Justice Albie Sachs was born in 1935 and during World War II, at the tender age of six, he received a card from his father expressing the wish that he would grow up to be a soldier in the fight for liberation. He lived up to that expectation and became a renowned human rights activist revered by all whose lives he touched. His enduring gifts to his country include a Constitution that incorporates the value system by which he lives, his progressive interpretations that meaningfully improve the lived reality of many South Africans, and his challenge to lawyers to explore innovative solutions to difficult problems.

Justice Sachs’ first act of protest was his participation in the Defiance of Unjust Laws campaign. He was seventeen years old at the time and in his second year of study at the University of Cape Town. Three years later he attended the Congress of the People where the Freedom Charter was adopted. He obtained his B.A. degree in 1953 and his LLB degree in 1956 from the University of Cape Town, and a PhD degree in 1971 from the University of Sussex.

He joined the Cape Bar aged 21 where his practice involved defending people charged under racist statutes and repressive security laws, many of whom faced the death penalty. Justice Sachs’ activities did not go unnoticed by the security police and he was raided, subjected to banning orders and twice detained in solitary confinement without trial for prolonged periods of time. He was eventually driven into exile in 1966. He began his contribution to the published jurisprudence of South Africa as the plaintiff in a key human rights case of this period.

Going into exile, Justice Sachs then spent eleven years in England studying and teaching Law before moving to Mozambique where he spent a further eleven years as law professor and researcher. During the 1980s he worked closely with Oliver Tambo and assisted with the drafting of the ANC’s Code of Conduct and statutes. In 1988 he was severely injured by a bomb placed in his car in Maputo by South African security agents. The explosion robbed him of an arm and the sight of one eye, but did not deter him. After his recovery he devoted himself to preparations for a new democratic Constitution for South Africa and in 1990 he returned home as a member of the Constitutional Committee and the National Executive of the ANC. He actively participated in the negotiations that resulted in our constitutional democracy. On the basis of his substantial contributions he was appointed a Judge of the Constitutional Court by President Nelson Mandela.

Justice Sachs’ deep compassion for others and his extraordinary ability to remain true to his beliefs in the face of adversity qualify him to assist other countries with the healing of their divided societies.

His compassion and eloquence permeates all his judgments and will inspire generations of Wits students. In *August v Electoral Commission and Others* he reminds us that the right to vote ‘is a badge of dignity and personhood’. Quite literally, it says that everybody counts.
In a country of great disparities of wealth and power it declares that whoever we are, whether rich or poor, exalted or disgraced, we belong to the same democratic South African nation; that our destinies are entwined in a single interactive polity.

In *Doctors for Life* he recognises the contribution of each individual when he states, “All parties interested should feel that they have been given a real opportunity to have their say, that they are taken seriously as citizens and that their views matter and will receive due consideration at the moments when they could possibly influence decisions in a meaningful fashion. The objective is both symbolic and practical: the persons concerned must be manifestly shown the respect due to them as concerned citizens, and the legislatures must have the benefits of all inputs that will enable them to produce the best possible laws”.

In *P E Municipality* he cautions that the denial of decent existence to others impacts on and devalues our entire society - “It is not only the dignity of the poor that is assailed when homeless people are driven from pillar to post in a desperate quest for a place where they and their families can rest their heads. Our society as a whole is demeaned when state actions intensifies rather than mitigates their marginalization. Thus the integrity of the rights-based vision of our Constitution is punctured when government action augments rather than reduces denial of the claims of the desperately poor to the basic elements of a decent existence”.

His passion for art and architecture found expression in the development of the Constitutional Court building in which he played an active part. We thank him and others for the building and the art that symbolize our past, and promise a just and beautiful future. Justice Sachs also generously shared his experiences through his penmanship. He is the author of eleven books two of which were dramatized by David Edgar for the Royal Shakespeare Company and filmed for the BBC. Continuing on from his ground-breaking work of legal history, *Justice in South Africa*, his publications include *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs; Stephanie on Trial; Liberating the Law, Liberating the People; The Soft Vengeance of a Freedom Fighter and The Strange Alchemy of Life and Law*. His latest book is *Blue Dress*.1

In acknowledgment of his substantial contribution Honorary Doctorates have been conferred on him by the universities of Antwerp, Cape Town, Edinburgh, London, New South Wales, Princeton, Southampton, Ulster, York (Ontario), York (UK), Western Cape and the William Mitchell College of Law. His is an honorary bencher of Lincoln Inn and in 2006 was awarded the prestigious Order of Luthuli in Silver for his excellent and selfless dedication to human rights activism and the struggle against apartheid. He is also a recipient of the Reconciliation Award from the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation and the Ford’s Theatre Lincoln Medal. And last, but not least, he is a member of the Appeals Commission of the International Cricket Council and was head of the panel that chose the design for the 2010 Soccer World Cup logo.

It is befitting that the University of the Witwatersrand confer upon him an honorary Doctor of Laws in recognition of his selfless dedication to human rights, and the expression in our Constitution of the democratic ideals for which he and many others fought.