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MEDIA RELEASE: Hon Dr Steenkamp Reflects on Leadership and Scholarship at NUST-UNAM Public Lecture

The Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), in collaboration with the University of Namibia (UNAM) and the Ministry of Education, Innovation, Youth, Sport, Arts and Culture, hosted a well-attended and thought-provoking public lecture celebrating the recent doctoral attainment of Hon Dr Sanet Steenkamp.

The event, which took place on Thursday, 19 February 2026, brought together members of academia, government, the education sector, students, and the broader public to reflect on how research-informed leadership can advance inclusive education and national development in Namibia.

Dr Steenkamp, who obtained a Doctor of Philosophy in Education from Rhodes University in October 2025, delivered the lecture under the theme 'A Journey of Turbulence and Transformation'. She perfectly blended the scholarly and the personal, tracing a doctoral journey marked by perseverance, emotional depth, and unwavering purpose.

A Difficult Journey

She narrated how, after completing her Master's degree in 2002, she stepped away from formal study for years before returning to academia. She initially enrolled in 2015, but placed her studies on hold to meet the demands of public office. The Minister, who also navigated changes in supervision along the way, described the PhD process as "a difficult journey that was deeply enlightening and very rewarding".

Dr Steenkamp reflected candidly on periods of uncertainty, including early setbacks intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought her research to an abrupt pause as schools closed nationwide, as well as the challenge of finding her academic voice. Her message to aspiring scholars was clear: writing is iterative, discipline is non-negotiable, and consistency is the hardest, yet most critical, requirement.

Her thesis, titled 'Expanding the Leadership of Learning Support Teachers in Resource Schools: A Formative Intervention Study in Namibia', focused on Moreson and Dagbreek resource schools.

The study explored how learning support teachers can expand their leadership agency within schools serving learners with special educational needs.

Transformation in Motion

Dr Steenkamp underscored that many teachers in special education are undermined, underestimated and undervalued, despite their expertise and daily impact. Through what she described as 'transformation in motion', her research identified several key themes:

- Contradictions as catalysts for change
- Expansion of leadership agency
- Collaborative transformation
- Expansive learning and innovation
- Emotional, ethical and cultural growth
- Systemic impact

When empowered and trusted, teachers can become the true architects of inclusive education, she said. Further reflecting on her doctoral work, she highlighted that "emotional intelligence, empathy and self-reflection are vital to scholarship. Research can be a tool for national transformation".

Meaningful Engagement

The lecture created space for meaningful engagement between students and the Minister during an interactive question-and-answer session. Some sought insight into the coping mechanisms that sustained Dr Steenkamp through moments of doubt, while others probed more deeply on the responsibility that accompanies academic success, questioning how scholarship can translate into tangible impact.

In her responses, she encouraged students to pursue qualifications not as ends in themselves, but as platforms for service, reminding them that true leadership lies in contribution rather than in titles.

The evening also offered touching insight into the personal motivations behind Dr Steenkamp's research. The Minister spoke of her early experience as a life skills teacher and of growing up in a family shaped by the lived realities of caring for a child with special needs.

Against All Odds

In a congratulatory message, NUST Acting Vice-Chancellor, Prof Andrew Niikondo, commended Dr Steenkamp for exemplifying the values of academic excellence within public service, noting that scholarship and leadership must reinforce one another in shaping national development priorities.

"Honourable Dr Steenkamp, we celebrate you this evening. We thank you for your service. We congratulate you on your doctoral achievement, and we look forward, with confidence, to the continued impact of your leadership," he said.

Meanwhile, on behalf of UNAM Vice-Chancellor Prof Kenneth Matengu, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor: Academic Affairs Prof Frednard Gideon, extended profound congratulations to Dr Steenkamp. He acknowledged the determination required to pursue doctoral studies while employed in demanding public office, describing the achievement as one attained “against all odds”.

The lecture concluded with a standing ovation and served not only as a celebration of academic attainment, but as a call to action: to empower teachers, to question the status quo, and to recognise research as a living instrument of transformation.

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