

## NEWS FROM:

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**23 June 2011**

### **UCT welcomes US First Lady Mrs Michelle Obama**

The University of Cape Town is honoured to be one of the hosts for the visit of the First Lady of the United States of America, Mrs Michelle Obama, on Thursday, 23 June 2011.

While at UCT, the First Lady will get an opportunity to meet 50 students from five historically disadvantaged communities in Cape Town. This forms part of Mrs Obama's continuing commitment to engage young people worldwide, especially girls and young women, support educational opportunities and promote youth mentoring.

The students, who will be accompanied by UCT mentors, will be taken on a tour of the entire campus. They will then be given talks by faculty representatives and administration staff about study opportunities at UCT, the admissions process, financial aid and campus student life, before meeting Mrs Obama and UCT Vice-Chancellor, Dr Max Price.

"The essence of Mrs. Obama's message reinforces a core part of UCT's mandate - to provide opportunities to learners with talent and motivation to gain access to a world class higher education regardless of their social class and in spite of their poorer schooling," said Dr Price.

"Mrs. Obama's efforts are aimed at making children believe it is possible; that aspiration and hope is a first but essential step in the transformation of a person's life situation. Moreover, her life-long work to promote education, active citizenship, community engagement and equality for all is closely aligned with UCT's values. Hosting Mrs Obama provides an opportunity to restate those commitments and reinforce them to our students, staff and wider society.

"Higher education is the single most effective intervention that an individual and society can make to lift people out of poverty, and stimulate employment. Yet South Africa's history,

and the still existing consequences of inadequate school education, has had the terrible result that many children today do not even aspire to higher education; they simply do not believe that it is possible for them and so deny themselves the opportunity. They view a degree as only possible for the privileged.

“We believe that it is indeed possible to succeed to graduation at a university even if your educational background was not ideal, even when you are very poor, even when your parents might have been denied such an opportunity. At UCT we have examples of these students succeeding against incredible odds. We create access through affirmative action admission policies, we ensure that anyone we admit will be given all the financial aid necessary to cover their costs, and we provide the additional academic support to help them succeed to graduation.”

UCT is the highest-rated university in Africa and the only African university to be ranked among the top 200 universities in the world by Times Higher Education World University Rankings.

The university also has a consistent record of resistance to the inequalities instituted under apartheid and has a proud association with American leaders who have a passion to advance human rights. In June 1966, Senator Robert F Kennedy delivered the National Union of South African Students’ annual Day of Affirmation speech in UCT’s Jameson Hall – a speech that still resonates today with its affirmation of the brotherhood of all humans. In March 1997 First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton visited UCT soon after visiting Robben Island with President Nelson Mandela.

UCT’s history includes other illustrious figures such as the current UCT Chancellor Mrs Graça Machel, wife of former president Nelson Mandela on whom UCT bestowed an honorary doctorate in 1990.

***ENDS***

**Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department**

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