

HONORARY GRADUATE

Ellen Kuzwayo

Ellen Kuzwayo, social worker extraordinary, was born in 1914 in Thaba Nchu in the Orange Free State.

Her first choice of career was teaching. She attended Adams College, where she obtained her Higher Primary Teachers Training Certificate. There she came under the influence of two powerful intellectuals, Dr Edgar Brooks and Chief Albert Luthuli, who reinforced and extended her belief in responsible citizenship and the duty of each person to care for others.

In 1947, by then the mother of two sons, Mrs Kuzwayo moved to Johannesburg. Although a full-time teacher, her concern for improving the quality of people's lives led her to become involved outside the classroom in political and self-help movements, and in youth work.

Her exposure to youth in Pimville and Orlando convinced her that her teaching qualification was insufficient to enable her to intercede effectively in the wide spectrum of issues relevant to disadvantaged children. Hence she enrolled for social-work training at the Jan Hofmeyr School of Social Work, where she topped her graduating class together with fellow student Mrs Winnie Mandela.

Thereafter followed a distinguished career in work with young people and women as Organizer for the South African Association of Youth Clubs, and then General Secretary of the YWCA for the Transvaal. In these roles Mrs Kuzwayo pioneered services for disabled young people, community development programmes in the cities and self-help projects in rural areas.

Mrs Kuzwayo's commitment to women and youth, her close involvement in their affairs and her participation in Black development programmes inevitably led to her being recognized as a community leader. In 1976 she was elected as the only woman member of the Soweto Committee of Ten and dubbed 'the Mother of Soweto'.

The Committee, and its success in providing leadership and direction to Soweto people, drew interest from many different quarters, and on 19 October 1977 she was detained. Detention did not shake her values, however: it confirmed them. When she was released five months later she was determined that she would continue to devote her energies to non-violent change in South Africa for the benefit of all its peoples. Moreover, she was determined to do so as a social worker.

It was fortunate, therefore, that Mrs Kuzwayo was offered employment as Programme Organizer of the Council of Voluntary Social Services in Black Communities. Her task was to promote the development and effectiveness of local welfare services, particularly in Soweto, and to widen the network of formal and informal welfare resources in that area. Concurrently with her work for the Council, Mrs Kuzwayo found the time and energy to become an active member of the Transvaal Board of Directors of the Urban Foundation, and to return to academic studies. In 1979 she registered as a part-time student at this university for the Higher Diploma in Advanced Social

Work Practice. She was then 64 years old, double the average age of her classmates and most of her teachers.

The learning and insight gained from her advanced studies confirmed Mrs Kuzwayo's belief that the unsung heroines of Black people in South Africa were their women. Hence, at the age of 66 years, Mrs Kuzwayo embarked upon writing a book which was published to international acclaim in 1986 under the title *Call Me Woman*. Subsequently she was awarded the CNA Literary Prize for her book.

Concurrently with her writing, Mrs Kuzwayo has been active in producing two films. The first, *Awake from Mourning*, which concerns African women and their role in developing the community, has been shown throughout the English-speaking world, while the second, *Tsiamelo - Place of Mourning*, depicts the human suffering caused by the forced removal of people from areas in which their families have lived for generations. Both films have generated extensive funding for South African human-welfare projects.

In recent years Mrs Kuzwayo became the founder President of the Black Consumers' Union, a national movement to reduce the exploitation of Black consumers. It is a measure of Mrs Kuzwayo's wisdom and belief in constructive development that she has steered the Union along a path of vigorous mediation between producers and consumers in order to seek increased benefit for both through the growth of fair trading practices.

Mrs Kuzwayo's role as a dynamic leader is widely recognized in all quarters of the community. Her achievements as a person and as a social worker provide a model and inspiration to all those in South Africa who seek to make their country a land in which everybody may live with dignity and a sense of fulfilment.

The University wishes to signify its deep appreciation of her courage, her selflessness, her devotion to others and her nobility of character. It does so by conferring on her the greatest honour that lies within its bestowal for distinguished public service - the degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*.