

# Fight for children's rights pays off as Skelton bags top award

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DR ANN Skelton, head of the Centre for Child Law at the University of Pretoria, who has for the past 20 years fought for the rights of children in SA, has been honoured by children around the world, receiving an honorary World's Children's Prize for her work.

Skelton has just returned from Sweden, where she shared the award with Sakena Yacoobi of Afghanistan, who received the award for her life-threatening fight for girls' right to education.

The first prize went to Anna Mol-

lel of Tanzania who received the most votes from children for her 20-year-struggle for Maasai children with disabilities.

The award ceremony took place in Mariefred, Sweden, last week.

Skelton said she was honoured by the fact that children had the final say in the awards. "It is very special that children vote."

About 50 children from 15 countries paid tribute to the heroes of millions of children, during the awards held at Gripsholm Castle.

Skelton told the Pretoria News that the ceremony was wonderful. "It was presented entirely by the 'children's jury' and child musi-

cians. Queen Sylvia of Sweden was the only adult on stage."

The children around the world are told in detail about the work done by the three nominees, in a magazine called *The Globe*.

They then vote for the candidates. About 2.4 million children voted this year.

"This meant that the children got to know the candidates' stories well. The children in Sweden recognised me immediately. They even approached me on the street to have their pictures taken with me.

"This is an entire new experience because I'm more used to being unpopular for my work as I nag

everyone about children's rights," Skelton quipped.

Skelton has done groundbreaking work for SA's children, both in the courtrooms and by changing laws affecting children.

To her the interests of children always come first.

It does not matter to her whether it is a child at the centre of a messy divorce dispute, an ill-treated child in a children's home or a child being held in custody.

When Nelson Mandela became president, Skelton was asked to chair the writing of new legislation protecting children in trouble with the law.

Barely back on SA soil from Sweden, Skelton was back in court doing what she loves best – fighting for children's rights.

Skelton is now in the Cape Town High Court fighting for the rights of children who've had a run-in with the law.

Later this week she will return to Pretoria to intervene in an application which can have grave consequences for children receiving child grants.

Following her award, Skelton said: "It's new to be popular. However, once I'm back at work I'm quite content to be unpopular, if that's what it takes."



Dr Ann Skelton receives her award from Queen Sylvia of Sweden. Skelton was accompanied by Khanyisile Ngidi, 15, of Pretoria, one of the many youngsters she has assisted over her career.