



Delegates who attended the UKZN's International Conference on IKS and Environmental Ethics.

UKZN Hosts International IKS and Environmental Ethics Conference

UKZN's DST-NRF [Centre in Indigenous Knowledge Systems](#) (CIKS) hosted the first International Conference on IKS and Environmental Ethics which examined the implications for peace-building and sustainable development.

The hub of the centre is at UKZN which partners with the Africa Programme of the UN-University for Peace in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, the University of Rwanda, and the Department of Science and Technology (DST) in South Africa.

A contentious issue at the conference was the role of culture in environmental ethics. There has been criticism of contemporary approaches by international institutions, researchers, and academics for universalising environmental ethics and values.

The conference organisers managed to mobilise stakeholders from diverse backgrounds within and outside Africa. The conference sub-themes included environmental governance, peace-building, justice and human rights; climate change, food security systems and global health; rural development, sustainable livelihood and gender; education transformation, and science and technological development and communication.

According to Professor Hassan Kaya, the Director of the DST-NRF Centre in Indigenous Knowledge Systems, the objectives of the conference were to create an international platform and network for interrogating and sharing views on Africa's conceptualization of the environmental crisis, especially the role of IKS in the development of environmental ethics and its policy implications on peace-building and sustainable development.

The aim was to come up with a consensus of strategies for ensuring that the outcomes of the conference identified currency in the deliberations of the UN and AU on environmental

ethics. It was highlighted that UKZN was the first University in South Africa and the continent to adopt an institutional IKS policy which has been endorsed by the University Council.

In his welcome address UKZN Vice-Chancellor, Dr Albert van Jaarsveld, said the international Conference was an important development for IKS as the University was looking forward to working with the Centre as a team so that it was soon recognised as a Centre of Excellence. This could be achieved by breaking new ground and doing things differently in knowledge production, including attracting the international community and for the local community to be intimately involved in IKS development.

The MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, Mr Michael Mabuyakhulu, who attended as both a panellist and on behalf the KZN Premier, said the Conference was in line with the provincial government's initiative of Sukuma Sakhe. This is about mobilising communities and building partnerships for sustainable livelihoods.

This was central to democracy and development because without community engagement there was a distortion of the relevance of the developmental agenda and the meaning of democracy. It also challenged people to redefine the meaning of human rights within the context of African value system (*Ubuntu*).

Another prominent speaker at the conference was former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Venda and Board member of the DST-NRF Centre in Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Professor Muxe Nkondo, who commended the University on the high level of understanding about the importance and the role of IKS and culture in environmental ethics and peace-building in Africa.

Professor Palamagamba John Kabudi of the Law Faculty of the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, urged conference participants to conduct more research on the role of hunter-gatherer communities, focusing mainly on their survival skills in the natural environment.

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