

Justice Bess Nkabinde receives an honorary doctorate from the NWU

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The North-West University (NWU) honoured Justice Bess Nkabinde with an honorary doctorate on 21 October 2021 for her exceptional contribution to the legal profession and to social justice in South Africa.



Justice Bess Nkabinde receives an honorary doctorate from the North-West University.

She was nominated by the Faculty of Law, with which she maintains close ties, not only for her significant contribution to our country's jurisprudence but also for being a role model to many, especially women in the legal profession, locally and internationally. Nkabinde was born in the North-West Province and obtained an LLB degree from the former University of the North West. She has made her mark in a field traditionally dominated by men and has worked tirelessly to advance the cause of local women in all fields.

She was admitted as an advocate in 1988 in Bophuthatswana. After serving her pupillage at the Johannesburg Bar in 1989, she was admitted as an advocate in Pretoria. She joined the North West Bar in 1990, where she practised in the areas of civil litigation, commercial law, matrimonial law and

criminal law.

Her judicial career began as acting judge of the High Court, Bophuthatswana Provincial Division, in 1999 and she became a permanent judge of that court in November that year.

Nkabinde served on the Mpshe Commission of Inquiry into the mutiny of warders at Mogwase Prison from 1994 to 1995. In 2003, she was appointed to serve on the special tribunal on civil matters likely to emanate from investigations by the Special Investigative Units established in terms of the Special Investigating Units and Special Tribunals Act 74 of 1996.

In 2000 and 2003, she served as an acting judge of the Labour Court and, from October 2004 to May 2005, as acting judge of the Labour Appeal Court. She also served for two terms in 2005 as an acting judge of the Supreme Court of Appeal.

She was appointed as a Justice of the Constitutional Court in January 2006. On her experience at the Constitutional Court, Nkabinde said: "The Court was an inspiration and really something to look forward to. Not in terms of being here, because I actually never even thought of being a judge in this court, but as a lawyer, you know, knowing that we are all moving towards this change, we all have to participate in making the difference. Because as lawyers we really make a contribution to our jurisprudence. So from that perspective it was quite an experience ... an exciting experience."

Nkabinde served as acting deputy chief justice of the Republic of South Africa from May 2016 until June 2017, and was appointed acting chief justice of the Republic of South Africa in November 2016. She retired from the constitutional court after 12 years of service in 2017. She has been the Acting Judge of Appeal in the Supreme Court of Namibia since October 2018.

Nkabinde was appointed as a member of and chairperson of the Rules Board for Courts of Law in 2004, and served in this position until 2013. She was also a member of the Small Claims Court. In addition, she was a member of the coordinating committee of the justice system in South Africa and of the sub-committee on racism and sexism within the Judiciary.

Her qualifications include a BProc degree from the University of Zululand in 1983, the LLB from the University of the North West in 1986 and a Diploma in Industrial Relations (with distinction) from Damelin College.

Justice Nkabinde has delivered papers at various institutions at home and abroad and has taught an introductory course in South African constitutional jurisprudence to postgraduate students at Maryland Law School in the United States.

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