



Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemarkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
La Grotto House, Glendarrach Rd, Rondebosch, Cape Town
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650-3733/2, Fax: +27 (0) 21 650-5682
Internet: www.uct.ac.za

Media Statement: Inaugural Gandhi Lecture at UCT

23 August 2007

The University of Cape Town's Vice-Chancellor and Principal Professor Njabulo S. Ndebele today hosted the inaugural public lecture of the Gandhi series with Mrs. Sonia Gandhi – Indian Member of Parliament and author, as the guest speaker. Mrs Gandhi's topic for the lecture was, "The relevance of Gandhian Philosophy in the 21st Century".

Mrs. Gandhi is the President of the Indian National Congress Party, and the Chairperson of the Coordinating Committee of the ruling United Progressive Alliance. She is also the Chairperson of the National Advisory Council – a government body set up to monitor the implementation of the National Common Minimum Programme of the Union Government.

The lecture, which took place at the UCT's Jameson Hall on Upper Campus, saw in attendance UCT Chancellor Mrs. Graça Machel, the South African Minister in the Presidency, Dr Essop Pahad, the Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, Mr. Anand Sharma and the High Commissioner of India in South Africa, Mr. Rajiv Kumar Bhatia, among others.

Opening the lecture, Professor Ndebele said UCT, as part of its mission, is committed to academic freedom, and it strives to cultivate critical enquiry and debate on issues of national and global importance. "The university therefore prides itself in bringing together people from all parts of the world to reflect on pertinent issues that have an impact on our society. It is for this reason we are honoured to be hosting the inaugural lecture in the Gandhi lecture series. And we are particularly pleased to have Mrs. Sonia Gandhi with us – as a woman in leadership; she embodies the very goals that UCT continuously aspires to attain through its vision and mission."

The Gandhi Lecture series has been established by the Government of India as part of a number of events that are taking place to commemorate the centenary of the historic Satyagraha movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi on 11th September 1906. The lecture series will take

place in major universities of the world under the auspices of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, with the objective of recalling the profound legacy of Mahatma Gandhi.

Professor Ndebele said UCT acknowledges the role that women play in society. “We honour them for the immense contribution they make to shaping our world. Advancing women in leadership is an integral part of the university’s transformation objectives, and over the years UCT has strived to promote women students and staff in all aspects of their academic and professional development.”

In reference to the historic development of women’s status at UCT, the Vice-Chancellor stated that UCT has been home to women who have broken the boundaries to become leaders in their time. “After 170 years under male leadership, UCT made a giant leap with the inauguration of our current chancellor, Mrs. Graça Machel, as the first woman, and the first black person to hold this honour. It was also at UCT that Dr. Mamphela Ramphele, physician and anthropologist, became the first woman and the first black person to hold the position of vice-chancellor in 1996”, he added.

In keeping with the university’s recognition of inspiring women leaders, UCT will confer an honorary degree – a Doctor of Laws honoris causa – on the Burmese Nobel Peace Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi in December this year for her extraordinary example and symbol of determination of women all over the world. Fellow Nobel Peace Laureate Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu will receive the degree on her behalf.

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