

Albie Sachs Introduction
10 May 2010
Ruth First Scholarship Launch
Lecture

Judge Albie Sachs, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Deans, Heads of Department, Judges, colleagues, students, ladies and gentlemen.

Welcome to this event and lecture by Judge Sachs to celebrate the launch of the **Ruth First Scholarship**, an initiative of Rhodes University and the Ruth First Memorial Trust, based in the United Kingdom.

The Ruth First Scholarship is intended to support students studying full-time at Rhodes University towards either a Doctoral or Masters degree in politics, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, economics, social policy,

democracy studies, development studies, media studies, or in cognate disciplines with a strong critical intellectual and human rights orientation.

The scholarship is specifically intended to support candidates whose work is in the spirit of Ruth First's life and work, poses difficult social questions, and who are interested in linking knowledge, politics, scholarship and action.

Albie Sachs and Ruth First were friends, comrades, and activists, who were active in the national liberation struggle and movement, and who dedicated their lives to human emancipation.

Both took part in the the Congress of the People held at Kliptown in 1955, at which the famous

Freedom Charter was drafted – the drafting committee included Ruth First.

Judge Sachs and Ruth First found a political home in the African National Congress, they were both exiled, and lived for many years in Mozambique, where while continuing to be political activists, they also worked as academics and critical scholars.

In 1977 Ruth was appointed professor and research director of the Centre for African Studies at the Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo, Mozambique. She began work on the lives of migrant labourers, particularly those who worked on the South African gold mines. The results of this study were published as *Black gold: the Mozambican miner* (1983).

Following a UNESCO conference at the Center on 17 August 1982, Ruth was killed by a letter bomb originating from military sources within South Africa.

On turning six, during World War II, Albie Sachs received a card from his father, Emil Solomon Sachs, expressing the wish that he would grow up to be a soldier in the fight for liberation.

His career in human rights activism started at the age of seventeen, when as a second year law student at the University of Cape Town, he took part in the Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign. Three years later he attended the Congress of the People at Kliptown.

He started practice as an advocate at the Cape Bar aged 21. The bulk of his work involved defending people charged under racist statutes and repressive security laws. Many faced the

death sentence. He himself was raided by the security police, subjected to banning orders restricting his movement and eventually placed in solitary confinement without trial for two prolonged spells of detention.

In 1966 he went into exile.

Albie spent eleven years studying and teaching law in England, and a further eleven years in Mozambique working as a law professor and legal researcher. On 7 April 1988, a bomb that was placed in his car in Maputo by South African security agents blew up. He lost an arm and the sight of one eye.

During the 1980s working closely with Oliver Tambo, leader of the ANC in exile, he helped draft the organisation's Code of Conduct, as well as its statutes. After recovering from the bomb he devoted himself full-time to

preparations for a new democratic Constitution for South Africa.

In 1990 he returned home and as a member of the Constitutional Committee and the National Executive of the ANC took an active part in the negotiations which led to South Africa becoming a constitutional democracy. After the first democratic election in 1994 he was appointed by President Nelson Mandela to serve on the newly established Constitutional Court.

In addition to his work on the Court, he has travelled to many countries sharing South African experiences in healing divided societies. He has also been engaged in the sphere of art and architecture, and played an active role in the development of the Constitutional Court building and its art collection on the site of the Old Fort Prison in Johannesburg.

Albie's 15-year term on the Constitutional Court ended on 11 October 2009.

Academic Degrees

BA and LLB, University of Cape Town (1951 - 1953; 1955 - 1956)

PHD, University of Sussex (1971)

Honorary Doctorates from the Universities of:

Antwerp

Cape Town

Edinburgh

London

Southampton

Sussex

Ulster

York (Ontario)

Western Cape

and the William Mitchell College of Law

Books published include:

- The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs (Collins)
- Stephanie on Trial (Harvil Press)

The above two books were dramatized by David Edgar for the Royal Shakespeare Company and filmed for the BBC.

- Justice in South Africa (Heinemann, Sussex University Press and University of California Press)
- Sexism and the Law (Free Press)
- Liberating the Law, Liberating the People (with Gita Honwana Welch) (Zed Press)
- Island in Chains (with Indres Naidoo) (Penguin Books and Random House)
- The Soft Vengeance of a Freedom Fighter (Harper- Collins; University of California Press)
- Protecting Human Rights in a new South Africa (Oxford University Press)

- Advancing Human Rights in South Africa (Oxford University Press)
- The Free Diary of Albie Sachs (Random House)
- The Strange Alchemy of Life and Law (Oxford University Press)

Membership

Albie is also an Honorary Benchers of Lincolns Inn, Member of the Appeals Commission of the International Cricket Council, Head of the Panel that chose the design for the logo for the 2010 Soccer World Cup.