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UCT Vice-Chancellor dedicates honorary doctorate to African women who paved the path

University of Cape Town Vice-Chancellor Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng has dedicated her honorary doctorate granted by the University of Ottawa to “three of the many African women who chose to challenge the status quo and fight for a world where women are equal”.

Professor Phakeng is among the nine distinguished recipients of honorary doctorates from uOttawa for “their substantial contributions to their profession, to science and/or to society at large”. She was honoured at the Faculty of Education graduation ceremony on Tuesday, 7 June 2022.

The Dean of the Faculty of Education, Professor Richard Barwell, described Phakeng as “an individual who has exemplified the values of the University of Ottawa during an inspiring career, “a trailblazer and a leader”, and a significant scholar in her field”.

“The University of Ottawa is proud and honoured to confer an honorary doctorate to Mamokgethi Phakeng in recognition of her achievements in mathematics, science and education and her commitment to social justice, to education and to the people of South Africa,” said Professor Barwell.

Phakeng said she was honoured to be recognised through the honorary doctorate.

“I want to dedicate this honorary doctorate to all the African women who paved the path for the freedom of people like myself, to dream big dreams and want to change the world for the better irrespective of how hard it may be. It gave us permission to dream big and want to change the world,” said Phakeng.

She mentioned specifically three of these women – her mother, Wendy Mmutlana (who bravely went back to finish high school after working as a domestic worker, getting married and giving birth to three children); Wangari Mathai (the first black African woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004); and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (the seventh Director-General of the World Trade Organisation who took office in March 2021, becoming the first woman and the first black African in this role).

“These are just three of the many African women who chose to challenge the status quo and fight for a world where women are equal. To them I want to say today thank you for showing the way. Thank you for breaking ground. I'm finding it hard right now. I cannot imagine how hard it has been for all those women who broke the ground so the people like me can find it a little easier,” said Phakeng.

She however acknowledged that the road was still long for women. “Of course, it is not over because black African women are still getting the short end of the stick on most growth and development indices today. But the journey has started and we will get there.”

- [Watch a video recording of the ceremony](#) (timestamp 01:22:00).
- [Download pictures](#).

It was the second honorary doctorate bestowed on Phakeng by an international university in a period of three years. This follows her being recognised by the UK's Bristol University in July 2019.

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