

Letter to Prof. Makgoba regarding Ashwin Desai from
Antonio Negri, Michael Albert, Naomi Klein, Avi Lewis and
Prof. Noam Chomsky, Michael Hardt,

December 24, 2005

Professor M.W. Makgoba
Howard College Campus
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Durban 4000
South Africa

Dear Vice-Chancellor M. W. Makgoba,

We have read with great concern the recent letter concerning Dr. Ashwin Desai from the Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa.

As outsiders to your university community, we do not presume to have firsthand knowledge of the events in question. However, if true, the facts in the Committee's letter are deeply distressing, suggesting that an academic of international importance and repute is being shut out of your university because of his political activism.

Indeed, Ashwin Desai is both an activist and an academic. We do not consider this combination a liability, but a demonstration of the highest form of commitment. Professor Desai is the very embodiment of the public engaged intellectual so needed in these times.

The Centre for Civil Society, and Dr. Desai's work there in particular, are known around the world as a rare model of rigorous academic research in the service of the surrounding community. His book, *We are the Poors*, is widely considered a groundbreaking work on new social movements globally, and is cited frequently in this burgeoning field of scholarship.

So we are writing today to testify to the critical importance of Dr. Desai's writing and research to international intellectual circles, and to congratulate you on the University of KwaZulu-Natal's support for this work in the past.

We sincerely hope that cherished principles of academic freedom will be respected in your institution's treatment of Ashwin Desai, and we urge you to do whatever is necessary to allow him to continue his important academic work.

Sincerely,

Noam Chomsky, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Michael Hardt, Duke University
Antonio Negri, Writer, Italy
Michael Albert, Writer, U.S.A
Naomi Klein, Writer, Canada
Avi Lewis, Filmmaker, Canada