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Honorary Fellow of COL

Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika – this is South Africa's national anthem and translated from Xhosa means "God bless Africa". This opening line of the national anthem encapsulates the spirit and service of a visionary leader, theologian, lawyer, activist and custodian of human rights – Professor Nyameko Barney Pityana.

Some might say that Professor Pityana's service to his country was genetically predestined. His paternal grandfather, a celebrated Xhosa poet, authored seven stanzas of Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika. However, we at the Commonwealth of Learning have witnessed Barney's career as a testimony of his deep-seated conviction and abiding love for education, South Africa and her people.

Professor Pityana is a distance learner, respected intellectual and scholar. He has first-hand experience of the meaning of "learning through adversity". During the 1960s and 1970s, as student activist and member of the Black Consciousness movement, he took on personal responsibility for dismantling racial discrimination in South Africa. Serendipity prevailed – he was not able to take up the scholarship waiting for him at Durham University because the South African authorities refused him a passport. In his words, this was "not a good move" by the Government. They would have done better to let him go because he then became president of the South African Students' Organisation (SASO). In spite of numerous detentions,

banning orders and incarceration by the apartheid Government, he found the time and discipline required of a distance learner to complete his BA in 1975 and BProc in 1976 at the University of South Africa (UNISA).

In September 1977, Barney's former roommate, and friend, Steve Biko died in detention while in the custody of the South African Security Police. In the darkness of national despair, Barney, with his wife and daughter, took on the new challenge of living in exile in the United Kingdom. He read Theology and Law at Kings College, London and Ripon College Cuddesdon in Oxfordshire and was ordained Priest in the Anglican Church. The Reverend Pityana continued his life's work in human rights as Director of the World Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism in Geneva. In 1993, he returned to South Africa and became the first Chairperson of the South African Human Rights Commission in 1995. In 2001, he was appointed the first black Vice-Chancellor of his alma mater, UNISA.

Mr. President and Acting Chairman, I request that you confer upon Professor Nyameko Barney Pityana the title of Honorary Fellow of the Commonwealth of Learning for his transformational leadership in restoring democracy to distance learning in South Africa and preparing UNISA to be one of the great mega-universities of the 21st century.