

## MEDIA ADVISORY

### LADY JUSTICE MEAZA ASHENAFI MENGISTU TO DELIVER THE 2024 UNISA FOUNDERS LECTURE

Approved for public release.

Date: Tuesday, 26 November 2024

The Former President of the Federal Supreme Court of Ethiopia, Honourable Lady Justice Meaza Ashenafi Mengistu will deliver the keynote address at the University of South Africa (Unisa)'s 2024 Annual Flagship Founders Lecture on Thursday, 28 November 2024, at Unisa Muckleneuk Campus in Pretoria, under the theme: ***“The role of women in delivering Justice in Africa: Passive or active agents?”***

The Unisa Founders' Lecture was introduced in 2003, with the aim to encourage the University and its stakeholders to engage and focus on critical issues in higher education at both global and national levels. Over the years, a variety of topics, presented by eminent and renowned scholars from across the continent and the globe, have established the Founders' Lecture as a premium forum for intellectual engagement of the highest order.

Justice Meaza Ashenafi Mengistu is the first woman in Ethiopian history to become the President of the Federal Supreme Court (Chief Justice). She is well-known as a women's rights advocate, with notable achievements including her role as co-founder of the Ethiopian Women Lawyers' Association (EWLA) and founder of a women's bank (Enat Bank) — both pioneering organisations and the first of their kind in Ethiopia.

After earning her Bachelor of Law degree in 1986, Mengistu co-founded the Ethiopian Women Lawyers' Association (EWLA) in 1995 to provide legal defence to women who couldn't afford it. Her transformative leadership as the Executive Director for eight years was instrumental in propelling the cause of gender equality in Ethiopia.

In 1996, Mengistu served as the attorney in the high-profile case of a 14-year-old girl who was enroute home from school when she was abducted by a posse of men seeking to procure a bride for a would-be husband. The girl fatally shot the would-be husband, who had beaten and raped her. Mengistu, in support of the girl, took the case pro bono to demonstrate that even though abduction into marriage is one of Ethiopia's oldest traditions, the girl acted in self-defence. Mengistu successfully defended the girl, and the case led to the government outlawing the Ethiopian custom of kidnapping girls for wedlock.

In 2005, Mengistu enrolled at the University of Connecticut in Storrs, where she received a scholarship from UNESCO for postgraduate studies. Two years later, she received a Master of Arts in International Relations in Gender Studies from the University. In 2011, she began serving as an adviser to the Gender and Social Policy Development Department with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). In 2012, she was named by the UN as a Women's Human Rights Advisor, followed in 2015 by her nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize.

In 2018, Meaza Mengistu was appointed President of the Federal Supreme Court by the House of People's Representatives (the Parliament) in Addis Ababa. There, she enhanced coordination



among Ethiopia's justice sector institutions, particularly in criminal justice administration and constitutional disputes.

Mengistu's awards include Advance Media's 100 Most Influential African Women, she also received the African Leadership Prize, the Hunger Project Award, and the Women of Courage for Ethiopia Award from the United States Government.

The lecture will take place as follows:

**Date** : Thursday, 28 November 2024  
**Time** : 17:30  
**Venue** : Function Hall, 4<sup>th</sup> floor, Kgorong Building, Unisa Main Campus, Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, Tshwane

Members of the media are invited to attend and cover the lecture.

**- Ends-**

For RSVPs and interviews requests, please contact Unisa Senior Media Officers: Tommy Huma on 072 218 6197 / [humartm@unisa.ac.za](mailto:humartm@unisa.ac.za) OR Edgar Rathelele on 063 731 5456 / [ratheme@unisa.ac.za](mailto:ratheme@unisa.ac.za)

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