



A peace activist honoured

THE Durban University of Technology conferred an honorary doctor of technology degree in health sciences to Ela Gandhi in recognition of her untiring commitment to community welfare, as well as non-violence and reconciliation in South Africa and internationally.

The honorary doctorate was also conferred to Gandhi in recognition of her invaluable contributions to the DUT, including in her role as chancellor.

Gandhi, a former DUT chancellor, received the award during the university's graduation ceremony that was held in Durban yesterday.

Gandhi is the granddaughter of the late Mahatma Gandhi and is a peace activist and former ANC member of Parliament.

She was born at the then Phoenix Settlement where Indians, coloureds, whites and Africans lived in harmony. It is also where Mahatma Gandhi dreamt of building a non-racial society.

Gandhi matriculated at the former Durban Indian Girls' High School, after which she obtained a social sciences degree from the University of South Africa (Unisa).

Growing up in an ashram, Gandhi was strongly influenced by her family's tradition of non-violent resistance. She joined the

Defiance Campaign marches at the age of 12, which marked the beginning of a dedicated and courageous life in politics.

She became vice president of the Natal Indian Congress in 1971 and was a member of the Detainees Support Committee in Durban where she participated in a number of support groups which assisted detainees.

Gandhi was a founding member of the Natal Organisation of Women and her work as a social worker, political and social activist revolved around creating strategies to raise awareness about race, poverty and gender, as well as ways to end these injustices.

In 1975, Gandhi was banned and placed under house arrest for eight years. This, however, did not deter her from continuing her activism and community work.

She has served in the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), ANC Women's League and the United Democratic Front (UDF), where she served on the Transitional Executive Council before the first democratic elections in 1994, after which she served as MP in the newly led ANC government until 1999.

During her first term in Parliament, she helped the people in Phoenix (her constituency at the time) to set up a 24-hour domestic-violence help line service.

Local people, both men and women, were trained and helped to run the 24-hour service.

Upon her exit from politics, Gandhi founded Satyagraha, a Durban-based non-governmental organisation that publishes a monthly newspaper of the same name. Now 12 years old, the monthly newspaper has a circulation of 21 000 papers.

She also founded the Gandhi Development Trust which promotes Gandhian values. She is also a trustee of the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Trust, which holds property donated by Mahatma Gandhi to the NIC during apartheid.

The NIC transferred the property to a trust to keep it away from the reach of the apartheid government.

She is a member of the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Trust as well as the Mahatma Gandhi Salt March Organising Committee. She is also honorary international president of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP).

Her role models include Chief Albert Luthuli, Africa's first Nobel Peace Laureate, her grandfather Mahatma Gandhi, former South African president Nelson Mandela and Monty Naicker, an anti-apartheid activist. She has received numerous awards, in-

cluding the Community of Christ International Peace Award in 2002 and the Padma Bushan Award by the Indian government in 2007 in honour of her outstanding community service.

This is India's third-highest civilian honour and was conferred by Indian President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam at his home in New Delhi.

Representing the Gandhi Development Trust, Gandhi presented the Dalai Lama with the Mahatma Gandhi International Award for Peace and Reconciliation in December 2011 in Bodhi Gaya, India.

— Supplied.



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