

## ERIC MOLOBI

Eric Molobi studied Electronics and Electrical Engineering at the Soweto Technikon and started work as a technician with Phillips, the company which employed his father. Distressed that his father, a revered leader of his community and a lay preacher, was referred to as 'boy' by the whites with whom he worked, Eric Molobi became involved in trade union activities and soon came to the attention of the security police.

He was detained at John Vorster Square, Johannesburg, where he was interrogated and tortured. Tried and sentenced under the security laws to terms of six years and four years, to run concurrently, he was imprisoned on Robben Island, where he registered with the University of South Africa for a Bachelor of Arts degree.

After his release in 1981 he completed his degree, worked for the Munich Re-Insurance Company of South Africa as an insurance underwriter and was recruited by the South African Council of Churches in 1985 to set up a community development programme aimed at disadvantaged youth.

Passionate about the future of the country's young people, he has played a major role in education in South Africa. In 1985, in the aftermath of the schools uprisings of 1976 and the social and educational upheaval that followed, he, together with other members of the Soweto Parents Crisis Committee and the Soweto Civic Association approached the University of the Witwatersrand for help.

In December that year the first National Consultative Conference was held at Wits, and the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC), was formed with the aim of addressing the school boycotts and the breakdown of the culture of learning in schools. The NECC spearheaded the idea of People's Education to counter Bantu Education and to educate a new generation of young people to be productive citizens, to create equal opportunities for advancement, to advocate non-discrimination, and to fill the social, economic and development needs of our society.

The third NECC conference, scheduled for November 1986 at Wits, was banned by government and, by January 1987, most of the NECC leadership was in detention. The NECC nonetheless went ahead with plans for the establishment of an Education Policy Unit at Wits. Describing the contribution of Eric Molobi, an enthusiastic proponent of the unit, the then Vice-Chancellor, Professor Karl Tober, said: 'As a young man he showed unusual determination, courage and integrity, and wisdom beyond his years. He made a massive contribution to the University by alerting us to the needs of the black community.' Mr Molobi maintained links with the Education Policy Unit and briefed members on political developments germane to education through the following years.

In 1991 he joined the Kagiso Charitable Trust as Chief Executive Officer responsible for raising funds from international donors to channel into education and community development projects. In 1994 he was awarded the Legion of Honour by the French Government.

Kagiso Trust aims to promote a non-partisan development approach, with the poorest and most economically depressed communities as the prime beneficiaries. Its work covers education and training, micro enterprise and small business, community development and institution building and rural development projects throughout the country

The philosophy of the Trust, says Molobi, is to empower as many people as possible. 'Apart from providing funds for bursaries and literacy programmes, our mission includes giving communities access to ownership of companies so they can participate in the mainstream economy.'

He believes that all blacks should make it their goal to ensure that all communities – in the hinterland as well as in the major metropolitan areas – benefit from the broad black economic empowerment process.

After South Africa was successfully reintegrated into the global community in 1994, Eric Molobi initiated the establishment of Kagiso Trust Investment Company (Pty) Limited (KTIC) with the object of providing a long-term means of financial support for Kagiso Trust, to enable the Trust to become self-sufficient in the face of decreasing donor funding. KTIC acquired control of Publico, the JSE-listed specialist media group, in a reverse takeover, and has invested in Kagiso Publishers, previously De Jager Haum. In a second major deal, KTIC acquired Supervision Food Services from the Tongaat-Hulett group. With its associations with learning institutions, hospitals and mines, Kagiso Khulani Supervision Food Services fits perfectly into the Trust's commitment to serve the community.

In 1994 Mr Molobi became Chairman of the National Housing Forum, which was formed to facilitate the delivery of low-income housing. The National Housing Board and the regional housing boards were established early in 1994, and the Interim Subsidiary Scheme was implemented in the same year.

Eric Molobi has demonstrated that it is possible to be engaged without losing rigour and objectivity. His vision for education in a transformed South Africa has never wavered. His thinking comes closest to the intellectual-political stance of Gramsci, who held that freedom could only be attained through the intellectual emancipation that comes with education. To him, the 'search for liberation through education' was no empty phrase. He fought for this ideal, he practised it, and he suffered for it.

It is with great pride and pleasure that the University bestows upon Eric Molobi its highest honour, the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.