



Biography

Professor Mongane Wally Serote is the third National Poet Laureate of South Africa inaugurated on November 6, 2018. He is a celebrated poet, author, struggle stalwart, member of the Black Consciousness Movement, Umkhonto we Sizwe commander, pioneer of IKS in South Africa, former MP, and Ngaka (healer). Serote has been awarded national and international accolades, amongst others the Ingrid Jonker Poetry Prize (1973); the Noma Award (1993); the English Academy of Southern Africa Medal (2003); the Pablo Neruda Award (2004); the Order of Ikhamanga in Silver awarded by President Thabo Mbeki (2007); the prestigious Golden Wreath Award for Poetry (2012), and the Arts and Culture Trust Lifetime Achievement Award (2016).

As a political activist, Serote was detained by the apartheid government and spent nine months in solitary confinement in 1969 after which he went into exile for 18 years. During this time, he obtained a Fine Arts degree at Columbia University in New York as a Fulbright student. In exile, he participated in various ANC structures working towards the liberation of South Africa. He received military training and became the head of the regional underground structure of MK in Botswana. After his return to South Africa in 1990, he became head of Arts and Culture in the ANC and participated in the CODESA negotiations. He became a Member of Parliament and Chairperson of the Arts and Culture, Languages, Science and Technology Portfolio Committee of Parliament. In his long career, he spearheaded the organization and mobilisation of cultural workers through major festivals, symposiums, conferences in Botswana (1982), Amsterdam (1987) London (1990), and Johannesburg (1993).

Professor Serote is widely recognised as the 'Father of Indigenous Knowledge Systems' in South Africa where he pioneered research and debate on IKS at the national level. He was the first CEO of Freedom Park and is the founding CEO of iARi, an organisation with a mission to anchor the African Renaissance on IKS towards the regeneration of Botho or humanness. Serote has also served on and chaired the boards of various organisations, inter alia, the Board of Johannesburg Theatres, iKSSA Trust, SAMET, iARikssa (UNISA), Seolo Sa Serote Institute

(Pty Ltd), Bookela Botho IKS Integrated and Complimentary Healing Institute (Clinix Private Hospital, Johannesburg), Seolo Se Mpande IKS Healing, the IKS Portal (University of Johannesburg) and is the Chairperson of the Credo Mutwa Reference Group by ministerial appointment. He serves on the Advisory Councils of the Thabo Mbeki Foundation and the quarterly journal, The Thinker. He was initiated as a Ngaka (healer) in 1999 and initiated and spearheaded the cleansing, healing, and return-of-spirit rituals and ceremonies in Southern Africa and US prior to the building of Freedom Park, as well as at Vlakplaas, the notorious apartheid black site. Serote has lectured widely on politics, arts, culture, IKS and heritage. He is a member of the Living Legacy Legends Project (LLLP) founded by the Minister of Arts and Culture, and serves as the Chairperson of its Heritage Committee. He has been awarded multiple honorary doctorates and professorships.