

PRESS STATEMENT

UNAIDS mourns the death of author and activist Achmat Dangor

GENEVA, 8 September 2020—UNAIDS is deeply saddened by the death of our dear friend and former colleague Achmat Dangor. Mr Dangor was an acclaimed author and leading activist who dedicated his life to social justice and the struggle for liberation and democracy in South Africa.

He was a prominent voice in the response to AIDS at a time when AIDS denial was widespread, speaking out and writing about the spread of HIV and the impact that the AIDS epidemic was having in South Africa. He expanded his work on HIV when he joined the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund as Chief Executive and when he became the Interim Director of the World AIDS Campaign. In 2004, he joined UNAIDS as the Director of Advocacy, Communication and Leadership, designing campaigns and strategies to put HIV at the very top of political agendas.

"Achmat Dangor was an activist who brought together leaders from all walks of life to make a difference for people—for women, children, the marginalized and people living with HIV," said Mahesh Mahalingam, Director of Communications and Global Advocacy, UNAIDS. "He combined human rights, compassion and kindness to make a unique impression on the AIDS response."

Mr Dangor promoted social justice throughout his life. In the 1970s, he started a writers' group called Black Thoughts, a collective established to promote African writers and black culture and to correct the cultural distortions being imposed by apartheid. In the 1980s, he co-founded the Congress of South African Writers, a grass-roots organization established to promote literature and redress the imbalances of apartheid education.

Mr Dangor served as the Chief Executive of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, a non-profit organization founded by Nelson Mandela when he stepped down as the President of South Africa in 1999, where he helped to establish Nelson Mandela Day, 18 July, to honour the legacy of Nelson Mandela through volunteering and community service. He was also the founding Executive Director of the Kagiso Trust, the largest black-led foundation in South Africa, and the South African representative of the Ford Foundation, a non-profit organization providing grants and investments to reduce poverty and injustice.

Mr Dangor taught creative writing and South African literature at New York State University and published a number of critically acclaimed works of fiction and poetry, including Bitter Fruit, which was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, and Kafka's Curse, for which he received the Herman Charles Bosman Prize.

UNAIDS expresses its heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of Mr Dangor.

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The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Learn more at unaids.org and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.