



**Communication and Marketing Department**  
**Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso**  
**Kommunikasie en Bemerkingsdepartement**

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa  
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town  
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

[www.uct.ac.za](http://www.uct.ac.za)

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## **UCT to honour Justice Mokgoro and Prof O'Connell**

### **First black female Constitutional Court judge and former UWC Vice-Chancellor to be awarded honorary doctorates**

The first black woman to be appointed to the Constitutional Court in post democratic South Africa, Justice Yvonne Mokgoro, and former Rector and Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Western Cape (UWC), Professor Brian O'Connell, will be awarded honorary degrees by the University of Cape Town (UCT) next week.

This will be in recognition of the significant contributions they have made to their fields and South Africa's democracy.

For her notable contributions to transformation and social justice that extend beyond the legal profession, Justice Mokgoro will receive an honorary degree as Doctor of Law from the Faculty of Law. She will be conferred her honorary degree on Saturday, 7 April 2018 at the 18:00 ceremony.

Prof O'Connell will receive an honorary degree as Doctor of Education from the Faculty of Humanities on Wednesday, 4 April 2018 at 10:00 for his engaged leadership in education and development locally and abroad.

The UCT graduation ceremonies will be held from 3-10 April.

### **Justice Jennifer Yvonne Mokgoro**

Justice Mokgoro served in the Constitutional Court since its inception in 1994 until the end of her 15-year term in 2009. She is regarded as a distinguished member of an illustrious bench. She showed excellent jurisprudence and a deep understanding of vernacular law and its relationship with the Constitution. Justice Mokgoro participated in writing pioneering legal opinions on the rights embodied in the South African Constitution.

Four rulings in particular stand out: that the regulation precluding foreign citizens from being employed as teachers was unfair (1998); that the right to social security in the Constitution vests in everybody and that it was unreasonable and discriminatory to exclude permanent residents from social grants (2004); that it is not permissible for a

bank to seize the property of defaulting debtors without a court order (2000); and that the sale in execution of a judgement debt of a person's home without judicial oversight is unconstitutional (2005). These judgments show her unwavering commitment to an imaginative and inclusive human rights jurisprudence.

She has made significant contributions to civil society organisations, including serving as President of Africa Legal Aid (which provides legal aid and human rights education throughout Africa), the Mandela-Rhodes Trust, the Africa Centre for Justice Innovation and chairing the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund.

She is honorary (emeritus) Professor of Law at the University of the North, UWC, UCT, University of Pretoria, and the University of South Africa. She is a recipient of a number of other honours and awards, including the Human Rights Award by the Black Lawyers Association, the Legal Profession's Woman Achiever Award by the Centre for Human Rights and the University of Pretoria, the Kate Stoneman Democracy Award (Albany Law School, New York, USA) and the James Wilson Award (University of Pennsylvania Law School).

### **Professor Brian O'Connell**

Against tough circumstances, Professor Brian O'Connell, former Rector and Vice-Chancellor of UWC, was instrumental in steering the institution to the position of a leading research university.

Under his leadership, UWC pioneered high-level computational genomics in Africa, had the biggest concentration of astrophysics in the country, hosted the national Centre for Excellence in Food Security and became the base for a four-university cooperation in nanoscience.

His contribution was not confined to university borders and his national impact is no more evident than in his role in combatting ignorance around HIV/AIDS. As a result, he was made chairperson of Higher Education South Africa's (HESA) strategic advisory committee on HIV/AIDS and represented HESA on the South African National Aids Council from 2005 to 2014.

His engaged leadership, intellectualism and passion for education and development has been recognised by various institutions globally. Over and above the fellowships and grants he has received over the years, O'Connell has been awarded honorary doctorates from the University of Missouri and the University of South Africa, a Belgian Order of Knighthood and the Paul Harris Award of Rotary International.

Most recently, O'Connell received the National Research Foundation's Lifetime Achievement Award which is "awarded to individuals considered to have made extraordinary contributions, of international standard and impact, to the development of science in and for South Africa over an extended period of time. An additional consideration is the manner in which their work has touched and shaped the lives and views of many South Africans."

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**Aamirah Sunday**

Media Liaison and Monitoring Officer  
Communication and Marketing Department  
University of Cape Town  
Rondebosch

Tel: (021) 650 5427

Fax: (021) 650 3780

Cell: (076) 947 6071

Email: [aamirah.sunday@uct.ac.za](mailto:aamirah.sunday@uct.ac.za)

Website: [www.uct.ac.za](http://www.uct.ac.za)