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UCT to award honorary doctorate to Zackie Achmat

The University of Cape Town (UCT) will award an honorary doctorate (LLD honoris causa) to Abdurrazak 'Zackie' Achmat at a graduation ceremony scheduled for Friday, 14 July 2017 at 09h00.

This is in recognition of his contribution to activism for social-justice in South Africa.

"Zackie Achmat's life work exemplifies UCT's values which seek the fostering of an institutional culture that protects and advances the transformative values of the Constitution, and promotes a more equitable and just society based on respect for human rights and human dignity," says Professor Hugh Corder, Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Institutional Innovation.

Achmat, who is particularly well-known for his work with the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), devoted his life to fighting injustice and oppression. In 1977, at the age of 15, he was detained by the security police for 14 days. He was a member of the ANC underground and UDF structures, taking a leading role for a period in the Marxist Workers Tendency of the ANC.

After the transition to democracy in 1994, Achmat took up a position at the AIDS Law Project. It was during his time at the AIDS Law Project that Achmat devoted his efforts towards issues of gay and lesbian rights, and then to the issue of antiretroviral provision and HIV/AIDS more broadly.

Achmat co-founded (and later directed) the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality (NCGLE). In his work with the AIDS Law Project and the NCGLE, he was involved in number of cases from the mid-1990s onwards that first established, and then enforced, the constitutional rights of gay and lesbian people in South Africa. Establishing a pattern that continued into other work, litigation was accompanied by political organising, education and mass mobilisation.

In 1995, Achmat and his colleagues secured an interdict preventing police harassment on the grounds of sexual orientation. This interdict was later followed by the decriminalisation

of gay sex; ensuring that same-sex couples were not discriminated against in their access to medical aid and pension benefits, or denied rights to permanent residence.

The formation of the TAC in 1998 signalled the next phase in Achmat's social activism. Through a series of court cases, the TAC compelled the government to provide treatment to people infected with HIV/AIDS. As a result in part of the TAC's victory South Africa now has the largest government antiretroviral treatment programme in the world.

In recent years, Achmat has been instrumental in the formation of social movements, Equal Education, the Social Justice Coalition, Ndifuna Ukwazi and Reclaim The City, focusing on schools, policing, sanitation infrastructure and access to urban land. Each of these campaigns, all of which are led principally by young black people, represent Achmat's approach to overcoming racism, sexism and social inequality through active political campaigning.

His advocacy has included a wide range of international causes including opposition to US-led wars in contravention of international law, vocal opposition to dictatorship and homophobia on the African continent and elsewhere, and activism to end violation of international law and occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel.

Achmat's contribution to public life has included regular writing, production of films and public speaking.

"Zackie Achmat's life has been devoted to the struggle for the building of a new social order based on dignity, equality and non-racism. He is indeed a worthy recipient of this honour," says Professor Corder.

ENDS

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