

NWU host first of its kind indigenous astronomy conference

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The North-West University (NWU) proudly hosted the inaugural three-day International Indigenous Astronomy Conference from 27-29 July 2022 at the Royal Marang Hotel in Rustenburg.



Dr Mbeho Koitsiwe, Prof Thebe Medupe, Prof David Mbdise, Kgosi Nyalala Pilane, Dr Bismark Tyobeka and Captain Witbooi at the International Indigenous Astronomy Conference.

During the conference the International Indigenous Astronomy Experts Society was also launched.

The theme of the conference, sponsored by the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) and South African Tourism, was “Facing the reality, value and relevance of indigenous astronomy in the 21st Century”.

The aims of the conference were to advocate the value of indigenous astronomy, contribute to the development of communication programmes, and improve research methodologies, epistemologies and philosophy.

NWU vice-chancellor Dr Bismark Tyobeka welcomed attendees, explaining that the NWU placed the IKS Centre in the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences for a reason.

“We acknowledge the scientific status of indigenous knowledge systems and the contribution it makes in the development and growth of communities and society.”

He added that indigenous astronomy (bolepa – dinaledi in Setswana), is a phenomenon that is explored from various points of view, including the culture, traditions, knowledge systems, philosophy and languages of indigenous communities.

Keynote speakers at the conference included Prof Jarita Holbrook from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, Prof Thebe Medupe, deputy dean for community engagement and stakeholder relations in the NWU's Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, and Gogo Aubrey Matshiqi, healer and independent political analyst. They were joined by various international and local experts and researchers in indigenous astronomy.

Notable attendees included Mosweu Paul Mogothle, director-general of the North West provincial government, Kgosi Nyalala Pilane of the Bakgatla ba Kgafela of Moruleng, Kaptein Witbooi, Nama chief, Kgosi Thari Maotwe, chairperson of the North West House of Traditional and Khoisan Leadership, and Imraan Patel, deputy director-general at DSI.

Other activities that took place during the conference included indigenous astronomy festivals, an excursion to the Mpebatho Museum, a game drive at the Pilanesberg game reserve and the African Indigenous Gala Dinner.

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