

MEDIA RELEASE

UP confers honorary doctorate on WHO chief Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

The University of Pretoria (UP) has awarded Director-General of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus with an honorary doctorate (*honoris causa*) in recognition of his outstanding contributions as a global health expert, scholar, advocate and diplomat.

The WHO head attended the ceremony, which was part of the University's 2023 autumn graduation season and at which UP awarded graduates from its School of Medicine with Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery (MBChB) degrees as well as postgraduate degrees.

"It is a privilege for the University of Pretoria to honour such an outstanding health leader for his many and significant contributions, which span three decades," said Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences Professor Tiaan de Jager of Dr Ghebreyesus, who holds a Bachelor of Biology, a Master of Science in Immunology of Infectious Diseases, a PhD in Community Health and an honorary fellowship from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

"Dr Ghebreyesus' notable achievements in global health leadership, particularly in the areas of malaria, HIV/AIDS, maternal and child health, have been immensely impactful," Prof De Jager added. "His enormous contributions globally in the fields of public health and epidemiology as a scientist, global health expert, diplomat and advocate together with his innovative, bold dynamism to reshape global public health have been unmatched."

The WHO chief is regarded as a health scholar with first-hand experience in research, particularly in the field of malaria, and has published numerous articles in prominent scientific journals on a range of global health topics.

Dr Ghebreyesus, who was born in Asmara (now part of Eritrea), Ethiopia, held various high-ranking positions in healthcare before his election in 2017 as Director-General of the WHO, an appointment that saw him become the first African to lead the global public health agency.

As Minister of Health in Ethiopia (2005 and 2012), he expanded the country's health system with the introduction of innovative health financing mechanisms, by investing in health infrastructure and building the health workforce, thus giving millions of Ethiopians access to healthcare. As Minister of Foreign Affairs (2012 to 2016), he led negotiations of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, where 193 countries committed to providing funding towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Over the years, through his leadership of several international health initiatives, Dr Ghebreyesus has ensured the foregrounding of critical health concerns on global development agendas. As Chair of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, he led comprehensive reforms to set the organisation back on track; championed country leadership as Chair of the Programme Coordinating Board for UNAIDS; elevated malaria on development agendas during his chairmanship of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership; and spotlighted maternal, newborn and child health as Co-Chair of the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health.

Dr Ghebreyesus' steering of global efforts to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic cemented his status as a global health leader and brought him worldwide recognition. He galvanised manufacturers of medical supplies to work with the WHO to scale up access to personal protective equipment for health workers on the frontlines of the pandemic, and in collaboration with health partners, WHO launched the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator initiative to bolster production, development and equitable access to vaccines, diagnostics and treatments.

Under his directorship, Dr Ghebreyesus has driven WHO initiatives that seek to have measurable impact in countries. The public health agency's five-year strategic plan (2019 – 2023) centres on "promoting health, keeping the world safe and serving the vulnerable", and places emphasis on supporting countries to achieve health-related SDG targets. The plan also focuses the WHO's work on meeting its "triple billion" targets: 1 billion more people benefitting from universal health coverage; 1 billion more people better protected from health emergencies; and 1 billion more people enjoying better health and well-being.

Over the years, Dr Ghebreyesus has received numerous distinctions for his work in advancing global health. Among others, he was the first non-American to receive the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Humanitarian Award (2011) and in 2018, he was made a Grand Officer of the National Order of Benin, awarded the National Order of the Lion of Senegal and was the recipient of the Oswaldo Cruz Medal of Merit in recognition of his services to public health in Brazil. In 2020, he was included in *Time* magazine's list of the 100 Most Influential People of the Year, and received the African of the Year Award from *African Leadership* magazine.

"Dr Ghebreyesus' values and ideals align closely with UP's 2025 vision, as the Faculty of Health Sciences strives to become a public health leader that consistently produces a new generation of healthcare professionals who aim to accelerate progress in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals," said UP Vice-Chancellor and Principal Prof Tawana Kupe. "He is a model of global health leadership, and we are extremely delighted to present him with a much-deserved honorary doctorate from our university."

Media enquiries

Please email Liesel Swart at liesel.swart@up.ac.za or liesel@roundtree.co.za , Cell: 082 672 0067

ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on the Hatfield Campus, Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also the largest producer of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only University in the country with a Faculty of Veterinary Science,

ranked top in Africa. Overall has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 55 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes.

UP is one of the top five universities in South Africa, according to the 2019-2020 rankings by the Centre for World University Rankings. It is ranked among the top 100 universities worldwide in three fields of study (veterinary science, theology, and law) and the top 1% in eight fields of study (agricultural sciences, clinical medicine, engineering, environment/ecology, immunology, microbiology, plant and animal sciences and social sciences).

In May 2020, the annual UK Financial Times Executive Education Rankings again ranked GIBS as the top South African and African business school. The University also has an extensive community engagement programme with approximately 33 000 students involved in community upliftment. Furthermore, UP is building considerable capacities and strengths for the Fourth Industrial Revolution by preparing students for the world beyond University and offering work-readiness and entrepreneurship training.

For more information, go to www.up.ac.za