**Citation for Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, honorary graduand, Rhodes University, October 2020.**

If one was to identify some of the key long-standing problems facing South Africa in recent years, the list would certainly include: inequality and poverty; violence against women and children; HIV/AIDS; a deficient educational system. There are surely few people in the country who have been more at the forefront in highlighting and addressing these issues than Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka. For the past seven or so years she has been extremely well-positioned to take on these problems in her position as Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, serving as the Executive Director of United Nations Women – a position which enables her to drive the gender equality agenda.

What have been the foundations of Dr Mlambo-Ngcuka’s outstanding, wide-ranging career? First, her childhood – born in Clermont, Durban, she was fortunate to have parents who instilled in her an ethos which prioritised serving others – her mother, a community health nurse, a particular inspiration.

Second Dr Mlambo-Ngcuka’s own enriching educational path – matriculating from the renowned Ohlange High School in Inanda (later returning there for a two-year stint as a teacher); a bachelor’s degree from the National University of Lesotho; a UCT masters degree, for a thesis focused on educational planning and policy. And a doctorate from the University of Warwick – education again the subject of the thesis, which examined the use of mobile technologies to support teacher development in poor countries – a particularly salient topic at this current time of remote learning brought on by the pandemic.

It is difficult to do justice to Dr Mlambo-Ngcuka’s distinguished career which has spanned a range of diverse activities and involvements. Here it is only possible to highlight a few of them: being appointed in 1983 as the first president of the Natal Organisation of Women, which was affiliated to the United Democratic Front, the anti-apartheid movement. From 1984 to 1987 working as a youth director for the Young Women’s Christian Association in Geneva, where she campaigned for educational development in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. From 1987 to 1989 directing a Cape Town-based development organisation and becoming involved in running skills training programmes for women in informal settlements. Undertaking similar work in the early 1990s while working for the World University Service, helping to promote literacy and rural development in marginalised communities. In 1994 becoming an ANC MP in the country’s first democratic parliament, rising to the position of Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry in 1996, then to Minister of Minerals and Energy in 1999, then to Deputy President in 2005, replacing Jacob Zuma who had been dismissed by President Mbeki, becoming the first woman to hold that position.

As Deputy president she oversaw programmes to combat poverty; in 2006 she launched and championed the Accelerated Growth Initiative for South Africa which aimed to promote growth in industries with high potential, while also leading the Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition, which aimed to develop the necessary skills and capacity to further growth. She resigned her position as Deputy president in 2008 following the resignation of President Mbeki after he had been recalled by the ANC’s national executive committee to prepare the way for Zuma to assume the presidency in 2009.

Since her resignation there has been no let-up in Dr Mlambo-Ngcuka’s commitment to public service and social justice – very soon, in 2008, establishing the Umlambo Foundation which provided support to schools in impoverished areas by offering coaching for teachers.

Her most important work has probably been undertaken in her role at the United Nations since 2013 – there a driving-force in promoting gender equality - helping, for example, to launch the ‘HeForShe’ campaign which encourages high-profile men to stand up for gender equality, to ensure the improvement of women’s wages, and to remove the glass ceiling that stalls the rise of women in the business sector. Two years ago she was appointed by the UN Secretary-General to sit on the UN Task Force on the Digital Financing of Sustainable Development Goals. Add to this her involvement in the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, and her board membership of the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children – then you have a formidable range of involvements on her part.

Dr Mlambo-Ngcuka has to be one of the country’s foremost champions of the rights of women. She expresses hope for the future, seeing in today’s generation of young women ‘powerful role models who have already found their voice and are taking the world stage to exercise that power as new leaders’. ‘From resisting violence against women’, she says, ‘to climate action, to asserting the rights of a girl and a woman to determine what happens to her body, UN Women stands by them and works to amplify their power and their calls for change’. She has gone on to say that ending poverty in the world can never happen without women. And there is her belief that advances in technology can help women – giving them education in health matters, enabling girls to obtain an education without having to go to school, where violence can be a problem.

Rhodes University is proud to honour one of South Africa’s most outstanding daughters, renowned for her accomplishments as an anti-apartheid activist, as a politician rising to the position of Deputy President, as a high-profile figure at the United Nations. To be honoured here especially for her community engagement, her promotion of human rights, for her contribution to educational development – particularly through the utilisation of technology – for her work as a champion of gender equality, and for serving as a wonderful role model for students and graduates of Rhodes University.

Mr Chancellor, I have the honour to request you to confer on Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa.*