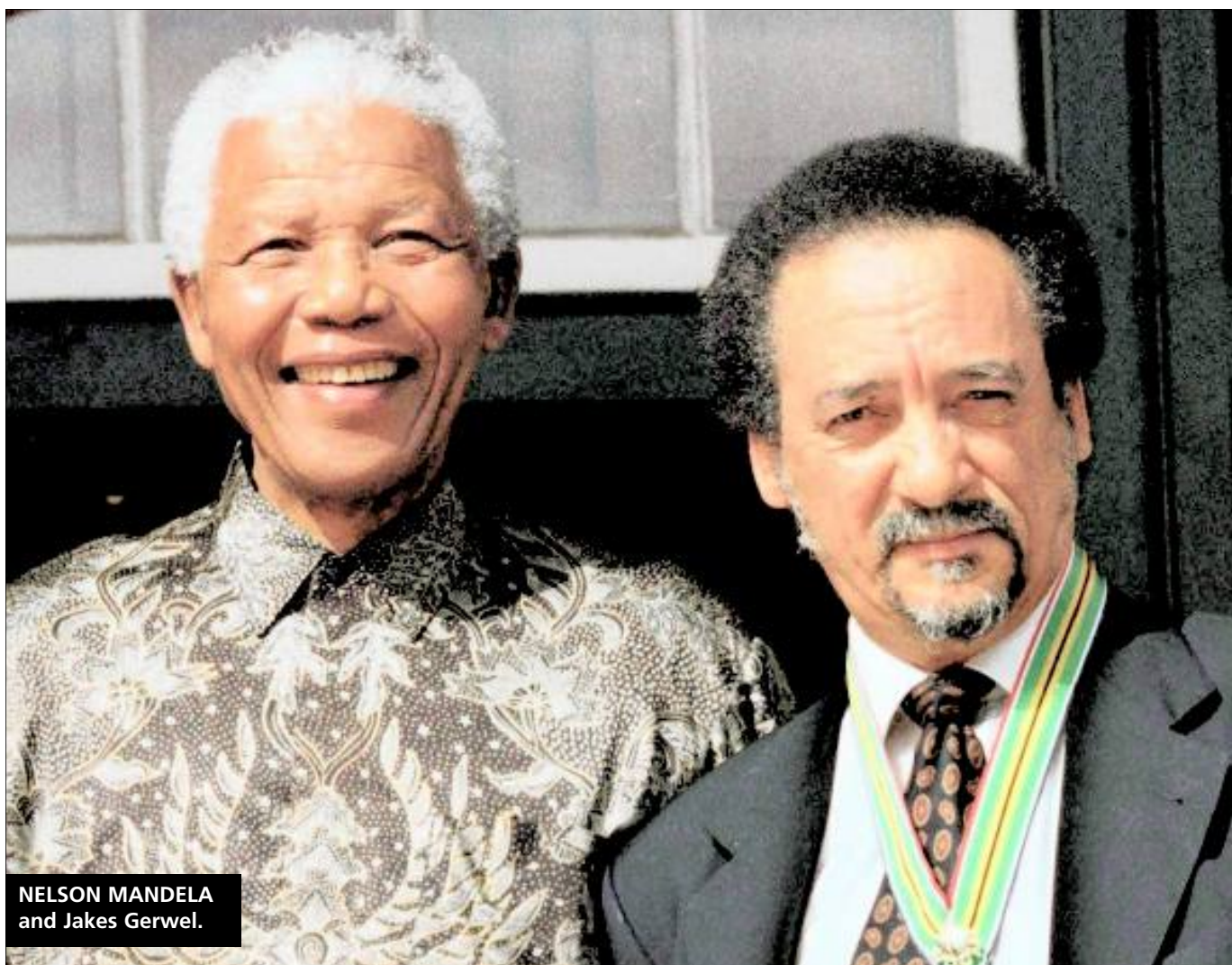


Hamba kahle, Chancellor Gerwel

Co-ordinated by: Brent Cole – 021 488 4174, Special Projects, Independent Newspapers, Cape

‘The nation drew inspiration from its defiant transformation of itself from an apartheid ethnic institution into a proud national asset: from its concrete and manifest concern for the poor, for women and rural communities, and from its readiness to grapple with the kinds of problems that a free and democratic South Africa was to deal with later’



NELSON MANDELA and Jakes Gerwel.

A humble man of intellect and integrity

SALEEM BADAT
VICE-CHANCELLOR,
RHODES UNIVERSITY

ONE of the first messages of condolences following the death of Rhodes University Chancellor Professor Jakes Gerwel came from a retired academic who said he was “a good and great man. He will be hard to replace”.

The chairperson of Rhodes’ UK Trust, Geoffrey de Jager, wrote: “What sad and devastating news. A great man who often gave me wise counsel. His death will leave a big void in many people’s lives”.

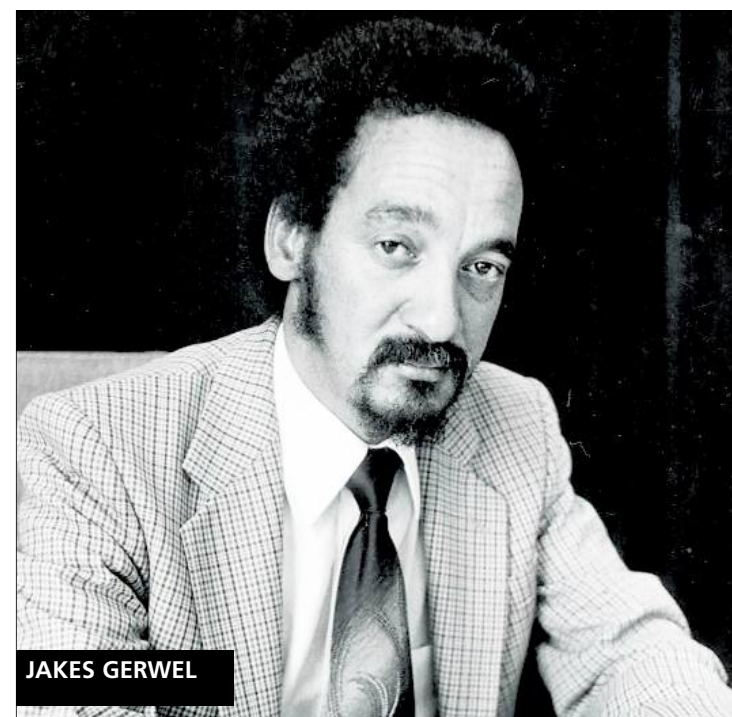
I first met Jakes Gerwel in 1987 at the London apartment of former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aziz Pahad. This was soon after Gerwel became vice-chancellor of the University of the Western Cape (UWC). I was excited by his commitment to make UWC the “intellectual home of the democratic left”, and was thrilled when he invited me to consider joining UWC when I returned to South Africa.

Joining UWC in 1989 was the smartest thing that I have done in my life. Many black intellectuals and scholars like myself owe our achievements and positions to Gerwel’s bold, inspired leadership, and the exciting intellectual environment that he cultivated at UWC. And so it was exciting to be formally linked with him again when I became vice-chancellor at Rhodes in 2006.

He will be fondly remembered and greatly missed as chancellor of Rhodes University. A humble, gentle man of great integrity with a lively mind and intellect, he was always a source of good judgement and wise counsel. He will be warmly remembered for the grace and dignity with which he officiated at the university’s graduation ceremonies and capped thousands of graduating students.

Born on January 18, 1946 in Somerset East in rural Eastern Cape, Professor Gert Johannes Gerwel was a product of historically disadvantaged schools in the Eastern Cape. Like most black South Africans of rural backgrounds, he had to triumph over the apartheid and Verwoerdian dictum that there was no place for blacks beyond being hewers of wood and drawers of water.

In a country deeply challenged to improve schooling so as to realise the



JAKES GERWEL

potential and talents of all our youth, his example of a rural boy who achieved remarkable success under adverse conditions must serve as a source of inspiration for young people who struggle under the burden of dismal educational opportunities.

Gerwel was an exceptional, courageous, gifted and pioneering South African intellectual, scholar, leader, citizen and person with a profound commitment to creating a just and humane society.

Through a long and distinguished association with the higher education sector, as an academic, dean, vice-chancellor, chairperson of the Committee of University Principals in the early 1990s, chancellor, and chairperson of the Mandela Rhodes Foundation, Gerwel was an outstanding champion of higher education.

As chancellor, he challenged Rhodes to become socially conscious and think critically and imaginatively about access, equity and transformation, and about its role in socio-economic development issues in South Africa, especially in the Eastern Cape.

On accepting an honorary doctorate from Rhodes, Gerwel said: “Universities are both central agents for change and steady beacons of continuity and tradition.” His leadership

ensured that these twin and paradoxical goals received constant close attention.

He was a strong advocate of Rhodes University pursuing, in a principled manner, equity with quality and quality with equity. He took pride in the university’s academic achievements and performance in research and teaching and its increasing involvement in community engagement.

The Jakes Gerwel Rhodes University Scholarship Fund is testimony to his own life of achievement and supports Eastern Cape students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds to attend Rhodes University and graduate from one of South Africa’s leading universities.

Gerwel was not only a significant figure in higher education, but he was also an important beacon in the economic, social and political life of South Africa more generally.

There were many pioneering firsts. On June 5, 1987 he became the first radical vice-chancellor, not only of the University of Western Cape but of any South African university.

He led the rejection of the apartheid principles on which UWC had been established. Noting that the “Afrikaans universities stand firmly within the operative context of Afrikaner nationalism”, and that the “English-language universities operate within the contexts of anglophile liberalism”, he observed that there was no university linked to “those people and institutions working for a fundamental transformation of the old settler-colonial order”.

In this context, he declared that UWC faced “the historical imperative to respond to the democratic left, to be an intellectual home for the left”. This meant that UWC had to “develop a critical alignment with the democratic movement” and had to “educate towards and for a change society”.

Gerwel stated that he could not “in conscience, in truth, educate or lead education, towards the reproduction and maintenance of a social order which is undemocratic, discriminatory, exploitative and repressive”. Universities, instead, had to promote “through example a democratic culture”.

Gerwel was too good and thoughtful an intellectual to reduce a university to a political institution. He observed that a university can never “have a corporate opinion” nor compromise its “essential identity as ‘disinterested’ searchers after Truth”.

President Mandela has noted: “The nation drew inspiration from its defiant transformation of itself from an apartheid ethnic institution into a proud national asset: from its concrete and manifest concern for the poor, for women and rural communities, and from its readiness to grapple with the kinds of problems that a free and democratic South Africa was to deal with later”.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu recalled Gerwel saying, especially at a time when it was unpopular: “We are on the side of the downtrodden, we are going to work for the upliftment of our people”.

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Tribute to a humanist and an intellectual
Prof Jakes Gerwel

The University of Pretoria honours Prof Jakes Gerwel for the conciliatory role he played in South Africa, and for the contribution he made towards uniting Afrikaans speakers. We treasure his legacy as a humanist and an intellectual. South Africa has suffered a severe loss in the passing of Prof Gerwel, but at the same time gained immensely from his life of selfless service to his country and its people.

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Cape Peninsula University of Technology

On behalf of the University community, the Vice-Chancellor of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Professor LV Mazwi-Tanga expresses her deepest condolences to Mrs Gerwel and family on the passing of her husband, Professor Jakes Gerwel.

Professor Gerwel’s immense contribution to South African society, especially in the field of education, will live on.

Prof Jakes Gerwel
has been our beloved Chairman for 9 years. He has made a significant contribution to our company and our lives.

A renowned humanitarian – his passion for people, profound wisdom and commitment to nation building will continue to guide us.

It has been an honour to have a man of his stature and insight on our team.

He will be forever missed.

Life Group Making life better

RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn

Prof Jakes Gerwel

Rhodes University mourns and lowers its flag on the passing of its Chancellor, Prof Gert Johannes (Jakes) Gerwel.

He served as the Chancellor of Rhodes University for over 13 years, having been appointed to the position on 9 April 1999.

Vice-Chancellor Dr Saleem Badat said that one of the first messages of condolence he received was from a retired Rhodes academic that said Prof Jakes Gerwel was “a good and great man. He will be hard to replace.”

Indeed, he will be fondly remembered and greatly missed as Chancellor. A gentle man with a lively mind and intellect he was always a source of wise counsel. He will also be warmly remembered for the dignity with which he officiated at the University’s graduation ceremonies and capped thousands of graduating students.

The numerous honorary doctorates awarded to Prof Gerwel and his extensive leadership roles in civil society and business organisations are testimony to the respect that he enjoyed in all quarters of society.

On accepting an honorary doctorate from Rhodes, Prof Gerwel said ‘universities are both central agents for change and steady beacons of continuity and tradition’. His leadership as Chancellor ensured that these twin and paradoxical goals received close attention.

Prof Gerwel was also a strong advocate of Rhodes University pursuing equity with quality and quality with equity. He took pride in the University’s academic achievements and performance in research and teaching and increasing community engagement.

The University expresses its deepest condolences to Prof Gerwel’s wife and wonderful companion, Phoebe, and the entire Gerwel family.

The University and South African flags at Rhodes will fly at half-mast until after the funeral service for Prof Gerwel.

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