

Mr Simon Walker Hon LLD

**Oration by Professor Nick Vaughan-Williams
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The way that business treats its stakeholders – be they shareholders, employees, customers, partners, suppliers or creditors – has a major impact on society. And few individuals have campaigned more vigorously in recent years for higher standards in business life than Simon Walker. Simon is currently the Director General of the Institute of Directors. His path to this position as one of the country's most influential business leaders has been a fascinating one, embracing a breadth of experience that few of his contemporaries could match.

He was born and raised in Johannesburg and as a teenager joined the liberal anti-apartheid Progressive Party and campaigned against racial segregation. He later came to the UK to study at Balliol College, Oxford, where he gained a degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics, and was elected President of the Oxford Union.

After graduating, he became a TV journalist in New Zealand where he presented the current affairs programme *Tonight*, on which he interviewed Prime Minister Rob Muldoon. Muldoon, who had sought to give answers only to questions which had already been submitted to him, resented Simon Walker's line of questioning and snapped "I will not have some smart Alec interviewer changing the rules half way through."

In 1979, he moved to the United States, where he was appointed a Knight Journalism Fellow at Stanford University. He then switched to politics, returning to New Zealand as Director of Communications for the Labour Party, and helped the party win office in the 1984 election.

Simon moved to Europe in the late 1980s, working for a public relations firm, before becoming a partner in the Brunswick Group in 1994. He returned to politics in 1996, working in the 10 Downing Street policy unit under Prime Minister John Major.

Where does one go after working in Downing Street? In Simon Walker's case it was Buckingham Palace, where between 2000 and 2002, he was Communications Secretary to the Queen. He then returned to the private sector as a director at Reuters and Chief Executive of the British Private Equity and Venture Capital Association.

Simon was appointed Director General of the Institute of Directors in 2011. The IOD as it is widely known, was founded by Royal Charter in 1903 and has a membership of over 30,000 individual directors and businesspeople. It has a triple role: to raise professional standards, especially through its Chartered Director programme; to provide facilities which support individual directors; and to represent business interests in Whitehall and Westminster and in the media.

In this role he has spearheaded a campaign to raise awareness of the need for good corporate governance and promote best practice throughout the UK. One might expect a leading paid advocate for business to defend its actions, right wrong. But not Simon Walker. He has not shied away from publicly criticising individual companies - and indeed, individuals - for poor corporate behaviour. He has been outspoken about things like unjustified high rewards and he has also been strongly critical of government policy on issues like visas restrictions for highly qualified individuals. Simon Walker believes passionately in the importance of business success to the economic health of the nation and has campaigned unceasingly for a better understanding of the role that business plays in wealth and job creation. However, he recognises that business success does not need to come at the expense of its wider obligations to society. Many business leaders take a similar view, but few, if any, have done more to promote it.

Mr Chancellor, in the name of the Senate, I present to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, Simon Walker.