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## Unisa's Odora-Hoppers honoured for research and scholarship



Prof. Catherine Odora-Hoppers clutches her medal with pride. She is flanked and congratulated by Prof. Mondo Kagonyera (Chancellor of Makerere University and Chairperson of the Presidential Awards Committee in Uganda) and Prof. Mandla Makhanya (Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Unisa).

Unisa boasts a number of academics and staff who have received accolades for their sterling work across the university, country, continent and globe. Joining that elite list is Professor Catherine Odora-Hoppers, who was awarded the Presidential Medal of Honour for her research and scholarship in commemoration of Uganda's Golden Jubilee of Independence this year.

Odora-Hoppers, incumbent of the Department of Science and Technology/National Research Foundation South African Research Chair in Development Education at Unisa was announced as one of Uganda's leading and celebrated academics and researchers during the 51st National Independence Celebrations in Rukungiri in Southwestern Uganda officiated by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. She officially received her medal on 23 November 2013, which coincided with the launch of the 6th DST/NRF SARChI Chair retreat at Unisa.

Odora-Hoppers is beyond grateful for this honour. "I lived in exile for almost 35 years. And now to have the Chancellor of Makerere University come from my original country to where I am now and present me with this award given by the President of my own country is overwhelming," she explained.

And she believes this is about more than just her. "The link between Unisa and Uganda has to get stronger because we can do so much with this opportunity and this recognition. We have to do something about it," she urged.

Foreseeing much more collaboration between Unisa, Uganda and Makerere University, Odora-Hoppers said, "This relationship is ready to go further and now it's all about putting our work into strategic action. She is eager to be one of the architects promoting and even facilitating this relationship and its outcomes and also encourages South Africans to be a major part of it. "Unisa has given me an opportunity to show myself, not only to the citizens of Unisa but also the citizens of South Africa, Africa and the world and it is my belief that we must do everything we can to offer our services to humankind."



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Prof. Catherine Odora-Hoppers receives hearty congratulations from some of the IKS elders.

Professor Mondo Kagonyera, Chancellor of Makerere University and Chairperson of the Presidential Awards Committee in Uganda, had the enviable task of officially honouring Odora-Hoppers with her medal. "I want to thank Catherine for being an extremely good ambassador over the country of our origin, Uganda. Coming to honour Catherine on behalf of His Excellency, President Yoweri Museveni is so special," he enthused. Kagonyera added that he takes "great pride in highlighting that Catherine does not only do great work within Unisa but she also does a lot of things in our country, including being one of the trustees for the Girl Child Education Project for Makerere University." This project canvasses support for providing education to needy and disadvantaged children with an emphasis on girl children. It speaks to the problem of the large number of girl dropouts from school before they reach their final grade.

Perhaps there's no greater compliment than from family itself and Odora-Hoppers' brother was there to share in her special moment. George Ocaya, who is also the Chairman of the Scientific, Training, Research and Technical Organisation in Uganda and member of the Elders Forum in Gulu District, Uganda, said, "We knew in our village and in our clan that there was something about Catherine that would not limit her to the village life. We have been proved right. Thank you to the government of South Africa and Unisa for

helping Catherine to get what is inside of her, for humanity, outside. What is inside of Catherine (what all of you here today have experienced at some point or another) comes from our late father and late mother. They were two of a kind," he shared.

Also sharing his pride on behalf of the entire university, Professor Mandla Makhanya, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Unisa, said "We are extremely proud of Professor Odora-Hoppers and the work that she has done, which is exemplified not only in the SARChI Chair but also in her

example. Professor Odora-Hoppers, we know that you 'practise what you preach'. 'Others' always feel welcome and validated by your warmth, caring and inclusivity, and by your passion for your field of expertise."

*\*Article by Kirosha Naicker*

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