

CITATION FOR RAYMOND LOUW

Honorary graduand, Rhodes University, 13 April 2012

By Professor Paul Maylam

In September last year in Taiwan the International Press Institute bestowed World Press Freedom Hero Awards on two journalists – one was the American, Daniel Pearl, who was murdered some years ago in Pakistan while tracking a suspected al-Qaeda bomber; the other was Raymond Louw, honoured for a sixty-seven-year career in journalism, during which time he has been South Africa's leading campaigner for media freedom.

This career dates back to 1944 when, aged eighteen, he began work as a copyholder with South African Associated Newspapers; then two years later joining the liberal anti-apartheid newspaper, the *Rand Daily Mail*, as a reporter. After a stint working for local newspapers in the UK in the early 1950s, he would return to the *Rand Daily Mail* as news editor in 1960, before taking on the editorship for an eleven-year term from 1966. He was thus at the forefront of oppositional journalism during momentous, turbulent times in South Africa's history – when apartheid was at its height in the 1960s, and when extraparliamentary opposition was on the rise in the 1970s – the time of Steve Biko and the black consciousness movement, the growing black trade union movement from 1973, and the Soweto uprising of 1976. All this required tough, uncompromising journalism – risky, pioneering investigative reporting and sharp, critical editorial stances. Raymond Louw ensured that the *Rand Daily Mail* would fulfil this oppositional role – and in the process so getting under the skin of the National Party government that prime minister John Vorster tried secretly to buy the newspaper through a front man and turn it into a pro-government mouthpiece. Having failed to do this the government, in a major scandal, illegally spent R30

million of taxpayers' money to establish *The Citizen*, an English-language newspaper that would give its full backing to the apartheid government.

Raymond Louw was for long a thorn in the side of this government, not just as a journalist, but also as an activist – joining numerous deputations to cabinet ministers and government officials in the cause of press freedom, making representations to government commissions investigating the press in the 1970s, as well as to another commission of inquiry into the 1976 Soweto revolt.

After leaving the *Rand Daily Mail* in 1977 he continued to combine the roles of journalist and media activist – from 1983 until last year editing and publishing the *Southern Africa Report*, a weekly current affairs briefing; helping to found, and chairing from 1985 to 1994, the Campaign for Open Media, which made representations on freedom of expression issues for inclusion in the country's post-1994 Bill of Rights; in 1987 addressing the United Nations Human Rights Commission on the need to entrench press freedom as a human right; two years later participating in a delegation that met with the ANC in Lusaka – one of those meetings that paved the way for democracy in South Africa. And during that transition period in the early 1990s Raymond Louw co-chaired the Campaign for Independent Broadcasting, calling for the establishment of an independent SABC, an open process for selecting SABC board members, and an independent broadcasting regulator, which would indeed come into being as ICASA, the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa.

Raymond Louw's commitment to media freedom has continued in the post-apartheid era – as one of the founders and a council member of the South African National Editors' Forum, through which he has made representations against serious media restrictions written into various parliamentary bills; or as chairperson of the anti-censorship watchdog, the Freedom of

Expression Institute, from 1994 to 1997; and as deputy chairperson of the governing council for the South African chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa, an organisation that monitors the media environment and engages in lobbying.

Raymond Louw's relentless endeavours in the cause of media freedom have extended into the international arena – as a fellow of the International Press Institute; and as an Africa consultant for the World Press Freedom Committee he has made representations to governments in Cameroon, Morocco, Sierra Leone, Burundi and Gambia, calling for the release of jailed newspaper editors. There have been, too, his representations to the African Union calling for the fostering of a free and independent media as a criterion for good governance on the continent – culminating in his key role in persuading the World Association of Newspapers in 2007 to issue the Declaration of Table Mountain, calling on African governments to review and repeal laws restricting media freedom. In South Africa more recently this consistent stand has led him to voice his resolute opposition to the government's secrecy bill currently passing through parliament.

All this has required immense stamina, as he travels around the world, campaigning and working at a pace that would exhaust most people half his age. Throughout he has retained a wonderful sense of humour – able to inject humour into the most tense situation – and a capacity for fun and enjoyment – known to be the life and soul of any party.

For his decades of work in the media Raymond Louw has won many awards: the Pringle Medal for services to journalism, twice awarded by the South African Society of Journalists; the Media Institute of Southern Africa's Media Freedom Award; the South African National Editors' Forum Wrottesley Award; the Mondi-Shanduka Newspaper Lifetime Achiever Award; another Lifetime Achiever Award in the Vodacom journalist of the year

awards; the International Press Institute award for Press Freedom Campaigning.

And now an honorary doctorate from Rhodes University, to be bestowed on a man affectionately known as 'oom Ray', a forthright public intellectual, author of numerous articles and papers, a media figure fondly remembered by black journalists who feel he has been sensitive to their interests, a champion of journalists' rights, a tireless campaigner who calls himself a 'soldiering journalist', and has been described as a 'war-horse for media freedom' over many decades.

Mr Chancellor, I have the honour to request you to confer on Raymond Louw the degree of Doctor of Literature, *honoris causa*.