

Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Hon DSc

Friday 31st July 2026

Orator: Professor Stuart Croft, Vice-Chancellor and President

Chancellor,

I am delighted to introduce our honorary graduand, former Deputy President of South Africa: DR PHUMZILE MLAMBO-NGCUKA.

Phumzile was South Africa's first female Deputy President – a landmark in a long and inspiring career distinguished by its emphasis on equality, social justice and human rights, specifically addressing gender and youth development. As a young woman, she was active in the struggle against apartheid and in 1994 became a member of the first democratically elected South African parliament. She already had wide experience of heading up programmes that addressed the inequalities faced by women and the lack of opportunities for young people: she had been Co-ordinator at the World YWCA in Geneva where she established a global programme for young women, been director of TEAM, an ecumenical organisation focused on upskilling women, and set up her own consultancy service to address race and gender issues.

Her time in government enabled her to advance this work: as Minister for Minerals and Energy (1999 -2005), she created opportunities for women's economic empowerment through organisations such as South African Women in Mining Association. As Minister, she played an instrumental role in establishing the Kimberley Process, through which governments, industry and civil society organisations work together to drastically curtail the trade in conflict diamonds.

As Deputy President from 2005 to 2008 – the highest ranking female political leader in the history of South Africa – she oversaw programmes to combat poverty, bring the advantages of a growing economy to the poor and to lead skills development.

In 2013, Phumzile was appointed Executive Director of UN Women, with the rank of UN Under-Secretary-General. She moved into a relatively new directorate and in her eight years in post expanded its scale, revenue and global influence.

She led the organisation's innovative work on social and gender inequalities, launching the HeforShe initiative to engage men and boys as active advocates for



women's rights. She spearheaded the Generation Equality Forum, bringing together governments, the private sector and civil society to accelerate investment in and implementation of gender equality. She launched the Stereotype Alliance to persuade the advertising industry to eliminate harmful gender stereotypes and promote positive, equal representation. And she helped many countries to change laws that discriminated against girls and women.

A constant theme in Phumzile's work has been her belief in the transformative power of education and training, particularly for women and young people. A teacher by profession, she has run skills workshops for women, promoted literacy as Director of the World University Service in South Africa, established the Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (affording young, unemployed graduates international work experience), and set up the Umlambo Foundation which focuses on improving digital literacy training for educators. Phumzile is now leading an initiative arising from South Africa's presidency of the G20 in 2024 and 2025 to extend access to higher education for students across Africa.

A strong believer in lifelong learning, she has found time during her busy life to continue her own education: in 2013, she was awarded a Doctorate in Technology and Education from this University, for which she studied in WMG, mentored by the late Lord Bhattacharyya. She is currently Chancellor of Johannesburg University and a Fellow of Kellogg College, Oxford. She visited us in 2024 as guest speaker and moderator for our annual Africa Lecture Panel Discussion and since 2025 has been a key figure in the growing partnership between Warwick and the University of Johannesburg. It is an enormous pleasure to welcome her back today.

Chancellor: in the name of the Senate, I present to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Science honoris causa, DR PHUMZILE MLAMBO-NGCUKA.

