

Geoffrey Michael Budlender SC
for the Doctor of Laws (*honoris causa*)

A distinguished alumnus of the UCT 1975 LLB class, Geoffrey Budlender is a towering figure in the South African legal profession who commands respect throughout Africa and beyond. His colossal record of struggle for the greater good, social justice and human rights began as a student at UCT in the early 1970s when he was President of the SRC and, later, Chair of the National Council of the National Union of South African students, and led student protests against the apartheid regime. Soon after graduation and completing his articles, Budlender, with Arthur Chaskalson who would later become the first President of the Constitutional Court of South Africa, co-founded the Legal Resources Centre (LRC), of which he was Director from 1993 to 1996, introducing to South Africa public interest litigation. At the LRC, Budlender became a trusted and indefatigable soldier of the poor and marginalised, winning them vital battles in the courts.

Budlender served as Director General of the Department of Land Affairs during Mandela's presidency. As such, he played a critical role in re-incorporating homelands into the new South Africa, and in the revision and reform of various laws including water law, the law governing the disposal of state land and the regulation of the legal profession. His return to the LRC as Director of the Constitutional Litigation Unit in 2000 to 2004 was perhaps the most consequential of his career. During this period, Budlender was involved in some of the most profound and ground-breaking decisions the Constitutional Court has produced to date. The Grootboom and Treatment Action Campaign cases in which Budlender was involved, and argued in favour of the positions of the vulnerable and marginalised groups, have received international claim, for they found the state to have violated positive obligations implicit economic, social and cultural rights, which were until then considered unenforceable by the courts. These decisions have inspired many countries throughout the world to constitutionalise socio-economic rights and to introduce judicial means of enforcing them. Over his long and illustrious career, Budlender has argued 87 reported cases.

In recognition of his distinguished service to the legal profession, Budlender was awarded senior counsel status in 2008. He has served as acting judge for a total of 15 months during which he authored at least six reported judgments. He has also contributed significantly to UCT including as a member (2002 – 2008) and chair (2004 – 2008) of council. Recently he received the Pro Bono Award from the International Bar Association in recognition of his immense contribution to social justice and public interest litigation. Geoffrey Budlender is eminently worthy of the award of LLD (*hc*).