**UNIVERSITY GOLD MEDAL: Legal Resources Centre**

The Legal Resources Centre is an independent, non-profit, public interest law clinic which uses the law as an instrument of justice. In the aftermath of the 1976 student uprising, a range of new organisations emerged committed to ensuring change despite an increasingly repressive society. The Legal Resources Centre was established in 1979 after Arthur Chaskalson, then senior counsel, and Felicia Kentridge, together with others, set up the Legal Resources Trust on November 22, 1978 to fund the Legal Resources Centre. There were initially less than 10 members of staff at the LRC.

Today the LRC has offices in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and Grahamstown and satellite offices in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, KZN and Eastern Cape the LRC has an extensive track record of working with individuals and communities whose rights have been violated. It provides free legal services for vulnerable people including: those who suffer discrimination by reason of race, class, gender, disability or through historical, social and economic circumstances; and those who stand up against abuse of power and corruption.

From its earliest years the LRC represented those arrested under the pass laws, which underpinned South Africa’s migrant labour system. As it grew from one to six offices, it also challenged forced removals, evictions, dispossession of land, dismissals from employment, consumer abuse, pension and unemployment insurance abuse, and detention without trial under apartheid security legislation. The work of the LRC involved persuading courts that justice ought to prevail in those situations in which the common law gave courts the power to choose. The LRC enabled ordinary people to use the courts in their favour in a manner that was novel and unprecedented.

At the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, the LRC represented several families of victims of apartheid. The LRC successfully opposed, amongst others, the application for amnesty relating to the torture and death in detention of Steve Biko, the deaths of the Craddock Four, the application brought by Eugene De Kock and the amnesty of the Civil Co-operation Bureau.

In land struggles, the LRC’s lawyers played a key role in land legislation drafting and policy formulation processes. The LRC pioneered the first rural land claims as well as the legal and institutional frameworks for community landholding arrangements: cases such as the Mfengu and Riemvasmaak were initiated before 1994. While Riemvasmaak successfully secured the return of 74 000 ha of state land, the Mfengu were the first community in South Africa to have their ownership to nineteen white-owned farms in the Tsitsikamma restored.

The Legal Resources Centre continues to be at the forefront of using the law in the pursuit of justice and freedom. One of its major successes is the 11 years of work in litigating against Anglo American on behalf of a group of miners suffering from silicosis. Judgment in the Silicosis Class Action matter was handed down on 13 May 2016 by the High Court certifying classes of mineworkers involving workers from 82 mines, owned by one (or more) of the 30 named respondents. In addition the High Court declared that any claim that has been made for general damages will be made transmissible to the claimant’s estate if he dies prior to the finalisation of the case. This decision is a landmark development in the jurisprudence of class action litigation.

The LRC assists the Hai||om People, the largest San grouping in Namibia that continues to live in some of the most impoverished conditions. The Hai||om People have instructed the LRC to bring a court action to have their ancestral ownership and/or use rights to the subject land and its resources recognised and for compensation for their unlawful forced removal from the land in 1954.

The LRC has also worked with the *Dwesa-Cwebe* community to secure the recognition of customary rights to marine resources for small-scale fishers. The LRC’s work has had a considerable impact on the lives of slum dwellers in South Africa directly and indirectly. During 2016, the LRC directly assisted more than 126 358 people living in poverty.

In the *women’s Legal Centre Trust and Another v The President of the Republic of South Africa and Others* matter the LRC represents the Commission for Gender Equality in a case before the Cape Town High Court which seeks to compel the President, Parliament and other relevant government departments to enact and implement legislation which would recognize marriages concluded in terms of the Islamic faith. In the matter, *Gender Dynamix and Two Others v The Minister of Home Affairs and Others,* the LRC is working with Gender Dynamix (GDX) regarding the Alteration of Sex Description Act 49 of 2003. The Act allows for an individual to alter their sex as assigned to them on the National Population Register, their birth certificate and their identity documents.

The LRC runs cases relating to Lindela Detention and Repatriation Centre. These relate to, amongst others, breaches of the Act when holding in detention asylum seekers beyond the maximum period; problems with regard to Lindela’s conditions and treatment of those being held there; and failures to provide access for representations to authorities.

In recognition of the contributions made by the LRC to society it is befitting that the University awards the University Gold Medal to the LRC.