

23 April 2021

Dear Rhodes University graduand,

On behalf of our Chancellor, the University Council and the entire Rhodes University community, I offer our heartfelt congratulations to you on your graduation from our University. To attain a Rhodes University qualification is an exacting proposition in the best of times; and to earn one under the extraordinarily trying circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic must have taken something truly special. You've risen to the challenge with remarkable fortitude, resilience and determination. Hearty congratulations!

We deeply regret that, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic and the national restrictions on gatherings, our University is unable to hold in-person graduation ceremonies this year. This has robbed us of an opportunity to recognise and celebrate your hard-earned accomplishments in the way we have always done at Rhodes University. A feeling of disappointment in not being able to mark your important personal academic achievement is understandable and justified. However, the University could not risk your health, safety and wellbeing and that of your family members and loved ones.

Graduation is an important milestone in any person's academic pursuits. This is particularly so for those who are first in their family to earn a university degree. I wish to assure you that, once the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic has receded, we will invite you, your family and friends back to our University to publicly celebrate your accomplishments together with your classmates, lecturers and those who supported and helped you along the way. At that event, you will take part in the traditional celebratory experience of having your name called out by your Dean, walk across the stage in your academic gown and with your hood over your arm, the Chancellor will tap your head with his folded round cap and the Registrar will hood you; your family, friends and the Rhodes University staff screaming with excitement and cameras flashing to capture your truly special moment. In this way, together, we will celebrate your momentous achievement.

In compliance with the University Statute which states that "a person is not entitled to any of the privileges conferred by any degree until he or she has been admitted to such degree at a congregation," the University Chancellor, the Honourable Justice Lex Mpati, will constitute a virtual congregation of Rhodes University for the conferral of degrees and award of diplomas and certificates *in absentia*. The proceedings may be accessed at noon, 12h00, on 28 April 2021 through the link: bit.ly/2RTmwPH or <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLAztaQ4TBvjTFeqXdNYCqKZquk6hGqwWN>

In this graduation ceremony, our Chancellor will confer degrees on, and award diplomas and certificates to, 2 204 candidates. Of these, 1317 will receive an undergraduate degree and 887, a postgraduate degree, diploma or certificate. I am delighted that 66% of the graduating candidates are women, 16% are international students, and 52 are PhD graduates. **Malibongwe!**

Our Chancellor will also confer six (6) honorary degrees on highly eminent persons in recognition and celebration of their extraordinary lifetime achievements and contributions in a field of knowledge or scholarship, in public service or in artistic creation. Their personal journeys and selfless service and sacrifices serve as an inspiration and an example worthy of emulation by us all. These are women and

men whose distinction in some field or selfless leadership set them apart, and are consonant with our own institutional mission, purposes and values. We are deeply grateful that they have honoured us with their acceptance of our offer of recognition. The recipients of the honorary degrees are: Adv Dumisa Buhle Ntsebeza SC, Dr Marguerite Poland, Mama Ntsiki Biko, Mr William Smith, Ms Mary de Haas and Prof Berhau Abegaz.

Our University community celebrates with you and your family your tremendous accomplishments. Your hard work, tenacity and dedication have paid off. I couldn't be prouder of you and those graduating with you! You have more than earned your place as a member of our Rhodes University alumni family. May you always live out the spirit and values of our motto: *Vis, Virtus, Veritas* (Truth, Virtue and Strength) and be a beacon of hope and a source of inspiration for a better society and a better world.

As you move on with the next phase of your life, never cease to appreciate the value of learning, the significance of knowledge, the strength of ideas, the merit of asking questions, the usefulness of theory, the need for reason and evidence, the power of logic, the benefits that come from clear thinking and thoughtful argument. Above all, never forget that one of the most important things we have tried to teach you at Rhodes University is the value of keeping a mind open to views and perspectives that are different to those you may hold.

With your graduation, you join a special family of our proud alumni - extraordinary women and men who are making remarkable contributions in many and diverse fields of human endeavour. This year we are launching a new and innovative interactive platform to connect our alumni in a lively and versatile cultural space. This exclusive platform is able to connect our graduates across generations and across the globe to form communities based on shared interests. You will be able to communicate and engage with one another and with your *alma mater*. The platform will enable you to access mentoring opportunities and be part of many other constructive initiatives with like-minded Rhodes University graduates.

You have earned your place in the distinguished and select group of Rhodes alumni who are leaders in our society and beyond. We would love to see you at our affinity events which aim to expand your professional network. Please visit www.ru.ac.za/alumni to update your contact details or email alumni@ru.ac.za

Graduates, families, friends, Rhodes University staff, alumni, and other community members are encouraged to post their celebratory and congratulatory photos and short videos on their personal social media pages using the hashtag **#RUGrad2021** as a way of celebrating our graduates. In order to participate, simply post photos and/or videos along with a congratulatory message to your personal Twitter profiles using the hashtag **#RUGrad2021**. These messages and videos will automatically be collected on a social wall created at

<https://www.ru.ac.za/communicationsandadvancement/socialmediawall/>

Once more, heartiest congratulations on your graduation. I am immensely proud of you and your tremendous academic success. Halaaaalaaa! Halaaaalaaa!

Yours sincerely



Sizwe Mabizela,
Vice-Chancellor, Rhodes University.