**Citation: Valerie AMOS**

Valerie Amos, properly styled The Right Honourable The Baroness Amos of Brondesbury, was born in British Guyana on 13 March 1954. She immigrated to the United Kingdom with her parents as a child and attended schools in England in the 1960s. After the Second World War, immigration from the Caribbean was public policy in order to provide unskilled labour in factories for what were then a period of booming industrialisation, as well as the growing provision of public service facilities such as transport and health care. By the 1960s Caribbean immigration had settled, and especially English cities had a considerable black presence. In some cities, like London, black Caribbean British people were concentrated in particular suburbs.

Discrimination was being experienced by the so-called new immigrants, housing had become ghettoized, and education for the black British was lamentable. At the same time studies showed that black youth were dropping out of schools, and the social breakdown in some black communities contributed to poverty and to the criminalisation of black male youth.

Valerie Amos is arguably among the very few black women to break through the glass ceiling of both gender and race discrimination. At Bexleyheath School for Girls, one of her many firsts was to be elected the first black deputy head girl. She proceeded to attend Warwick University, where she graduated with a degree in Sociology. She later took courses in cultural studies and development studies at Birmingham University and the University of East Anglia.

Her career saw her take up senior positions in race relations and equal opportunities at several Boroughs in London, culminating in her appointment as the Chief Executive Officer of the Equal Opportunities Commission (1989-1994). As a student leader and an activist in the British Labour Party, Baroness Amos was immersed not just in the anti-racism struggles in the UK, but also in the anti-apartheid movement. It was therefore natural that upon relinquishing her position in the Equal Opportunities Commission and having started her own consultancy she became an advisor to the new South African government, especially on public service reform, labour legislation and employment equity. She was also a valuable and expert advisor to the South African Human Rights Commission in organisational, strategic planning and anti-racism strategies. Amos was also active in advising South Africa in the run-up to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban in 2001. Since then Baroness Amos has closely followed the South African story.

In a lifetime of public service, she has served as a trustee of many public bodies and non-governmental organisations committed to social justice and equality, among them the Runnymede Trust, the Institute for Public Policy Research, the University College Hospital Trust and the Royal College of Nursing Institute.

In 1997, Baroness Amos was appointed a member of the House of Lords following the reform of the Lords by the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair. As a life peer she held various positions: spokesperson on Social Security, International Development, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and Government Chief Whip in the House of Lords. In 2001 she became Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and for a short period she was Secretary of State for International Development in the wake of the resignation of Clare Short in protest against Blair’s policy on Iraq. Thereafter she served as the Leader of the House of Lords in 2003. She left government following the resignation of Blair as Prime Minister.

Baroness Amos then assumed the position of British High Commissioner in Canberra, and in 2010 was appointed Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief at the United Nations. She was active in bringing world attention to the imploding humanitarian situation in Syria and the outflows of migrants into Europe.

In September 2015, Baroness Amos became Director of the London School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS), the first person of African descent to do so. She has been honoured with honorary LLD degrees from Warwick University, her alma mater, and Leicester University, and at Birmingham University a room in the Students’ Union has been named after her. She is also Honorary Professor in Equality and Justice at the Thames Valley University. In 2016 The Right Honourable Baroness Amos PC CH was named in the Queen’s Birthday Honours List to the Order of the Companion of Honour for services to the United Nations. She has also been honoured as among the 100 great Britons today.

The Right Honourable The Baroness Amos of Brondesbury has an abiding passion for justice and equality around the world, and has served as an expert in world development. She is an activist for social justice, a diplomat and a public servant. She is a role model and a reminder of our common humanity and it is therefore befitting that the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg awards an honorary doctorate degree to Valerie Amos.