

## UP and Ikiam University enter research, academic exchange partnership

The University of Pretoria (UP) and the Universidad Regional Amazónica Ikiam (University of Ikiam) in the Republic of Ecuador signed a memorandum of understanding on Monday, 31 August 2020 to collaborate on research, and student and staff exchange projects.



Her Excellency, Ambassador, María Soledad Córdov of the Republic of Ecuador and UP Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof Tawana Kupe.

The partnership will allow UP researchers and students, mainly from the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, opportunities to collaborate on projects that address global challenges such as sustainable energy, safe water, biodiversity and conservation, climate change and natural disasters.

The University of Ikiam was established in 2013 and is in the Napo province in the heart of the Amazon. It is the only educational institution that is located within a “living laboratory”, the Colonso Chalupa Biological Reserve. The reserve consists of more than 93,000 hectares of forest and moors, with six ecosystems. Programmes offered by Ikiam University relate to geosciences, ecosystems, water sciences, agro-ecology, biotechnology, sustainable architecture and experimental sciences.

“We are meeting in a different reality than when we initiated the discussions on the memorandum of understanding that we are signing,” said UP Vice-Chancellor and Principal Professor Tawana Kupe at the online signing of the agreement. “Our world has been visited by a pandemic that has changed life as we knew it. The Covid-19 pandemic is not only a disease crisis, it is a crisis of society, of the economy, of sustainability and well-being, and of governance on the continent and globally.”

He said the current context is “a wake-up call” for individuals and organisations to think and do things differently. “We have all had to adapt to the new ‘normal’ or ‘unusual’ and rely on technology to help us adapt to new challenges,” he said. For Prof Kupe, now is an opportune time to collaborate with the University of Ikiam. “It is in times like these that we as universities are called upon to lead the fight against global challenges and give hope to our people. Noting the global nature and similarity of the challenges we face, it is my firm belief that it can be only through collaborations and partnerships that we will be able to develop lasting solutions. Through collaboration, we will be able to fully exploit our collective strengths, share learnings and maximise on our limited resources.”

Prof Kupe added that both universities must do everything in their power to ensure that tangible programmes are developed and resourced. The collaboration with the University of Ikiam is the only one UP has in Ecuador.

Dr Caroline Bacquet, Rector of the University of Ikiam, said this is the first collaboration that the university has with an African institution. “This is a great milestone for us and one that is historic,” she said. “We were looking for a universal university so that our students could be open to the world and understand problems at a local and global level.”

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