

PRESS RELEASE - 5th November 2024

The City of London Recognises Two Distinguished South Africans with the Freedom of the City of London

South Africa in the City

There have been numerous events to mark the 30th anniversary of South Africa's democracy this year, but the particular focus of the South African Chamber of Commerce UK has been to celebrate "South Africa in the City", a series of events aimed at promoting South Africa as a prime trade, business and investment destination.

The Chamber has been honoured to be hosted by the Lord Mayor in Mansion House for our Annual Gala Dinner, and by the City Sheriff, who is South African, in the Old Bailey. Additional events have been graciously hosted by City firms, including Simmons & Simmons and Investec Bank.

This represents a real meeting of old and new. While the office of the Mayor of the City of London was established in 1189 and is one of the oldest continuously elected civic positions, the South African Chamber of Commerce UK is the youngest foreign Chamber of Commerce established in the UK, dating back only to 2006.

We are incredibly grateful that the Lord Mayor Professor Michael Mainelli has been a steadfast supporter of the SA Chamber of Commerce UK for several years now, helping to increase its visibility in the City. It is especially appropriate that in his final week in office a very special honour will be bestowed on two notable South Africans.

The Freedom of the City of London

The Freedom of the City of London is an ancient honour bestowed upon individuals who become Freemen of one of the Worshipful Livery Companies or Guilds of the City. This honour is awarded on merit to those who have made significant contributions to business or society. Steeped in history and tradition, the ceremony dates back to medieval times when it granted privileges such as trading in the City.


Several South Africans have previously been honoured this way. In 1996 President Nelson Mandela was awarded the "Freedom", and since then, all ten co-accused in the 1964 Rivonia Trial have been similarly honoured, along with two of their lawyers, George Bizos and Lord Joel Joffe.

The SA Chamber UK's Recommendation

This year, for the first time, the SA Chamber of Commerce UK had opportunity to recommend two outstanding South Africans to be granted the Freedom of the City. We are delighted that both were approved by the Court of the Chamberlain of London.

Two New Freemen of the City

Mrs Ruth Leas is recognised for her exceptional leadership of Investec Bank in the UK. Having joined the Bank in 1998 in South Africa and moving to the UK office in 2002, Ruth was appointed an Executive Director to the Board of Investec Bank plc in 2016. She became Chief Risk Officer in 2017 and Chief Executive Officer in 2019. As one of only nine female CEOs in the FTSE 250 index, Ruth is dedicated to driving belonging, diversity, and inclusion at Investec and within the financial services industry.



The High Commissioner for South Africa to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, His Excellency Mr Kingsley Mamabolo, is being honoured for his distinguished career in diplomacy. He has served as Ambassador to the UN, Chair of the Group of 77 and China, Ambassador to the African Union, Deputy Joint Special Representative for the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, and High Commissioner to Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and currently the United Kingdom. He is passionate about golf, diplomacy, and geopolitics.

South Africa in the City of London

The relationship between South Africa and the City of London has been further enhanced recently. In early October, a delegation of Ministers and Deputy Ministers of the Government of National Unity (GNU), led by the Deputy President of South Africa, His Excellency Mr. Paul Mashatile, visited the UK and held several key meetings in the City. Their mission was to share the progress of the GNU over its first 100 days, generating renewed optimism for trade and investment between South Africa and its key trading partner, the United Kingdom. They successfully explored business opportunities and pitched the Investment Case for South Africa under a multi-party government.

The GNU has instilled hope, enthusiasm, and energy for investors. The Cabinet, including Ministers, the Deputy President, and President Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa, has been actively engaging with stakeholders globally to promote South Africa's potential.

South African Chamber of Commerce UK Limited

The SA Chamber of Commerce UK is a bilateral chamber for trade, investment, and foreign direct investment (FDI). It serves as a home for South Africans in the UK, a catalyst for business expansion, and is part of a global network of South Africans worldwide. Sharon Constançon, the retiring Executive Chairman, stated, "It is an honour for the Chamber to recommend two prominent South Africans to receive this prestigious award."

We look forward to celebrating our 20th anniversary in 2026, and to continuing to build stronger trading and investment ties between the two countries. We particularly look forward to the prospect of collaborating with the first South African-born Lord Mayor during the 2027/2028 Mayoral year, should that eventuality be realised.

The Chamber comprises several geographic and business interest chapters to remain relevant to its global membership.

For more information about the SA Chamber UK, please visit <https://southafricanchamber.uk> or email Juliet at jrushent@sachamber.co.uk.

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