

New South African Chief Justice

1997 saw the appointment of Judge Ismail Mahomed as the Chief Justice of the Republic of South Africa. His appointment has been welcomed by the Law Societies of South Africa, who describe him as a "man of his time".

Justice Ismail Mahomed was admitted to the Johannesburg Bar in 1957, as the bar in his home town of Pretoria was reserved for whites. Even in Johannesburg, he was unable to occupy an office at the bar because chambers were situated in a 'whites only' area. In 1974, he was awarded silk, and was the first black person to be accorded this honour.

He is acclaimed as an eminent jurist, having been appointed judge of the Appeal Court in Swaziland in 1975, then Judge of Appeal in Lesotho in 1982. He went on to become Chief Justice of Namibia and President of the Lesotho Court of Appeal. 1991 was the year of his appointment to the bench of the Supreme Court in South Africa and he continued to rise through the ranks until he was appointed Deputy President of the Constitutional Court in 1995.

As an advocate, Ismail Mahomed

was renowned for his appearance in a number of trials on behalf of leading anti-apartheid activists and his part in challenging administrative and executive decrees from the government.

This challenge has now turned into that of restoring the faith of the people of the Republic of South Africa in their legal system, a challenge which he sees as belonging to all lawyers in that country, following the introduction of the final Constitution, signed by President Nelson Mandela on 16 December 1996.

Chief Justice Mahomed, in welcoming delegates to a World Jurist seminar in Capetown, said: "The new Constitution of our nation restores the legitimacy and the majesty of the law and gives to the judiciary a very crucial and independent role in the protection of its humblest citizen from injustice, however mighty and powerful be the agency from which it emanates and, indeed, however formidable be the popularity which that agency might claim."

This theme continues that of his statements on announcement of his appointment where he said: "I am deeply con-

scious that the country is now irreversibly committed to a new constitutional future, based on equality and freedom. The President and my country of birth have deeply honoured me by appointing me to a very high judicial office which would give me the opportunity of giving effect to that commitment. I hope that I will be able to contribute to the urgent need to salvage the image of the law so that it in fact is, and is perceived to be, a friend and protector of the people instead of an instrument of racial, gender or political oppression."

De Rebus, journal of the Law Societies of the Republic of South Africa, indicates the Societies' anticipation of a "potential relationship with the Chief Justice [that is] a far less indirect one than in the past", based on the gaining of supreme court rights of audience by attorneys, and continues "as equal players ... in the legal profession" to wish him "strength to his arm".

Source: *De Rebus*, December 1996 & February 1997

Letter to the Editor

Thank you so much for the congratulations of you and your members on my 50th celebrations, and your flowers were lovely and such a delightful surprise.

Please convey my thanks and appreciation to you and all members of the Law Society.

Mary Ridsdale



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