South Africa has lost a human rights and social justice giant – Universities South Africa

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Recognising the outpouring of grief following the news of the passing away of our beloved Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Mpilo Tutu, Universities South Africa (USAf) joins the rest of South Africa and the world in expressing condolences to his wife, Mrs Nomalizo Leah Tutu, and family. USAf also regards this period as a moment of celebration of an all-encompassing life intricately interwoven into the multiple trajectories of South Africa’s struggles for peace, human rights and social justice. Passion, courage, strength were central to Archbishop Tutu’s armoury -- but they were built around his deep spirituality, compassion, and his irreverent and infectious humour.

Mrs Nomalizo Leah Tutu, his wife and life partner since 1955, has walked alongside him and helped to shape the leader he became. “We are all deeply indebted to her for her own social activism and for working so steadfastly with him in giving a voice to the disenfranchised and downtrodden, to speak out against the abuse of power even by former comrades,” Professor Ahmed Bawa, USAf’s Chief Executive Officer, says. “We convey our deepest and sincerest condolences to her and the other members of the Tutu family and thank them for sharing this wondrous human-being with us.”

Professor Bawa adds that as South Africans contemplate the future of this nation, “we must do so understanding that we have lost another giant, a lodestone, an unwavering voice for human rights and social justice. Universities South Africa joins the rest of South Africa and the world in this grief born out of a loss and, in this celebration of an amazing, wonderful life filled (as he liked to say) with love, laughter and the ability to cry.

"His legacy, broad and extensive, much of it cutting-edge, will be studied by scholars for years to come. His popularisation of the notion of South Africa as The Rainbow Nation, was driven by his conviction that peace and justice would come via truth and reconciliation, through forgiveness, and magnanimity of spirit. Interwoven into the fabric of the 1994 transition to democracy, a notion The Rainbow has been severely tested and interrogated as the march to social justice has faltered.

“The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has generated much international intellectual interest and has already been subjected to strenuous analysis which will continue. His contributions to theological debate too will be tested. Other aspects of his contributions to social development will similarly be subjected to analysis.

“The most fitting and lasting tribute we can give to the memory of this great leader is to recommit and rededicate ourselves to the complete and permanent eradication of greed, corruption and all forms of discrimination and intolerance in our society. We must work tirelessly for the realization of a socially just, humane and equitable society. He always commented that South Africa was ‘a scintillating success waiting to happen.’ It falls on all of us to make it happen.
“We shall miss Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Mpilo Tutu. He will, however, always be with us as his legacy is studied, amplified, dissected, and brought more formally into our systems of knowledge. He shall be with us. May His Soul Rest in eternal Peace.”

**Inquiries:** ‘Mateboho Green, Manager: Corporate Communication: 072 807 4677