

LAVDATIO DOMINI SAM NUJOMA PRAESIDIS NAMIBIENSIS REIPUBLICAE

Today it is our privilege to welcome to our university a distinguished leader and world statesman, His Excellency Dr. Sam Nujoma, President of the Republic of Namibia. Sam Nujoma is a remarkable personality of truly historic significance, in Africa and indeed the world. Namibia occupies the western edge of southern Africa. Although one of the world's youngest states, it has been for many years at the cutting edge of social and political change in Africa, thanks to the extraordinary career of our distinguished guest. Sam Nujoma's youthful commitment to the interests and rights of his compatriots and fellow workers in what was then Southwest Africa culminated to his election to leadership of the Owambo People's Organization (now better known as SWAPO – South West African People's Organization) in the late 1950's. As leader of the SWAPO struggle against oppression and exploitation, his heroic efforts were awarded by his election as the founding president of a modern democratic state, the Republic of Namibia.

Sam Nujoma was born between 1st and 2nd World War in the remote region of Omusati in Southwest Africa, at that time under the control of the Dominion of South Africa. As one of ten children born to poor and industrious farmers, his early life was dedicated to helping his family survive the challenges of a dry but staggeringly beautiful part of the African continent. His early schooling and a consuming thirst for education paved the way to political awareness, an enlightened compassion for the plight of his compatriots, and concern for the welfare of working people across the globe. While committing himself whole-heartedly to the demands of a growing family – shared with Kawambo Theopoldine Katjimuni, his wife of 47 years – his political conscience and awareness of the living conditions and problems facing his fellow countryman drove him to petition the United Nations to secure Namibia's freedom from South African occupation. With numerous comrades, including renowned freedom fighters Uatja Kauketu and Moses Garoeb, he organized resistance to the moral bankruptcy policy of apartheid which South Africa had imposed in the 1950's. The suppression

of dissent was brutal while resistance was dangerous and punished with bloodthirsty vigour. Because of his leading role as a freedom fighter, Sam Nujoma was arrested and forced into exile. Thereafter, his increasing prominence on the world stage, firstly on the African continent and then across the world, highlighted the appalling conditions that prevailed in Southwest Africa. Sam Nujoma and his SWAPO comrades refused to abandon their goals despite the harshness of colonial rule and continued to build the foundations for the eventual achievement of justice and democracy. As armed struggle against South African rule continued through the 1960's, Sam Nujoma represented Namibia in 1961 as a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement - a critical buffer between the opposed forces of NATO and the Warsaw Pact - and two years later, the Organization of African Unity. He was the first African leader to address the United Nations Security Council in New York on behalf of African nationalist movements. In the late 1970's, as leader of a SWAPO delegation, Sam Nujoma played a key role in securing the adoption of UN resolution 435 which provided a blueprint for the foundation of a democratic and free Namibia. A ceasefire agreement allowing for the implementation of this resolution was eventually signed by Sam Nujoma in 1989. He was sworn in as the first democratically elected President of the Republic of Namibia on March 21, 1990 and was twice rewarded for his successful leadership by direct re-election by the Namibian people.

Today, Sam Nujoma is recognized across the globe for his leadership role in SWAPO and his historic achievement in bringing Namibia into the community of free peoples. A two-time recipient of the Medaglia Pontificia (the Pope's medal), he has been praised for his outstanding courage and determination in working for peace, freedom and justice, by nations as diverse as Vietnam, Brazil, the U.S.A., India, Cuba, and Portugal. Especially significant was the expression of gratitude and respect represented by the award to Nujoma of post-apartheid South Africa's most prestigious honor. Moreover, honorary degrees have been bestowed on Sam Nujoma by leading academic institutions in the U.S.A., Russian Federation, Kenya, and Nigeria.

The Senate of the University of Bucharest – mindful of its responsibilities as an institution not only of learning but also of discovery and creation, with a mission (amongst others) to disseminate new ideas and enlightened opinion, has the esteemed honour to award His Excellency Dr. Sam Nujoma, President of the Republic of Namibia, the title of *doctor honoris causa* for his outstanding contributions to the birth and development of Namibia, a

country in the vanguard of realising the values of democracy, freedom and civil society in the 21st century.

In my concluding remarks, as a practitioner of the Earth Sciences, I would like to draw your attention to the rich potential of Namibia's natural resources – the fortuitous gift of hot mantle upwelling beneath the Etendeka Plateau – and the confidence I share with my colleagues in the fair stewardship and future prosperity of Namibia, thanks to Sam Nujoma's heroic and far-sighted leadership.