


 In Memoriam:

Essop Pahad

By Prof. Letlhokwa Mpedi, Vice Chancellor and Principal of the University of Johannesburg

Whilst many will speak today of the historic and invaluable contributions of Essop Pahad to our country's liberation struggle and at the dawn of democracy, it is often forgotten that this came at great pain for him to live a life in exile, isolated from family and friends. Such was the often silent struggle that happened parallel to the struggle for freedom. Though this was an immensely politically active time for him, it was also incredibly taxing. It was in this time that Essop clung to the promise of a free and democratic South Africa. As the Greek tragedian Aeschylus once said: 'I know how men in exile feed on dreams.' So desperate was his dream for a better tomorrow that he worked tirelessly with members of the international community to bring attention to the plight of those he left behind. Throughout his life, he continued to cling onto this dream as he fought for justice and equity long beyond the advent of democracy. He once said: 'Our march to a better life requires that each and every South African should put shoulders to the wheel – all of us as partners in transforming ours into a society that cares. We must know our rights and exercise them, in the same measure as we take on our collective responsibility to build South Africa into a nation of our dreams.'

His association with the University of Johannesburg (UJ) goes back many years with significant intellectual contributions and interactions given his vast presence in politics and his stature as an academic. His PhD awarded from the University

of Sussex focusing on political movements in this country from the 1920s onwards was a seminal piece of work that is constantly referenced. His association with UJ was cemented when *The Thinker*, the journal that he founded, shifted to UJ Press in 2019. *The Thinker* is aimed at creating a space for public discourse, the clash of ideas, to stimulate intellectual debate and scientific discourse. It strives to give all its contributors the freedom to express what they think, understanding that openness in the context of ideas, theoretical divergences and multi-dimensional practice is a necessary condition for fundamental social transformation. It is really in understanding the objectives of *The Thinker* that we understand Essop and his commitment to justice through a critical lens. Beyond this, he was an Honorary Scholar and Board Member of the Centre for Africa-China Studies (CACs), UJ's research Institute focusing on China's relations with Africa. He was also a committed member of the Concerned African Forum (CAF) and worked closely with the South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChi) Chair for African Diplomacy and Foreign Policy and the Centre for African Diplomacy and Leadership (CADL). His death is a great loss to our community. As Zakes Mda said in his award-winning work *Ways of Dying*: 'Death lives with us every day. Indeed, our ways of dying are our ways of living. Or should I say our ways of living are our ways of dying.' It is in Zakes' words that we are reminded that Essop's legacy and dream are immortal and in this we can take solace.