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UCT to confer honorary doctorate on anti-apartheid activist Denis Goldberg

The University of Cape Town (UCT) will confer an honorary doctorate on anti-apartheid activist and philanthropist Denis Goldberg at a graduation ceremony on 12 July 2019.

Goldberg was born in Cape Town in 1933. He completed his basic education in Observatory and then proceeded to study at UCT, where he graduated in 1955 with a Bachelor of Science in civil engineering. He was an anti-apartheid activist and a member of the Modern Youth Society; he served the Congress of Democrats as treasurer and chairperson at various times; and he was active on an organising committee for the Congress of the People.

Commenting on the honorary doctorate, UCT Vice-Chancellor Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng said: "This is in recognition of his courageous and selfless role in the anti-apartheid struggle over decades, which saw him becoming one of the central figures in the liberation of our country. Mr Goldberg is considered a moral beacon for the new South Africa."

Goldberg's political activism led to his dismissal from his job on the South African Railways, and in 1960 he was detained for four months and declared a banned person. Three years later he joined Umkhonto weSizwe as a technical officer and worked on the plan for Operation Mayibuye. Later in the year he was arrested at Liliesleaf Farm in Rivonia and, following the Rivonia Trial, was sentenced to four terms of life imprisonment in 1964. As the only white person convicted, he was isolated from his comrades and imprisoned in Pretoria. During his imprisonment he obtained a degree in public administration (1969), a BA (1975) and a degree in library science (1981). He was finally released from prison in 1985.

After his release, Goldberg served in the London Mission of the ANC as spokesperson until 1994. He returned to South Africa in 2002 and served as a special advisor to two successive ministers of Water Affairs. Despite the multiple influential positions Goldberg

held in the state and party, he has always retained the ability to be deeply critical of those transgressing what he sees as the core values of the ruling party. He has been a fierce critic of “state capture” by external forces, and of the degrading of the moral stature of the party he joined as a young man – for which he said he was prepared to die. Throughout his life he has been fearless in speaking truth to power.

He has made substantial contributions to civil society, most notably by serving as director of the development organisation Community HEART (Health, Education and Reconstruction Training) in London between 1994 and 2002, and now as honorary president.

Goldberg established the Denis Goldberg Legacy Foundation Trust in 2016. The core project of the Trust is the establishment of the House of Hope Art and Culture Education Centre in Hout Bay as a place where children from the local communities can come together to dream, to grow, to learn and to enrich their lives.

Professor Phakeng remarked: “As a UCT alumnus, Goldberg represents the very best of this institution’s values and culture. We are pleased that the university will bestow an honorary doctorate on a person of his calibre.”

UCT’s Development and Alumni Department will, as part of their Distinguished Alumni Speaker Series, host a special screening of a documentary featuring Goldberg, [Life is Wonderful: Mandela’s Unsung Heroes](#), on 18 July from 17:00 to 21:00.

ENDS

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