

Weaver Press

Box A1922, Avondale, Harare Ph: 308330 Fax: 339645 e-m: weaver@mweb.co.zw

27 May 2010

To Whom it May Concern

Re: Mr Zephaniah Phiri Maseko

We understand that Mr Maseko has been suggested as a recipient of an honorary degree from your University, and we would like to offer our unconditional support to his nomination.

Weaver Press was established in 1998 with the express purpose of giving a stimulus to the voices of Zimbabwean writers, and ensuring that research into the country's history and heritage be made more readily available to the reading public.

One of our early publications was Mary Witoshynsky's 'The Water Harvester: Episodes from the Inspired Life of Zephaniah Phiri'. The book – like the man whose story it relates – defies easy categorization. Part biography, part memoir, part political and social history, part farming manual, it is presented in plain and powerful words that have moved people throughout the world.

Zephaniah was born in 1927, in Zvishavane, where he lives still. As a member of the railway workers union he was detained for two years in the 1960s; on release, his employment was terminated and he began to farm, and to develop his water harvesting techniques. In 1976, he was arrested again, for assisting freedom fighters in the rural areas, and spent nearly five years in leg-irons, under house arrest.

Despite these privations, he worked tirelessly for his family, for his community, and for the cause of ecologically sound agricultural practice. With the post-independence founding of the Zvishavane Water Project, he ensured that lessons learned were spread widely: he travelled extensively to tell others of his work, and received a constant stream of visitors to his oasis of fruit trees, crops and fish ponds.

His work was honoured in 2006 by the National Geographic Society and the Howard G. Buffet Foundation with their annual Award for Leadership in African Conservation. The Award citation is thorough and succinct in its praise of the man:

For exemplary leadership in community-based resource conservation among dry land farmers in Zimbabwe and across southern Africa;
For fifty years of pioneering research, experimentation and refinement of innovations in rain water harvesting, soil conservation and dry land farming;
For founding the Zvishavane Water Project;
For ceaseless dedication to teaching the importance and benefits of conservation;
For inspiring farmers, practitioners, scholars and the development of new conservation programs;
For harvesting rain for school water supplies and for restoring watersheds;
For humanitarianism in giving water, seeds and the knowledge to nurture them;
For wisdom and courage in working to improve the wellbeing of fellow farm families through resource conservation for food security; and
For lifelong altruism that enriches our human spirit.

Little more needs to be said; but more can be. Zephaniah has not acquired personal wealth; his working life has been hard and long, but he has not abandoned his community for easier pickings elsewhere.

Above all, and to his marrow, he is a gentleman: 'a man of good feelings and instincts, courteous and honourable'.

Zephaniah Phiri Maseko has never coveted fame or celebrity; indeed, he is the least covetous of men. He has moved with peasant farmers, development workers and agricultural researchers, but his movements have been modest and unassuming. As he settles into the ninth decade of a dedicated life, recognition by the Academy would be a most fitting crown for his years of service.

Yours sincerely,

Murray McCartney & Irene Staunton
Directors