



## Office of the Vice-Chancellor

### Human Rights Day 2020 – Message from the Acting Vice-Chancellor

Human Rights Day in South Africa is historically linked with 21 March 1960, and the events of Sharpeville. On that day 69 people died and 180 were wounded when police opened fire on a peaceful crowd that had gathered in protest against the Pass laws that denied people of their right to freedom of movement. This day marked an affirmation by ordinary people, rising in unison to proclaim their rights. It became an iconic date in South Africa's history that today we commemorate as Human Rights Day as a reminder of our rights and the cost paid for our treasured human rights.

The anniversaries of these painful events from our past are a reminder that many paid the ultimate price for us to live in a society governed by human rights and dignity for all. Since 1994, government commemorates these painful chapters of our past to unify South Africans and affirm our human rights culture. It is an affirmation that the dark deeds of our past will never be repeated again in a democratic society.

All people young and old are entitled to social, civil, political and economic rights; regardless of their gender, religion, race, ethnicity or any other condition.

With a view to developing a consensus position for the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), our institution strives to ensure that the rights of students, staff and other stakeholders are respected. We continue to combat racial discrimination, xenophobia, homophobia, gender-based violence, sexual harassment and unfair discrimination, which all undermines fundamental human rights.

As SMU let us continue to commemorate Human Rights under the 2020 theme, "the year of unity, socio-economic renewal and nation-building". In particular, as Health Sciences University, let us work together to ensure that we act collectively to protect the right to life, especially at moments like this when we are called upon by government to be socially responsible in order to reduce the transmission of Coronavirus. Let us act by adhering to public health calls for social distancing and self-isolation, which may seem to limit our individual rights to freedom of movement, but justified for the common good of all. It is time to practice humanity by showing kindness, compassion, gentility and patience with others.

On this significant day, I call on SMU community to reaffirm our commitment to working together in supporting the development of an institutional culture founded upon the recognition and protection of the fundamental human rights, regardless of who is involved.

Kind regards,  
Professor O Ayo-Yusuf  
Acting- Vice Chancellor