

Chancellor, I have the honour to present, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Social Sciences, honoris causa, Maria Mcdiarmid Ingouville Burton.

Last month, the bodies of four small children were found in the veld, just outside Verdwaal, about 1300km from this hall. They were Sebengu, Mapule, Nkune and Onkarabile (9, 7, 6 and 2 years old). They hadn't eaten properly in weeks. The night before, the last of the food had run out and their mother had borrowed some mealie meal from a neighbour. In the morning, she set off to find food at the next farm. The fatal journey began when the four children, hungry and thirsty, decided to follow her. It was a hot day, and it got even hotter. Eventually, after walking about 13km, they collapsed. The post mortem showed that they had died of hunger and dehydration, but the real killer was poverty.

Mary Burton is talking about children like these when she says: "Poverty. .. destroys the lives of a vast number of people". She is talking about families like these when she says: "Poverty is made more painful by the inequality which taunts it". She is talking about tragedies like these when she asks: "Where has our hope for a better society gone"?

Mary Burton has dedicated her life to working against poverty and inequality and for an ideal of a better society.

She was born in Argentina, grew up in Brazil and arrived in Cape Town as a young bride at the age of 22. Within a few months, she had joined a soup kitchen on the Cape Flats. There she saw children going for days without food, parents with no money and no jobs, entire families that had been uprooted from their city neighbourhoods.

Feeling that she wanted to do more than just repair work, but rather tackle the root cause, she joined the Black Sash. The root cause in this case was apartheid.

At that stage, the Black Sash was a small organisation of women protesting primly in hats and gloves. In the 60s and 70s it was very lonely – protesting alone (since they weren't allowed to stand together) and rejected by both whites and blacks. However, under her leadership, the Black Sash participated fully in the non-racial struggles of the 1980s and were teargassed, harassed and arrested.

She says: "Those years were hectic but also wonderful. It was liberating to be part of the forces for change and to feel that change was possible".

During that time, she raised four sons while completing a BA degree at UCT.

In 94, for South Africa's first democratic elections, Mary Burton was appointed Electoral Officer for the Western Cape. This involved working like crazy, many nights sleeping on the floor and waking to more crises and more turmoil; counting votes through the first night and through the next and the next and then - we had a miracle- a very successful, peaceful, first democratic election.

The Electoral Officer role required strong leadership. But it was Burton's personal qualities – her integrity, her sound judgment and her sense of balance that came to the fore as a

Commissioner on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In this role, she was called on to use both her head and her heart. This was a journey - from a past littered with horrendous events - to a future based on forgiveness and reconciliation.

Mary Burton has spent her life working tirelessly for human rights and civil liberties. She has never sought recognition. She has been awarded the Order of the Disa by the Premier of the Western Cape; the Reconciliation Award by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation and the Order of Luthuli – Silver for “raising the conscience of South Africans against the evils of apartheid and for her outstanding contribution to national reconciliation, nation building and peace”.

Mary Burton is still working for human rights and civil liberties. She is still working for national reconciliation and peace. Just six weeks ago, four children died needlessly of hunger. Their fatal journey began and ended in poverty.

In Mary Burton’s words: “As long as we have inequality and poverty, we will never be able to say that we have achieved reconciliation”.

Chancellor, I have the honour to invite you to admit to the degree of Doctor of Social Sciences, honoris causa, Maria Mcdiarmid Ingouville Burton.