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Dr. Narissa Ramdhani, a former anti-apartheid activist, is today a leading South African academic, who has also distinguished herself in the business, development and cultural heritage sectors nationally and internationally.

Currently holding the position of Chief Executive Officer of the Ifa Lethu Foundation, she has devoted the last fifteen years of her career to the areas of academia, business and cultural heritage, eleven at Executive level. For she has been of the view that cultural gratification is important because South Africans needed to take ownership of their cultural heritage as part of South Africa's nation building exercise.

Ramdhani was born in 1959 in Durban, South Africa to parents- both of whom were descendents of Indian indentured laborers who arrived in the country from India in 1892. Having completed her bachelors, honors and master's degrees in South Africa, she found herself unable to deal with being saddled with the race classification of the apartheid state. Added to this dilemma, was the persecution affiliated to her activism in resistance activity-all which affected the safety of her family. She was therefore forced to leave the country, her eight month old daughter and her partner to take up refuge in the USA. This refuge was offered by the University of Connecticut where it was arranged that she would pursue a further Master's degree in Public History and Archival Management. Following this, she took up a position at Yale University devoted to building research capacity on the South African political dilemma. During her long stay in the USA, she devoted much of her energies to continuing her anti-apartheid activities by leveraging support for the South African cause and by involving herself in the divestment rallies in Yale and Washington.

In 1993, she returned to South Africa at the invitation of the African National Congress to participate in one of former President Nelson Mandela's special projects. As the only South African person of color to hold a tertiary qualification in Archival Management/Public History, she was invited to locate the ANC's lost archives and repatriate them to South Africa. She succeeded in tackling this major national undertaking with much zeal and passion, with the result that she completed the process of repatriation of documents from 33 countries, thus making it possible for the former freedom movement to set up its archive. Dr. Ramdhani recognized the value of these archives as being the single most

complete record of the historic mission of the ANC. As a South African historian she believed that their value could not be matched in any meaningful way by other records in a country that had not been truly mindful of the contribution to history of the majority of its formerly oppressed majority. For her, “an archival record such as this one provides the foundation for the continuing pursuit of a just society—hence these records can help secure justice for the victims of oppressive action and to guarantee the existence of an enlightened and democratic society”. National and international scholars are today the beneficiaries of her sterling efforts, without which there may not have been a collective record of the people’s struggles for justice and human rights. In addition to this effort, she was invited by Mr. Mandela to assist in a personal and highly secretive project related to documentary sourcing and retrieval. Entrusted with national projects of such high level, and with the custodianship of national treasures, Dr. Ramdhani pushed the boundaries of research development and capacity and earned the respect of the scholarly communities, the country’s majority and many international bodies such as the UN. This resulted in her being approached to share her expertise with such bodies as well as with countries such as Chile, Argentina, Spain, Poland, India, Germany and the USA. Through such efforts, she has been instrumental in playing a critical role in the development of policies for documents of former oppressed regimes.

She returned to the realm of academia when she joined the Universities of Durban-Westville and KwaZulu-Natal in 1998 and held Directorships at three of the Research Centers of these institutions. During this time she focused on aggressively generating socio-political research and capacity as a means of contributing to academic and community efforts aimed at social cohesion and human rights awareness in the country. Through such work she also succeeded in raising the profiles of the Centers with which she has been associated nationally and internationally as Centers of Excellence in research. The result was an increase in Research output.

As Director of these Research Centers, she worked to inject the academic component into cultural heritage, thus generating further research into these areas, thus catapulting the value of South Africa’s cultural heritage into the international arena. Her greatest achievement in this regard, was the establishment and co-chairing from 1999-2004 of the largest partnership effort between the USA and South Africa in the field of cultural heritage. Included in this collaboration were USA academic and heritage institutions, South African government ministries, tertiary institutions, political parties and heritage institutions. Through its mandate, this large partnership achieved much success during its tenure, with the result that it played a critical role in skilling South Africans who now occupy key positions in all economic sectors. Through her work on this body, she made a meaningful contribution to South Africa’s attempts preserve and transmit its cultural heritage and history and to train heritage practitioners. For her, seeing South Africa’s national treasures being returned to where they really belonged was a poignant moment.

In view of her expertise and knowledge of the relationship between and sources of the African National Congress and the United States of America, and with the support of Mr. Mandela, she went on to register for her PhD at the University of KwaZulu-Natal during which she explored the complexities of this relationship through the use of unique archival sources drawn from the formerly hidden, repressed and repatriated materials as well as interviews. This resulted in the production of a doctoral dissertation which was completed in 2009. Her hope, in completing this research, is that it will act as the catalyst for further interrogation of these new sources as well as a guide for the future relationship of South Africa with the USA.

In view of the her expertise in the area of cultural heritage and its preservation and her track record with the ANC repatriation project, she was approached by decision makers in the field in South Africa to head a project devoted to the repatriation of South Africa's struggle-era heritage. Accepting the position of Chief Executive Officer of the Ifa Lethu Foundation in 2005, Dr. Ramdhani succeeded in turning the Foundation's work into South Africa's largest repatriation effort, with art and other South African heritage being repatriated from 16 countries. In addition to this she has played a significant role in leveraging heritage as a tool for economic empowerment and as one focused on national impact priorities such as poverty alleviation and employment creation in South Africa. This strategy was guided by her research which pointed to the lack of available and related skills in this sector and the failure to use heritage to empower communities and create a more entrepreneurial society in South Africa, thus contributing to the economic development of the country. Therefore her passionate involvement in economic empowerment of rural women, struggling artists and youth through her implementation of the entrepreneurship programmes in the creative sectors over the last five years has resulted in many success stories for South Africa such as the creation of business opportunities and employment for such groups on the continent and beyond. Through her work in the creation of enabling environments for the creative practitioners, she has catapulted South Africa visual artists and sculptors and fashion designers into the international stage where such individuals have succeeded in trading successfully-thus paving the way for creative practitioners to sustain themselves for 2010 and beyond. Further, through her success at poverty alleviation efforts, through the arts and heritage, she has earned the respect of the corporate and government sectors not only for her work but for the cultural heritage sector of South Africa as well. During the last three years, she has made critical inroads into using cultural heritage to translate industry growth needs in South Africa into meaningful capacity.

In recognition of her work, she been approached to serve on many boards and continues to do so. She has also held many fellowships, as well as many executive and non-executive memberships of national and international boards.

Through her concentration in the field of history and her work with peace institutes such as the Gandhi-Luthuli institute, she has played a critical role in redressing social injustice, assisting moral regeneration and redressing historical inequalities and contributing towards conflict resolution and peace in South Africa.

Dr Ramdhani has addressed numerous bodies, including conferences nationally and internationally on the subject of South African politics, cultural heritage and access to information, and in so doing has helped to shape debates on these areas.

Arriving at the University of Connecticut as a South African activist, Dr. Ramdhani today stands out as an example of how one could use adversity to overcome challenges and move on to make a valued contribution in the world. In this regard she stands out as a beacon of hope to many young graduates who look into the world beyond graduate school with much trepidation. To the many who have been victims of many types of adversity such as racism, religious, ethnic and sexual intolerances, and other forms of abuse, and to the many minorities, her life exemplifies how lessons carried from university can arm one with all the necessary tools to overcome such adversity. It also demonstrates how the values instilled by the University of Connecticut experience can contribute to the attainment of the highest forms of intellectual and moral values.

Dr, Ramdhani's advocacy work has ensured that the University of Connecticut brand has been carried across the oceans. This was clearly illustrated through her role in the development of the historic ANC-UCONN partnership. This led to further collaboration between UCONN and South Africa such the UCONN-University of Fort Hare partnership and the partnership between the State of Connecticut and the Eastern Cape of South Africa. Being the first and only partnership between a political party and an international tertiary institution, this collaboration witnessed many academic and archival exchanges, capacity building projects, archival initiatives as well as many interesting engagements. As a result of this and of the role of UCONN in offering Dr, Ramdhani a home away from home during a very dangerous and turbulent period in her life, the University of Connecticut today continues to occupy a valued position in South Africa. Dr. Ramdhani today also continues to reflect on her UCONN lessons as being rooted in her visions for her future development.

From the above motivation it can be seen that Dr. Narissa Ramdhani's exceptional life and achievements epitomize the very character and quality of the University of Connecticut –thus serving as a wonderful source of inspiration to new graduates. Hence we are of the view that the choice of Dr. Ramdhani as an Honorary Graduated would serve the University well in conveying its vision for its graduates. It will also serve to demonstrate the effectiveness of the University mission of cultural diversity and internationalism.