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CITATION FOR THE AWARD OF AN HONORARY  
- DOCTORATE BY THE  
UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE  
GOVAN ARCHIBALD MVUMYELWA MBEKI  
Chancellor

I have the honour to present for the degree of Doc:or  
Philosophiae (Honoris Causa) Govan Archibald Myumyelwa  
Mbeki.

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The University of the Western Cape provides tertiary education mainly to black South Africans. It is an academic institution commanding national and international respect for its distinctive adherence to education in a context of transformation. The Senate and Council of the university have clearly declared itself against apartheid and committed the institution to the educational service of particularly the oppressed and disadvantaged people of South Africa, while the university seeks to establish itself as an "intellectual home of the Left".

The life and career of Govan Mbeki, in signal degree, reflect these aspects of UWC itself. Born in the classically colonial setting of the Transkei, excelling in school and university education achieved by few black South Africans of his generation, he devoted his intellectual, moral and political capacities to the achievement of a more just, equitable, rational and humane society. As teacher, author, journalist, elected office-holder and leader he led a public life that contributed significantly to the forces of opposition in an increasingly racist and authoritarian South Africa.

For these activities Govan Mbeki was variously detained, banned, put under house arrest, and - in 1964 - sentenced to life imprisonment. In November 1987, after serving 23 years on Robben Island, he was released; only to be served - in December of the same year - with severe restriction orders which have been lifted only two weeks ago. In his political activities, Govan Mbeki is representative of a generation of leadership - together with Xuma, Mandela, Sisulu, Luthuli and Fischer - that profoundly shaped non-racial opposition to segregation and apartheid in the 1940s, 1950s - and early 1960s. At the same time - as commentator, analyst, reporter and historian - he attained distinction and authority as thinker and theorist.

'His first published work, *Transkei in the Making*, appeared in 1939. His was one of the guiding minds behind the historic "African Claims" of 1943. Some of the most trenchant journalism of the 1940s and 1950s flowed from his prolific pen. A remarkable study published in 1964 under the title *The Peasants' Revolt*, and reissued in 1987, remains a quarter of a century later the indispensable starting point for academic enquiry into the Pondoland uprising of 1960/61. Perhaps more than any other leading South African politician, Govan Mbeki experienced and reflected the tensions and complexities of both urban and rural life. He worked in Johannesburg, Durban and Port Elizabeth - but also devoted enormous energies to the Transkei and rural eastern Cape. Theoretically, he insisted to an unusual degree upon the potential importance of rural mobilisation and struggle; practically, he has been recognised for the salience of his contribution to urban organisation in Port Elizabeth. The combination of these spheres remains unique in South African history. In any list of intellectuals of the South African Left, the name of Govan Mbeki must occupy a prominent position.

Between 1937 and 1960 Govan Mbeki worked mainly as teacher and newspaper editor, with a shorter spell as manager of a cooperative store. He taught at secondary schools and at Adams College in Natal. From 1939 to 1944 he was editor of *Territorial Magazine*, and Port Elizabeth editor of *New Age* from 1955 to 1960.

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In his active public life spanning decades, he held many offices and served in various capacities. In 1943 he was a member of the drafting committee of the document *African Claims in South Africa* and in 1955 served on the joint committee of the Congress Alliance organising the "Congress of the People" where the Freedom Charter was adopted. In 1956 he was elected National Chairman of the African National Congress; in 1960 led the ANC delegation at the Conference of African Leaders; and in 1963 became a member of the High Command of *Umkhonto we Sizwe*. In 1969 Govan Mbeki was awarded *Isithwalandwe*, the highest decoration of the African National Congress.

The remarkable combination of activism and intellectual achievement in the life and work of Govan Mbeki has already been recognised by institutions of tertiary education. He was the first member of the governing council of his alma mater Fort Hare to be elected by ex-graduates of that university, and was subsequently elected as President of its alumni organisation. In 1978 he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Amsterdam - and the same university has established the Govan Mbeki Fund (for research into South Africa) in recognition of his contribution to critical thought. .

Govan Mbeki's personal dedication to university study spans decades. After graduating as a Bachelor of Arts and a Diploma of Education at Fort Hare in the 1930s, he studied for and was awarded a University of South Africa Bachelor of Economics in 1940; during incarceration on Robben Island he was awarded an Honours degree in Economics and also achieved non-degree credits in other subjects (including Afrikaans). Born in the year that the Union of South Africa was created, Govan Mbeki is now in his eightieth year. Today he speaks across generations and enjoys the admiration of millions of South Africans. His adult life has exemplified intellect harnessed to action, practice informed by theory. The University of the Western Cape was parented by apartheid, grew up in opposition to apartheid and announced its maturity by a "rejection of the politico-ideological grounds on which it was established". By awarding Govan Mbeki this honorary doctorate, the University of the Western Cape simultaneously celebrates the eminence of a remarkable South African and attests to its own ideals and vision.

Chancellor, it is my privilege to ask you to confer the degree of Doctor Philosophiae (Honoris Causa) on Govan Archibald Mvumyelwa Mbeki.

WEDNESDAY 29 NOVEMBER 1989