

Media Advisory

Professor Mukoma Wa Ngugi to deliver the 16th Es'kia Mphahlele Annual Memorial Lecture at Unisa in Polokwane

Approved for public release.

Date: Tuesday, 25 November 2025

The University of South Africa (Unisa)'s North-Eastern Region, in collaboration with the College of Economics and Management Sciences (CEMS), will host the 16th Es'kia Mphahlele Annual Memorial Lecture on Wednesday, 26 November 2025, in Polokwane.

This year's lecture will be presented by **Professor Mukoma Wa Ngugi**, a Professor of Literatures in English at Cornell University, New York, USA. He is an acclaimed scholar, novelist, poet, and public intellectual whose work continues to shape contemporary African literary discourse, particularly in the areas of language, identity, and decolonial imagination.

The purpose of the lecture, under the theme: "***The African Writer as a Prophet and Social Critic in Contemporary Times***," is to:

- Honour the legacy of late Prof Es'kia Mphahlele and to acknowledge his contributions to literary discourse and the social development.
- Generate debate that contribute to public discourse.
- Promote academic intellectualism.
- Stimulate intellectual dialogue on literary discourse and contemporary issues.
- Advance Unisa's social impact through teaching and learning, community engagement and critical research.

Audience:

The lecture attracts a diverse audience, including political parties; the business community; government departments at national, provincial, and local levels; traditional leaders; institutions of higher learning; members of the general public; media, etc.

About Prof Mukoma:

Professor Mukoma Wa Ngugi holds a PhD in English from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, an MA in Creative Writing from Boston University and a BA in English and Political Science from Albright College.

He is also the author of **The Rise of the African Novel: Politics of Language, Identity and Ownership** as well as the following novels: **Mrs. Shaw**, **Black Star Nairobi**, **Nairobi Heat**. Also authored two books of poetry: **Logotherapy** and **Hurling Words at Consciousness**

Prof Mukoma's other works include:

- 2009: shortlisted for the Caine Prize for African Writing
- 2010: shortlisted for the Penguin Prize for African Writing for his novel manuscript, *The First and Second Books of Transition* (Mrs. Shaw)



- 2013: named one of the 100 most Influential Africans by the New African magazine.
- 2015: juror for the Writivism Short Story Prize and the Neustadt International Prize for Literature
- 2016: wrote an eight part play radio play, Drugs to Kill, Drug to Cure for Deutsche Welle that was translated into Portuguese, Lingala, Kiswahili, Hausa and French
- co-edited with Prof. Laura Murphy, a Special Issue of New Orleans Review titled The African Literary Hustle
- 2021: Unbury Our Dead With Song, a novel about competing Tizita musicians, was released from Cassava Republic Press.
- The German translation of Nairobi Heat was named the 2014 Crime Book of the Season by Buchkultur.
- former co-editor of Pambazuka News and political columnist for the BBC Focus on Africa Magazine
- His columns have also appeared in The Guardian, International Herald Tribune, Ebony.com, Chimurenga, Los Angeles Times, South African Labour Bulletin, Africa is a Country, Daily Nation, and Business Daily Africa.
- Guest on Democracy Now, NPR, Al Jazeera, Nation TV, and the BBC World Service, etc.
- Some of his works have been translated into German, Turkish, and French

Previous Speakers at this lecture:

Previous speakers of the Es'kia Mphahlele Annual Memorial Lecture include:

- Dr Reuel Khoza (Chairman of Dzana Investment)
- Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng (Chief Justice)
- Dr Mosibudi Mangena (former leader of Azapo and Minister of Science and Technology)
- Dr Mamphela Ramphele (former Principal of the University of Cape Town)
- Dr Xolela Mangcu of the University of Cape Town
- Dr Mongane Wally Serote
- Prof Muxe Nkondo
- Prof Ngugi wa Thiong'o
- Prof Tshepo Madlingozi of Wits University
- Professor Adebayo O. Olukoshi (Director for Africa and West Asia, International IDEA).
- Itumeleng Mosala (former Director General of the Department of Arts and Culture). Also former leader of AZAPO.
- Prof Tinyiko Maluleke (Principal and Vice Chancellor, Tshwane University of Technology)
- Prof Siphamandla Zondi, Director of the Institute for Pan African Thought and Conversation (IPATC).

Discussants:

- Prof Everisto Benyera, Academic and political analyst from the Department of Political Sciences, Unisa
- Prof Puleng Segalo, Chief Albert Luthuli Research Chair, Unisa

About Eskia Mphahlele:

Es'kia Mphahlele was a South African writer, educationist, artist and activist celebrated as the Father of African Humanism and one of the founding figures of modern African literature. He was born on the 17th December 1919 in Marabastad, Pretoria. He died in October 2008.

Mphahlele received a BA degree in 1949, followed in 1956 by a BA Honours degree and in 1957 by an MA degree (with distinction). He studied for his three degrees by correspondence with the University of South Africa. In 1968, he received his doctorate from the University of



Denver in the USA. He worked at various institutions on the African continent, France, and in the US. He was given the name Ezekiel Mphahlele at birth but changed his name to Es'kia in 1977.

Mphahlele was the illustrious author of two autobiographies, more than thirty short stories, two verse plays and a fair number of poems. Some of his authored work include titles such as:

- Down Second Avenue
- In Corner B
- Chirundu
- Renewal Time
- Father Come Home
- The Wanderers

Members of the media are invited to attend and cover the event as follows:

Date : Wednesday, 26 November 2025

Time : 18:00

Venue : Unisa Polokwane Campus, Baobab Functions Hall, 2nd Floor, Clifford Tleane Building, 20 Market Street, Polokwane.

/Ends.

ISSUED BY UNISA MEDIA AFFAIRS

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