

UCT Statement and Apology regarding Professor A B Mafeje

The late Professor Archie Mafeje, started his academic career at the University of Cape Town. He left UCT with exceptional credentials, including a first-class honours degree, and a Masters degree with distinction. He completed his training with a PhD from Cambridge University in 1966, and then began his career as a teacher and researcher.

In 1968 he was appointed as Senior Lecturer in Social Anthropology at UCT, but under severe government pressure the University Council rescinded the appointment. This was strongly opposed within the University at the time, and led *inter alia* to a week-long student sit-in during August 1968 in the university administration building, exactly 40 years ago.

Professor Mafeje went on to a distinguished academic career in other countries, becoming an influential scholar with many significant publications. He never returned to UCT, despite attempting to do so in the 1990s.

In 2003 UCT offered an honorary doctorate, which was never accepted, to Professor Mafeje in honour of his academic achievements, and his inspiration of young African researchers. Later in 2003 the University Council offered its sincere regret and apologies for the University's role in the events of 1968 – specifically its failure to defend adequately the right of the university to appoint academics without political interference, and hence its failure to protect Archie Mafeje's right to work at UCT.

It has become clear that the University did not do nearly enough in the 1990s to make it possible for Professor Mafeje to return to UCT, and that this remained an obstacle to his reconciliation with his alma mater.

In 1991 UCT made Professor Mafeje an offer of a one-year Senior Research Fellowship. The offer did not reflect the academic seniority and stature of Professor Mafeje, and he felt unable to take it up. Furthermore, the University failed to respond in a way which might have made acceptance possible.

In 1994 Professor Mafeje was a candidate for an advertised professorship at UCT. The selection committee encountered some difficulties in its processes, which contributed to a perception on Professor Mafeje's part that he was not treated fairly. The University should have recognised that for many reasons, every effort should be made to offer Professor Mafeje an appropriate position in the University and to persuade him to accept it, whether or not it was the particular professorship which had been advertised. Regrettably, this was not done.

We record therefore that significant opportunities were lost during the period of South Africa's transition to democracy to bring a very significant African scholar home to UCT. In this the University showed a serious lack of sensitivity, and it is a matter of profound regret that Professor Mafeje's life ended with these matters unresolved. The University now wishes to apologise to Professor Mafeje's family that it did not make a committed effort

to secure a place for Professor Mafeje at UCT, and that it may even have acted in a way that prejudiced Prof. Mafeje a second time in the 1990's. UCT also reiterates its regret regarding the Council's decision under government pressure to withdraw the appointment as senior lecturer in 1968.

In extending its further apologies to Professor Mafeje's family, the University commits itself to finding tangible ways in which the memory of a fine scholar of Africa might be acceptably and indelibly enshrined both at the University of Cape Town, and in the wider scholarly community.

- The University undertakes firstly, to permit access to scholars wishing to research the events surrounding Archie Mafeje at UCT to all relevant archival material without waiting the normal proscribed period, and to allow publication of any research resulting from this. However no individuals still living may be named or identified without their permission¹.
- UCT will fund and promote a festschrift to honour Professor Mafeje's life long body of scholarly work.
- UCT will create a post-graduate scholarship in the name of Archie Mafeje for a black South African scholar in the field of African Studies.
- UCT will rename the Senate Room in which the 1968 sit-in took place as the Archie Mafeje Room and erect an appropriate plaque recalling the history of the Mafeje affair.
- UCT will confer on Archie Mafeje posthumously the degree Doctor of Literature, Honouris Causa.

Dr Max Price
Vice-Chancellor, University of Cape Town
August 2008

¹ The University needs to ensure public confidence in the confidentiality and integrity of selection committee processes past and future. Consequently, scholars wishing to access material still within the 30 year archival protection period must first obtain the permission of the Vice-Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor will have to approve how any information obtained may be published or shared with third parties.