



188, 14th Road, Noordwyk, Midrand, 1685
Private Bag X10, Marshalltown, 2107
Tel: +27 10 493 2500 (Switchboard)
E-mail: mediaenquiries@judiciary.org.za
www.judiciary.org.za

Media Statement

23 November 2025

STATEMENT BY CHIEF JUSTICE MANDISA MAYA ON BEHALF OF THE JUDICIARY ON THE PASSING OF RETIRED JUSTICE LEONORA VAN DEN HEEVER

It is with profound sadness that the Judiciary announces the passing of the Honourable Justice Leonora van den Heever, who died on 20 November 2025 at the age of 99. Her loss is felt not only by her family and friends, but by the entire legal community and indeed, the nation.

Justice van den Heever's distinguished career stands as a testament to courage and perseverance. As South Africa's first female judge, first appointed in 1969, she shattered a formidable glass ceiling at a time when the bench was the exclusive preserve for male Judges. Later, in 1991, she became the first woman to serve permanently at the Appellate Division which became the Supreme Court of Appeal. Her pioneering presence opened doors for women in the Judiciary law, and her legacy lives on in the many who follow in her footsteps.

Her legal mind was sharp, principled. She rendered judgments of clarity and conviction, moulding legal doctrine with integrity and a sense of justice that transcended the courtroom. Beyond her role in the Judiciary, she was a woman of culture and an author of note. She wrote children's books, short stories, and contributed to significantly to South African literary life. Her commitments extended also into service on cultural boards, poetry, and the arts.

As a symbol of achievement and service, she received numerous honours. Among them, she was awarded an honorary LLD, recognising not only her legal acumen but her unwavering dedication to justice and fairness.

"To her family, we offer our heartfelt condolences. The Judiciary mourns with you and honours her memory. To her former colleagues, the legal fraternity and all whose lives



she touched – may we continue to emulate her strength of character and her unshakeable faith in the power of the law to serve society,” said Chief Justice Maya.

Justice Leonora Van den Heever leaves behind a legacy that is both enduring and transformational. She reminds us that courage and conviction can reshape institutions and open pathways where none existed before. Though she has passed from this world, her spirit endures in the very fabric of our courts.

May she rest in peace, and may her life continue to inspire our judicial service and pursuit of justice.

Ends.

Media enquiries:

Email: mediaenquiries@judiciary.org.za

Issued by the Office of the Chief Justice