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For Immediate Release

Prof PLO Lumumba urges African universities to lead knowledge creation and technological innovation

VANDERBIJLPARK, 9 September 2026 - Renowned Kenyan academic, lawyer and Pan-African thought leader Prof Patrick Loch Otieno (PLO) Lumumba has challenged African universities to reclaim their role as creators of knowledge, technology and solutions capable of shaping the continent's future.

Delivering the keynote address at the Vaal University of Technology's (VUT) Teaching and Learning Conference, Prof Lumumba said Africa's higher education institutions must move beyond being consumers of technologies and ideas developed elsewhere and become centres of innovation that respond to the continent's unique challenges.

The three-day conference, hosted by VUT from 8 to 10 September 2026 at Emerald Tsogo Sun in Vanderbijlpark, brings together academics, researchers, higher education practitioners and thought leaders to explore innovative approaches to teaching, learning and student success in a rapidly evolving higher education environment. Held under the theme, *"Reimagining Teaching and Learning for the Future"*, the conference serves as a platform for scholarly engagement, collaboration and the exchange of ideas on the future of higher education.

Originally known as the Centre for Academic Development (CAD) Conference, the event was repositioned in 2022 as the VUT Teaching and Learning Conference and opened to participation from the broader higher education sector. Since then, it has grown into an important forum for advancing scholarship, sharing best practices and promoting innovation in teaching and learning across South Africa's higher education landscape.

Addressing delegates from across the higher education sector, Prof Lumumba argued that the future of African development will depend on the continent's ability to invest in research, technological capability and intellectual self-confidence.

"The question is not simply whether we are using artificial intelligence," said Prof Lumumba. "The question is: whose artificial intelligence is it? Who owns the software and who controls the knowledge systems upon which we increasingly depend?"

Prof Lumumba warned that technological advancement without technological sovereignty risks deepening Africa's dependence on external knowledge systems. He urged universities to critically engage with emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence while building local capacity to develop solutions relevant to African realities.

Drawing on Africa's historical experience, he noted that many education systems were established to serve colonial interests, making the decolonisation of higher education a matter not only of curriculum reform but also of knowledge production and ownership.

According to Prof Lumumba, universities must ask difficult questions about whether they are producing the knowledge, skills and innovations required to address Africa's development priorities.

"Africa must develop the confidence and capacity to produce research that addresses its own challenges while contributing meaningfully to global scholarship," he said. "Research cannot thrive without infrastructure, investment and deliberate support."

He further highlighted the importance of strengthening research ecosystems through investment in laboratories, technology infrastructure, connectivity, energy security and sustainable funding models.

Referring to lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, Prof Lumumba said Africa's dependence on externally developed vaccines, medicines and technologies underscored the urgent need to strengthen local research, manufacturing and innovation capabilities.

The keynote also challenged universities to reconsider how success is measured.

"If we teach agriculture, we must contribute to food security. If we teach medicine, we must strengthen healthcare. If we teach engineering, we must build infrastructure. Education must solve problems and transform society," he said.

Prof Lumumba cited countries such as China, South Korea, India and Vietnam as examples of nations that have successfully invested in education, research and innovation to accelerate development. He encouraged African countries and institutions to study these experiences and adapt relevant lessons to their own contexts.

Speaking in the context of the African Union's Agenda 2063, he stressed that aspirations for a transformed and prosperous Africa must be supported by meaningful investment in education, research, technology and human capital.

The keynote resonated strongly with the conference theme of reimagining teaching and learning for the future, reinforcing the role of universities as drivers of innovation, socio-economic development and sustainable growth.

For universities of technology such as VUT, the message underscored the importance of translating research and knowledge into practical solutions that address community, industry and national challenges.

Prof Lumumba's address formed part of a programme featuring local and international experts on higher education leadership, artificial intelligence, educational innovation, research and student success. The conference will conclude on 10 September 2026 and includes the launch of two scholarly books developed from papers and academic contributions presented at previous editions of the conference, demonstrating its growing scholarly impact and contribution to the higher education sector.

Concluding his address, Prof Lumumba urged African institutions to preserve, document and share the knowledge they generate for the benefit of future generations.

"The most important question facing our universities is no longer whether they are ready for the future," he said. "It is whether they are prepared to create it."

Prof Lumumba's keynote formed part of a broader programme featuring distinguished local and international speakers who are examining the future of higher education, teaching and learning, artificial intelligence, leadership, research and student success. The conference programme includes contributions from Prof Monwabisi Ralarala, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic at the University of the Western Cape; Prof Nyna Amin, Director of Teaching and Learning at the University of KwaZulu-Natal; Ms Phindiwe Kamolane, AI Governance Researcher and Senior Lecturer at the University of South Africa; Dr Julie Lindsay, an international expert in educational technology and innovation; and Dr Azwinndini Christopher Tshivhase, Acting Vice Principal for Teaching, Learning, Community Engagement and Student Support at UNISA, among other higher education thought leaders.

A key highlight of the conference will be the launch of two scholarly books on the evening of 9 September 2026. The publications, developed from peer-reviewed papers and academic contributions presented at previous editions of the conference, demonstrate the growing scholarly impact of the VUT Teaching and Learning Conference and its contribution to advancing knowledge and teaching excellence within the higher education sector.

For additional context and reference, the full video of Prof Lumumba's keynote address can be accessed here: Video link: <https://youtu.be/aRsYyWn4pj0>

About VUT

The Vaal University of Technology (VUT) is one of South Africa's leading Universities of Technology, committed to advancing innovation, research, teaching and learning in support of socio-economic development.

Guided by its Strategy 2033+, the University is focused on producing graduates who are future-ready, driving impactful research and innovation, and strengthening partnerships that contribute to sustainable development at local, national and global levels. VUT continues to position itself as a responsive, engaged and transformative institution that creates knowledge and solutions for the benefit of society

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