

The 2017 Sydney and Felicia Kentridge Award for Service to Law in Southern Africa



Ashraf Hendricks/Groundup;

The 2017 Sydney and Felicia Kentridge Award for Service to Law in Southern Africa was bestowed posthumously on late Judge Essa Moosa at the General Council of the Bar's Annual General Meeting in July 2017. The chairman of the GCB, Vuyani Ngalwana SC, presented it to the late judge's son, Faizal Moosa.

Judge Moosa – widely known as “the people’s attorney” - was born in District 6 in 1936 and graduated from the University of Cape Town in 1960. He qualified as an attorney in 1962. In 1969, he and his family were forcibly removed from District 6 under the notorious Group Areas Act, something he tried to challenge in court.

A founding member of the National Association of Democratic Lawyers, Moosa’s firm, E. Moosa and Associates, became known for its work with political detainees and human rights. It is said that activists in the Western Cape learnt his phone number off by heart.

He was appointed as a judge by President Nelson Mandela in 1998 – the first person who was not an advocate to be elevated to the bench.

In an obituary, the *Mail & Guardian's* Siphso Kings described an anecdote often used to capture the person that was Judge Moosa: “It takes place in a jail cell, packed with clergy and activists who had been detained by apartheid security forces for marching through the Streets of Cape Town. The year is 1989. Archbishop Desmond Tutu - who



is said to share this anecdote more than most - turns to the officer in charge and says: “I want our lawyer.” Normally, this would necessitate a phone call. But, instead, a soft voice from the back of the cell floats over the excited hubbub: “I am also here.””

Judge Moosa was nominated for the Sydney and Felicia Kentridge Award by Ahmed Cajee of Pitje Chambers, who also presented the award at the AGM. [A](#)