusion, and the university's Vision 130 initiatives. The panel boasted diverse experiences and backgrounds, each bringing a unique voice.

Luvuyo Jacobs, the former Student Representative Council (SRC) President, spoke eloquently about the university's journey in embracing diversity and fostering a sense of belonging for all. He recounted personal stories of growth and transformation during his tenure, and his words resonated deeply with the audience.

Zama Zulu, the Incoming SRC representative for Arts and Culture, brought a fresh perspective to the stage. She described Culture as follows: "***Culture is a broad term that is constantly changing redefined by its people who portray it, its people who resonate by it, and as a university, we can constantly see that from our residency spaces staff and to our students the Culture of the university is constantly redefined.***" She emphasized the power of the arts in bridging cultural gaps and creating spaces for dialogue. Her enthusiasm was infectious, and her vision for a more culturally inclusive campus was met with applause.

Sibabalo Tokwe, Residence Prime, added a student residential perspective to the conversation. As someone deeply involved in the communal life of the university's residences, she highlighted the importance of creating a welcoming and harmonious environment for all students.

Pule Mmalo, a final-year Law student, articulated the importance of institutional policies and strategies in shaping the campus culture, including creating familiarity; he states: "***Creating this culture for familiarity makes it easy for people to learn,***" further rephrases his statement by saying "***I think it shouldn't be difficult, it should be more intuitive.***" He praised the Vision 130 initiatives, which aimed to make the university a global leader in higher education while remaining rooted in its South African heritage.

Inclusion Luvoyo Jacobs wrapped up the session by stating: "***The journey is still in process; the fruits of these works are very far from being archived by yet near to us because we are the key custodians of making the change that we need. Let us invest more in taking our local talent out to the world and let us receive more international talent to the university to make the journey of internationalisation more pleasing. We need more of our academic staff to go out and benchmark the inclusion of the international society in our academics and institutional Culture and also expose more of our local students to opportunities outside the UFS and Africa at large. We have done great in investing in our contemporary issues of cultural diversity, but the far yet so-near journey needs to start; we have an appointment with the future. 2034 needs to meet us at a point where the international market appreciates our role to ensure that our knowledge contributes to the development of the African continent and the Global South. We will thus foster relationships with universities and other partners to advance this. It will require an emphasis on expanding research networks to include scholars from across the world, including the African continent. The exposure to a wide diversity of approaches and cutting-edge thinking will contribute to an improvement of the work that our scholars deliver. We have a long way to go, but I trust and believe in the vision at hand and the leadership of this university alongside the students as major stakeholders to carry the mandate. The journey is still long, but the fruits are worth it.***"

The International Cultural Diversity Festival was more than just a day of cultural exhibitions and performances; it was a testament to the university's commitment to

fostering an inclusive environment where every Culture, every voice, and every perspective had a place. The festival continued throughout the day, offering a delightful array of international cuisines, captivating cultural performances from students and residencies curated by the Student Affairs arts and culture office, and fascinating exhibitions that allowed the university community to immerse themselves in the beauty of global diversity.

As the day turned into night, the campus was alive with laughter, music, and the spirit of unity. The 2023 International Cultural Diversity Festival celebrated Heritage Month in a festivity spirit with the student community. It was a day of connection, understanding, and celebration, reminding everyone that the world is a rich tapestry of cultures, and the university proudly embraced it all.

To watch the dialogue, click on the link below:

https://www.youtube.com/live/TavXjp8dmVs?si=KqpEBo_YzW65phH3