

## INTRODUCTION OF PETER HARRIS

**Graduation speaker, 8 April 2010**

By Professor Paul Maylam

When tonight's speaker, Peter Harris, graduated from Rhodes University about thirty years ago, two of his major subjects had been law and English. He has since excelled in both fields, so his years at Rhodes must have given him a fine foundation. Last year he won three major awards for his book, titled *In a Different Time* – the absorbing story of the Delmas Four, four young South African guerrillas who infiltrated the country in the 1980s, and whom Peter Harris represented at their trial. For this acclaimed book he won the *Sunday Times* Alan Paton non-fiction award, the South African Booksellers Choice Award, and the Jenny Crwys-Williams Book Club Book of the Year Award.

There has been, too, a distinguished legal career, beginning with a fellowship at the Legal Resources Centre in 1981 – a public interest law firm that provided free legal services to the poor and marginalised. Then co-founding the law firm, Cheadle, Thompson and Haysom – a firm with a special interest in human rights. So Peter would find himself acting for detainees, representing defendants in high-profile political trials, as well as serving as legal adviser to the ANC, COSATU, and various anti-apartheid organisations; and, after 1994, becoming a technical adviser to the Constitutional Assembly, which was charged with the task of drawing up a new national constitution.

Then there has been work as a mediator and arbitrator in the political and labour fields – in the early 1990s acting as director of the Wits/Vaal region of the national peace accord, tasked with easing the conflict between warring political factions. And, in 1996, leading the establishment of the CCMA – the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration – South Africa's first national agency set up to resolve labour disputes.

There is more to be added to this impressive cv. Peter's involvement in election monitoring, for instance – serving as Chief Director of the Monitoring Directorate of the Independent Electoral Commission during South Africa's first democratic election in 1994; and becoming Director of Programmes of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance in Sweden, where he was responsible for electoral and conflict resolution programmes worldwide.

His international involvement has taken him far and wide – whether it be to advise on judicial reform, labour law, or the conduct of elections – in such countries as Indonesia, the former Yugoslavia, Mexico, Haiti, Guyana, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Sierra Leone.

In 1999 Peter co-founded the Resolve Group, where he is currently the executive chairperson – a consulting company that advises governments and companies on legal matters and strategic planning issues. In a period of less than ten years the Group's professional staff has grown from two in number to 140.

It is my pleasure to hand you over to our speaker – a devoted family man – husband of Caroline, and father of four children – Dusi canoeist, Comrades runner, scuba diver, skydiver, Rhodes graduate, human rights lawyer, conflict mediator, and award-winning author – Peter Harris.