



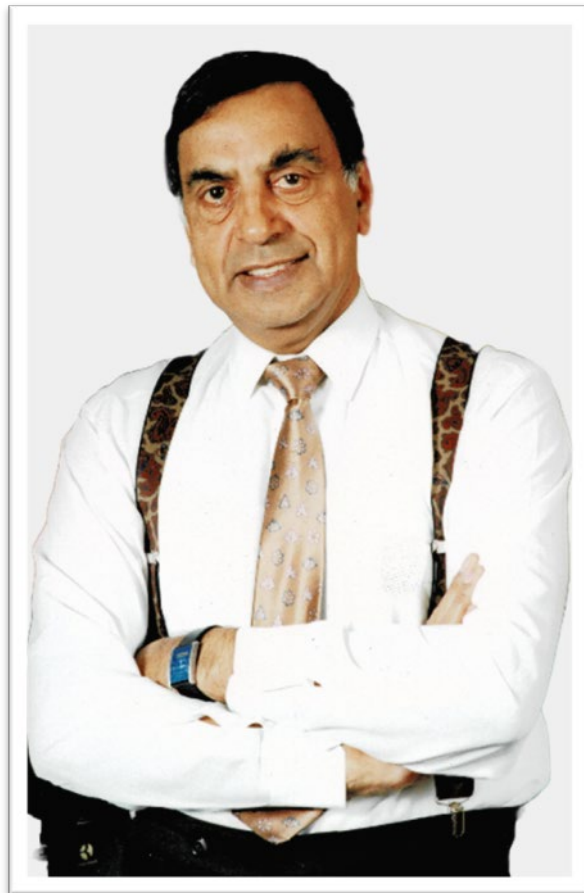
UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

15th Dullah Omar Memorial Lecture

With **Professor Nico Steytler**

21 October 2025

University of the Western Cape



Adv Dullah Omar

(26 May 1934 – 13 March 2004)

The Dullah Omar Institute and the Faculty of Law honour the late Adv Dullah Omar, by hosting a regular lecture on human rights and democracy. Adv Dullah Omar left behind a rich legacy from which we, as an Institute and a Faculty, draw inspiration and guidance.

Dullah Omar believed that law must serve justice, that law must serve the community, and that law must give effect to human rights and democracy. He put that belief into practice. When he was in practice most of his clients were people who were victimised by apartheid laws. He acted as the legal representative of numerous political prisoners. He also acted as legal counsel for trade unions, civic and religious organisations. By living out his quest for justice, he became a guiding light to many. First as an attorney and later as an advocate, he played an important educational role for many a young lawyer who came in contact with him. At the height of repression, during the states of emergency, he played a key role, often at great personal sacrifice, in the flagship civic organisation fighting against apartheid, the United Democratic Front. With the normalisation of politics in 1990 he became chairperson of the African National Congress in the Western Cape.

Following the unbanning of the liberation movements in 1990, a vision for the new legal order based on justice, human rights and democracy was required. To this call Dullah answered. He brought to bear this vision and intellect to the University of the Western Cape and the Law Faculty when in 1990 he became the director of the Community Law Centre. Dullah was the inspiration behind the Centre and worked tirelessly to establish it as a centre of research and advocacy on human rights and democracy. Under his directorship the Centre became a major contributor to policy formulation for the new constitutional order, focusing on the structure of the state, the electoral system, gender issues, children's rights, policing, and the transformation of the judiciary. With his colleagues at the Centre – including Bulelani Ngcuka, Brigitte Mabandla, Zola Skweyiya and Albie Sachs – he participated in the constitutional negotiations, charting the course towards the shaping of the new South Africa.

Dealing with the big issues of the day did not cut him off from the University community, in particular the law students. He took time to talk to them, instilling the excitement and the challenge of practicing law in service of the community, to the benefit of the new South Africa.

With the first democratic election in 1994 Dullah was elected to Parliament. Befitting his role in the struggle for justice, he was appointed by President Mandela as Minister of Justice. On his shoulders thus fell the task of transforming a legal system that had propped up the perverse scheme of apartheid, into a system that embraced democracy, human rights and justice. This he did with great zest and success. Under Dullah's ministry, the administration of justice was transformed. Eleven apartheid-based administrations were fused into an entirely new Department of Justice. The Constitutional Court was established, and the foundation was laid for the meaningful transformation of the judiciary. A single national prosecuting authority was formed. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created. Overall, the framework was developed for the transformation of the administration of justice.

In 2015, the Community Law Centre was renamed the Dullah Omar Institute for Constitutional Law, Governance and Human Rights to honour its founding director.

PROGRAMME
School of Public Health
University of the Western Cape
18h00

MC

Mrs Thabile Chonco-Spambo

NGap Researcher: Dullah Omar Institute

Opening Remarks

Prof Lukas Muntingh

Director: Dullah Omar Institute

Welcome

Prof Robert Balfour

Rector and Vice-Chancellor, University of the Western Cape

Introduction of the Speaker

Prof Jaap de Visser (SARCHI Chair in Multilevel Government, Law and Development)

And

Prof Tinashe Chigwata (Deputy Director & Project Head (MLG): Dullah Omar Institute)

Main Speaker

Prof Nico Steytler

Professor Emeritus: Dullah Omar Institute

TOPIC: THE LEGACY OF DULLAH OMAR, THE HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER

Word of thanks

Ms Rahmat Omar (sister of the Late Adv Omar)

(On behalf of the Omar Family)

in partnership with

DULLAH OMAR MEMORIAL LECTURE SERIES:

19 April 2024

Chief Justice Raymond Zondo

The Rule of Law and the South African Judiciary in the first 30 years of South Africa's constitutional democracy

16 November 2022

Prof Thuli Madonsela

Reimagining Democracy Through a Social Justice Lens: Reflections on Dullah Omar's Legacy

19 October 2018

Minister of Higher Education, Hon Naledi Pandor

Enhancing a human rights culture in South Africa - problems, prospects, successes

3 October 2017

Founder of the Graça Machel Trust, Graça Machel

A Call for a Nation's Soul Searching

19 August 2015

Minister of Justice and Correctional Services, Tshililo Michael Masutha

South Africa's judicial system: Prospects and challenges

25 March 2014

Former Constitutional Court Judge Albie Sachs

Speaking to Oliver Tambo's Ghost – Twenty years of democracy

16 February 2012

Former President Thabo Mbeki

Reflections on peacemaking, state sovereignty and democratic governance in Africa

06 October 2010

Former Chief Justice Pius Langa

Transformation of the Judiciary

01 July 2009

Dr Navanethem (Navi) Pillay, UN High Commissioner of Human Rights

The agenda for the promotion of the rights of women in the next decade

27 March 2008

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu

The state of democracy in South Africa

20 March 2007

Minister Trevor Manuel MP

The need for a human rights culture

13 June 2006

Former Chief Justice Arthur Chaskalson

Enforcing socio-economic rights: The role of the courts

14 June 2005

Minister Brigitte Mabandla MP

The rights of the child: Progress and prospects

22 November 2004

Bulelani Ngcuka, Former National Director of Public Prosecutions

The National Prosecuting Authority and the promotion of human rights and democracy

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Look out for #2025DOML and #dullahomar on social media