

# Universities discuss role in democratic SA

March 5 2014 at 10:13am

By Michelle Jones [Comment on this story](#)



Independent Newspapers Students are seen on campus at the University of Cape Town. File photo: Ross Jansen

Cape Town -

Universities have a role and responsibility to speak out and use their knowledge base to guide post-apartheid South Africans.

This came out when a number of vice-chancellors and university representatives gathered at St George's Cathedral on Tuesday night for a conversation on the role of institutions in developing post-apartheid South Africa.

University of the Western Cape vice-chancellor Brian O'Connell pointed to the increasing number of service protests. There was an expectation due to "outlandish promises" that there were sufficient resources to provide jobs and homes now for all South Africans, he said.

O'Connell said all universities should speak to the nation as a single system.

University of Witwatersrand vice-chancellor Adam Habib said the institution, which would not exist were it not for mining, should address the issue of changes which should take place in that industry. He spoke of the killing of miners in Marikana.

"It has to stand up and say these things. We have to reconfigure this industry," he said, adding that mining was essential to the economic success of the country. The participants had been asked to speak to the problem statement: "The role of universities in society has been debated and contested, with institutions often struggling to define their identity."

Several examples were made of where universities had failed to speak out - including when apartheid first started as well as when HIV and Aids was denied.

UCT vice-chancellor Max Price said universities were a meeting place where students of different races, religions and sexual orientations were introduced to each other.

“They come to a university campus which is very diverse. I think one of the most powerful things we do at universities is to introduce students to the other.”

Prins Nevhotalu, newly installed vice-chancellor of Cape Peninsula University of Technology, said Tuesday night’s conversation was one that should have taken place in the early 1990s. He pointed to the importance of teaching students to respect one another and the world they lived in.

“We produce students who are going to exacerbate the divisor between rich and poor.”

Nevhotalu said it was important that when graduates went on to manage companies, they knew how they should treat their workers.

Cape Town Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba chaired the discussion.

**Cape Times**

<http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/universities-discuss-role-in-democratic-sa-1.1656520#.VCEfOxacxfg>