**CITATION: EDWIN CAMERON**

Tonight we honour an extraordinary person – *a true hero of the country*, in the words of Nelson Mandela in his foreword to Cameron’s book ‘Witness to Aids’ (2005). While it is easy to record the academic and professional achievements of Justice Edwin Cameron, it is not as easy to reflect his real achievements, his contributions to Wits, South Africa and South African jurisprudence.

Despite his heavy workload, Cameron agreed, in 1997, to become a member of the Wits Council. He was elected as the first chair of the newly constituted Council in 1998.

Edwin Cameron retired as Chair of the Wits Council in April 2008, after having served in that voluntary position for ten years. He guided the institution through a period of transformation, often marked by strife and discontent. He devoted himself to supporting the senior executive team in their commitment to creating the best academic institution in the country. His contribution is regarded by members of the Council and the Wits community, including students, as *magnificent*.

Justice Cameron was born in Pretoria in February 1953. He matriculated, with distinction, at Pretoria Boys’ High School in 1970. He was awarded an Anglo American Corporation Open Scholarship to attend Stellenbosch University, where he read for a BA and an honours degree in Latin, graduating with distinction. Having received a Rhodes scholarship to study at Oxford he read for the BA in Jurisprudence, graduating with first class honours, and won the jurisprudence prize. He returned to Oxford in 1981 to read for the BCL, also attaining first class honours, and won the Vinerian scholarship as the best graduate.

In October 1978 Cameron joined the academic staff of the Wits Law School. At the same time he studied for the South African LLB at Unisa, once more graduating with distinction, with the prize for the best law graduate.

As a young academic Cameron very quickly made his mark both as teacher and writer. He was promoted to a senior lectureship in 1980. In 1982 he published a celebrated article entitled “Legal Chauvinism, Executive-Mindedness and Justice: L C Steyn’s Impact on South African Law” (1982) 99 *South African Law Journal.* In it, Cameron demonstrates the way in which the former chief justice, L C Steyn, shaped the law to meet the government’s apartheid agenda. The scholarly paper set the tone for Cameron’s subsequent writing and legal career.

Justice Cameron has used his intellect and very forceful personality to make a positive contribution to society. After spending a couple of years at the Johannesburg Bar he joined the Centre for Applied Legal Studies in the Faculty of Law at Wits as a research fellow and advocate in 1986. There Cameron embarked on a Labour and Human Rights practice where he conducted a defence of ANC activists charged with treason; defended, in celebrated cases, conscientious and religious objectors who fought conscription; dealt with land tenure issues and forced removals; took on the case of the Sharpeville Six and defended them against the imposition of the death sentence; and fought for gay and lesbian rights.

From 1988 Cameron advised the National Union of Mineworkers on AIDS/HIV. He worked on negotiating and drafting the mining industry’s first comprehensive AIDS agreement with the Chamber of Mines. He also assisted in drafting the Charter of Rights on AIDS and HIV, and co-founded the AIDS Consortium – a national affiliation of non-governmental organizations working with AIDS. The AIDS Law Project, long a part of CALS, was founded and directed by Cameron.

Appointed as an ad hominem Professor of Law at Wits in 1989 (a signal mark of intellect, ability, and of international recognition in one’s academic field), Cameron gave his inaugural lecture (in 1992) on ‘Sexual Orientation and the Constitution: A Test Case for Human Rights’. He was responsible for the submissions made by gay and lesbian movements to the negotiators of the first democratic constitution, the only Constitution that expressly prohibits discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation.

The constitutional prohibition has been fertile ground for successful litigation in achieving equality in many areas of the law for gay and lesbian partners and parents and is in no small measure attributable to Cameron’s activism.

In 1994 Justice Cameron was appointed a senior counsel. In the same year the Minister of Justice, Dullah Omar, asked him to chair a commission to investigate an illegal arms transaction. He was appointed as an acting judge for the purpose. Later that year he was appointed as a judge in the Johannesburg High Court. Cameron was asked by the former chief justice, Arthur Chaskalson to act in the Constitutional Court from 1999 to 2000, a position that he graced. He was subsequently appointed to the Supreme Court of Appeal in 2001.

Justice Cameron’s substantial workload and philanthropic commitments have not prevented him from continuing to write and publish. He is the lead author of *Honoré’s South African Law of Trusts*, the leading work on the subject, now in its fifth edition (2002); a co-author of a number of books on labour law, and a biographical account of his life as an AIDS survivor, and of the issues that impinge on those affected by the disease. He has made seminal contributions in law journals on human rights, sexual orientation, and the legal system in general.

His contribution to justice and his personal courage have been recognized all over the world. Cameron’s awards (too many to mention here) and the many places where he has been honoured demonstrate the appreciation of these qualities.

Cameron’s reputation as an excellent speaker has ensured that he frequently lectures and speaks both in South Africa and abroad. Most recently, he has delivered a special lecture at Birkbeck College, University of London (2007) and the Annual Lord Chief Justice Taylor Memorial Lecture, Inner Temple, London (2008). He often participates in international conferences. He is a philanthropist too. He is the patron of several children’s organizations, hospices and AIDS organizations.

And last – but something of which he is immensely proud – Justice Cameron is an ardent cyclist. He has completed three Cape Argus Marathons in excellent time, and has shown the world that he is fit and healthy.

In seeking to honour Edwin Cameron, the University brings honour to itself. This distinguished man has contributed enormously to the University, the judiciary and the country. His work is not yet done, but it is time that we signal our admiration and appreciation of this fine human being. The award of this Honorary Doctor of Laws degree is made for his scholarly contribution to the discipline of law, for his outstanding contribution to Wits, and for his contribution to society as a whole.