

The University of Zululand (UNIZULU) recently held its momentous occasion on 18 March 2025 at King Bhekuzulu Hall, KwaDlangezwa campus, organised by the Department of Social Work within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. The event aimed to celebrate the transformative power of social work, World Social Work Day, and reaffirm social work's commitments to social justice, advocacy, and community empowerment through the solemn oath-taking of future social work professionals. Also sought the launch of the groundbreaking book, *Social Work in the 21st Century: Scholarship and Praxis Reimagined Towards Vulnerability*, a testament to the evolving landscape of the social worker profession and its critical role in addressing contemporary societal challenges.



This insightful event kicked off with welcoming remarks and brief description on the purpose of the day by Professor John V. Rautenbach, head of Social Work department, started by wishing a happy world social work day to all attendees. He shared their plans to celebrate in style, aligning with the 2025 World Social Work Day theme, "Strengthening Intergenerational Solidarity for Enduring Wellbeing." He passionately emphasised to second-year students the significance of oath-taking as a symbol of legacy and the greatness of the social work profession.



Professor John Rautenbach – Head of Department, UNIZULU

Among the esteemed guests were Prof. Varoshini Nadesan from the University of Johannesburg and Prof. Annaline Keet from Nelson Mandela University, both reflecting on the national theme of World Social Work Day. Prof. Keet acknowledged the profession's enduring influence, stating, *“As we have all gone through these generations, social work has made its impact.”*



Prof. Annaline Keet
Nelson Mandela University



Prof. Varoshini Nadesan
University of Johannesburg

As part of their professional journey, second-year social work students engaged in a thought-provoking presentation on the significance of the student social worker oath in the context of the 2025 national theme, *“Strengthening Intergenerational Solidarity for*

Enduring Wellbeing.” One of the student presenters passionately expressed that “*social work is more than just work—it’s a calling.*” The presentation highlighted how caregiving extends beyond duty, requiring deep commitment, empathy, and a sense of purpose.



Second-year students presenting

Adding to the enriching dialogue, Ms. Nombulelo Khuzwayo, a final-year social work student from the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) and recipient of the prestigious Abe Bailey Travel Bursary 2024, shared insights from her recent international experience in the United Kingdom (UK). In an interview with Mr. S. Mbhele (final-year social work student) she reflected on the transformative impact of navigating an international space, where she built her professional identity, recognised her agency, and affirmed her competence. Notably, she was the only undergraduate among 15 postgraduate bursary recipients, a testament to her remarkable achievement. Drawing comparisons between South Africa and the UK, she highlighted key takeaways:

- South Africa could benefit from greater integration of technology in social services, improving efficiency and accessibility.

- The UK, in turn, could learn from South Africa's deep-rooted philosophy of Ubuntu, fostering stronger communal support and human-centred approaches in social work practice.

Her reflections offered both inspiration and a challenge to aspiring social workers—to embrace learning beyond borders while remaining grounded in the values that define the profession.

Dived into the candle lighting and oath-taking of students led by the Chief Magistrate Vusumuzi V. Hlatshwayo. He expressed his honour in being part of this prestigious event, acknowledging his daily interactions with social workers, sharing moments of laughter, tears, and challenges. He praised the oath for upholding integrity among social work students and emphasised their responsibility in caring for the nation. Referring to them as nation builders, investigators, and foot soldiers, he recognised their dedication and the effort they put into gathering information, no matter the circumstances.



Chief Magistrate Vusumuzi V. Hlatshwayo

Towards the end of the programme, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Nokuthula Kunene shared that it was her great pleasure to congratulate the launch of the book of *Social Work in the 21st Century: Scholarship and Praxis Reimagined Towards Vulnerability*. She said that the book not only highlights the relevance of social work in a modern context but also calls for a more profound understanding of variability.

“I commend the editors and contributors for their dedication to this important work and for their commitment to advancing the scholarship of social work. It is through such collective effort that we can continue to push boundaries to ensure that social work remains a vital force for change, compassion, and justice in our world. On behalf of the university, I wish this book great success in reaching out to the wider audience and sparking further dialogue on how society can do it more inclusively and compassionately and build more resilient communities,” said Prof. Kunene.

The highly anticipated book launch session resumed with Prof. Allucia L. Shokane, the project leader and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, addressing the audience. She began by affirming her identity as a social worker first, before her role as Dean, and expressed deep gratitude to the university for its unwavering support throughout the book's development—acknowledging that the journey was not without its challenges.

Despite the difficulties, she and her colleagues remained committed to their profession, determined to make an impact and ensure the project's success. Prof. Shokane was joined by Prof. Nadesan and Prof. Keet, who, along with her, served as editors of the book. Acknowledging their collegiality, she recognised them as giants in the social work profession.



Prof. Shokane, Prof. Keet and Prof. Nadesan

This publication is designed for social work and social sciences scholars, practitioners, and students, offering valuable insights into the field. In a significant gesture of accessibility and academic empowerment, the book has been made available free of charge to students. Prof. Shokane proudly highlighted the university's dedication to supporting projects, research, and innovation, noting that the institution fully funded the book's publication, reinforcing its commitment to advancing knowledge and professional development in the social sciences. Prof. Shokane concluded by thanking students for attending this remarkable milestone. "I so want to express my heartfelt thanks to the university management for their general support and guidance through this project and for hosting the book launch. Really, it is so exciting to be at the University of Zululand, where we become a franchise of knowledge production and all the support that we get."