**CITATION: RAYMOND LOUW**

Raymond Louw was born on 13 October 1926 in Cape Town and he attended Parktown Boys High School in Johannesburg.

‘Oom Ray’ as he is affectionately known has given 70 years of unstinting service to journalism and the fight for free expression and unwavering opposition to censorship, both locally and globally. He has always been a journalists’ journalist, with an unbridled passion for the profession and commanding universal respect from his peers. His contribution to the freedom of expression constitutes a major contribution to the realization of a democratic dispensation in 1994.

He started at the age of 18 as what was then called a copyboy at SA Associated Newspapers before joining the *Rand Daily Mail* during the critical period when the legendary editor Laurence Gandar was shifting the paper to become the leading voice of liberal opposition to apartheid. After six years in Sussex, Cumbria, and London, England, working in newspapers, he returned to become news editor and then editor from 1976, with Gandar as editor-in-chief. When Gandar was fired, he took the reigns, and continued the tradition of outspoken, high quality coverage of the country at a critical time. Louw took the newspaper to its highest circulation, particularly with outstanding coverage of the 1976 Soweto uprising, and oversaw the first racial integration of a mainstream newsroom when the paper began to hire black reporters and photographers and launched an African edition to give more coverage to township news. The paper was during this period also known for pioneering investigative journalism on apartheid and other issues. He was kicked upstairs in 1977 to become general manager before being fired a few years later by a management that was trying to reign in the papers outspokenly anti-apartheid voice.

During the apartheid era as part of his commitment to protecting and defending freedom of expression he was involved in efforts to defend journalists against censorship as head of the Media Defense Trust.

He helped found and chaired the Campaign for Open Media 1985-1994, which fought the attempts to close down the alternative press during the State of Emergency. During the transition period, he co-chaired the campaign for Independent Broadcasting, which led the way to opening up broadcasting and then served on the Independent Electoral Commission media oversight committee as a watchdog during that critical time preceding the first democratic elections in 1994.

An integral part of his work as co–chair of the Campaign for Independent Broadcasting was his role in the transformation of the state controlled broadcaster the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) which was one of the major pillars of the apartheid system to a real public broadcaster. This effort was ultimately successful, and the corporation was able to play a role during the first democratic election under new leadership, and with a new and better mandate. In fact in the run up to the first democratic elections in 1994, he was appointed to the Independent Media Commission to ensure state broadcasting and state-financed publications were impartial. The difficulties the SABC has experienced since then does not detract from this early achievement. He was also a member of a Task Group appointed in 1994 to restructure government communications from a propagandist role to a public information orientation.

His fight continued into the new order. He has over the years been involved in almost every initiative, campaign and organisation fighting for media freedom. For some years, he published his *Southern African Report*, a weekly current affairs briefing and became the country’s most consistent and tireless media freedom advocate, always at every committee meeting, quick to react to any challenge and dogged in pursuit of his passion for free and unbridled expression and the protection of journalists doing their work.

His energy and commitment is legendary, and his attention to detail is quite remarkable. There have been various legislative initiatives which could have harmed media freedom if it had not been for his willingness to look at the fine print of complex documents. No spring chicken at 80, his unflagging energy puts many younger editors and journalists to shame.

Among some of his recent and current efforts through organisations like the Save our SABC (SOS) is to take up the cudgels again on issues of broadcasting to insist that the SABC be given the independence it requires to operate in the public interest and not revert to its apartheid status as an appendage of the government of the day.

He was a founder member of the SA National Editors’ Forum, and still leads its Media Freedom Committee; he has been a crucial member of the Freedom of Expression Institute since its formation in 1994; and deputy chair of the Media Institute of Southern Africa, which monitors and lobbies for media freedom across the sub-continent.

He has also played a similar role on a global scale, as fellow of the International Press Institute, Africa consultant for the World Press Freedom Committee and he played a key role in persuading the World Association of Newspapers in 2007 to adopt the Declaration of Table Mountain, a timely call on African governments to review and repeal laws restricting the media. He has played a central role in the local campaigns against a statutory Media Tribunal and the so-called Secrecy Bill.

His standing among his peers is indicated by the awards he has won: the Pringle Award for services to journalism, twice; the Media Institute for Southern Africa Media Freedom Award; the Mondi-Shanduka Lifetime Achiever Award; the Vodacom Journalist of the Year Lifetime Achiever Award; the IPI named him – alongside Daniel Pearl – as a World Press Freedom Hero in 2011.

Now in his late 80’s, he still travels, campaigns and fights like the vigilant war-horse he has always been. It is not an exaggeration to call him one of the preeminent freedom of expression fighters that South Africa and the world have ever seen.