

NEWS RELEASE

#UPGraduation2024: UP confers honorary doctorate on WHO Regional Director for Africa, Dr Matshidiso Moeti



Recipient of an honorary doctorate from the Faculty of Health Sciences, Dr Matshidiso Moeti

PRETORIA - The University of Pretoria (UP) has awarded World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for Africa, Dr Matshidiso Moeti, with an honorary doctorate in recognition of her outstanding contribution in Africa and beyond as a leader, global health expert, advocate and diplomat. This makes her the first woman to receive an honorary doctorate from the Faculty of Health Sciences at UP.

Dr Moeti is the first woman to be elected as WHO Regional Director for Africa. She has been wildly acknowledged for driving changes and a transformation agenda that has improved the WHO's performance on a number of areas including emergencies, enhanced accountability and gains towards Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

"I am truly honoured to be awarded the honorary doctorate by the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Pretoria, and for being the first woman to be conferred the honorary doctoral degree by the faculty. I believe strongly in the power of education to transform lives," Dr Moeti said.

"I congratulate the 2024 graduates on reaching this milestone. I am grateful to become an adopted family member of the University of Pretoria and hope that this moment serves as inspiration for young women forging a path in health in Africa."

Among a long list of key achievements, Dr Moeti is renowned for having led WHO's '3 by 5' Initiative in Africa at the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, driving access to antiretroviral therapy among people living with HIV, explained Professor Tiaan de Jager, Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences and Professor in Environmental Health at the School of Health Systems and Public Health at UP.

“By empowering nurses to prescribe antiretroviral drugs (ARVs), her work helped to shift HIV from a death sentence to a chronic illness in Africa.”

Since taking up the reins as the WHO Regional Director for Africa in 2015, the organisation has achieved key milestones under Dr Moeti's leadership. These include eradicating the poliovirus in 2020 – the second disease to be eradicated from the continent after smallpox 40 years ago – and increased investments in areas such as surveillance, training, innovation, community engagement and partnerships. The investments have improved countries' capacity to prepare for and respond to the around 100 acute health emergencies that occur annually on the continent.

“This resulted in faster, better coordinated and more effective response to outbreaks like Ebola. Dr Moeti has also led a robust response to the COVID-19 pandemic,” Prof de Jager added.

Dr Moeti, a medical doctor and public health expert with more than 40 years of national and international experience, obtained her Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery from the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine of the University of London in 1978. Then in 1986, she obtained a Master of Science in Community Health for Developing Countries, from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Before joining WHO in 1999, Dr Moeti worked with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) as Team Leader of the Africa and Middle East Desk in Geneva, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as Regional Health Advisor for East and Southern Africa, and Botswana's Ministry of Health as a clinician and public health specialist.

After joining WHO's Africa Regional Office, she served as Deputy Regional Director, Assistant Regional Director, Director of Noncommunicable Diseases, WHO Representative for Malawi, Coordinator of the Inter-Country Support Team for the South and East African countries and Regional Advisor for HIV/AIDS, before being elected to the top WHO post on the continent.

“Dr Moeti is also a great champion for women in leadership in global health and has launched a partnership with the UN Volunteers programme to recruit 100 young women from the global south as the next generation of health leaders,” Prof de Jager said.

“Under her leadership, WHO in Africa has additionally rolled out several interventions to improve leadership skills, build confidence, and empower women to take up significant roles.”

In recognition of her exceptional service to humanity, Dr Moeti has received accolades such as honorary fellowships from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the Colleges of Medicine of South Africa, among others. She was also named a COVID-19 Heroine by the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Center for Women and Development and most recently, she was honoured with Membership of the United States National Academy of Medicine and was recognised for African health leadership on COVID-19 by AMREF Health Africa.

“For her sustained, outstanding, and life-changing contributions to the health of the people of Africa, it is a great honour and with great pleasure that we award Dr Matshidiso Moeti a honorary doctorate in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Pretoria.”

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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 its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers 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, which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The [2024 Times Higher Education subject rankings](#) placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of Law, Veterinary Science, Accounting and Finance; Agriculture and Forestry and Electrical and Electronic Engineering. Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their [2024 World University Rankings \(WUR\)](#). UP was the only South African university featured in the [2023 World University Rankings for Innovation \(WURI\)](#), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

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