

## **Oration by Professor Kim Hutchings to present Professor Margot Light for admission as an Honorary Fellow of the LSE**

### **Professor Margot Light**

Chairman, it is a great privilege to present Professor Margot Light for admission as an Honorary Fellow of the School. I know that many of my colleagues would dearly love to have the honour of speaking in celebration of Margot's scholarship, integrity, kindness and collegiality.

Margot came to the UK from South Africa in 1963. Her original qualifications were in the field of physiotherapy, but she decided to take a 'short' career break in 1966 to study Russian and International Relations – a break that has now lasted for well over 40 years. She studied for her PhD at the LSE, taught at the University of Surrey 1971-1988 and then joined the Department of International Relations at LSE. She became head of the Department between 2002-2004 - at that point only the 2<sup>nd</sup> woman to do so in the history of the Department. Since retirement in 2005, she has continued to teach, research and publish.

Margot's work has been of tremendous significance in a variety of fields. As well as being a leading expert on the foreign policy of the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, she challenged standard International Relations frameworks for understanding and explaining the international relations of the region, arguing that they did not take the specificity of Russian culture, identity and history sufficiently seriously. One colleague described Margot's analytical outlook as that of a 'realist with a human face', another spoke of the 'clarity and nuance' of her work. She pioneered thinking in International Relations about ethics and foreign policy, drawing on the insights of both academics and practitioners, and made important contributions to the analysis of democracy promotion in the aftermath of the Cold War. Her work was crucial to opening up the study of International Relations to questions of gender. And her current work within the LSE Centre for the Study of Human Rights, which supports the capacity of human rights civil society organisations in Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, demonstrates her continued commitment, not just to high standards of scholarship, but also to supporting those who are attempting to further a human rights agenda.

Margot's professional achievements are not all in the usual run of academic eminence. In 1986, she became *persona non-grata* from the point of view of the Soviet authorities because, having already helped to rescue a set of stranded cultural exchange students from contamination after the disaster at Chernobyl, she put herself at risk in order to try to establish the nature and level of risk to others. This resulted in her being arrested and questioned, and subsequently being unable to gain entry to the then Soviet Union, the focus of her research, for some time. It is typical of Margot that she responded to this emergency selflessly and with little regard for her own personal or professional interests. When she tells the story now it is in an understated, amusing way that underplays her own initiative and courage.

In addition to her scholarly and activist work, there are other aspects of Margot's career that are of particular note. She has always been hugely supportive to her colleagues, in particular younger colleagues, and has been a brilliant mentor, and example, for young women academics. And she has been a dedicated, but always rigorous, teacher and supervisor to her students. One of her former students, who is now a lecturer herself, summed Margot up as 'a passionate and engaging teacher, and certainly an example to be followed'. Margot's generosity to colleagues and students has also been echoed in her track record in assisting refugee scholars, both personally and professionally. Above all, Margot has been an exceptional and highly committed citizen of the School, she has invariably upheld the best of the values that the School represents and endorses.

When she was young, Margot saw and rejected the Apartheid regime. Since becoming an International Relations scholar, she has never been an 'ivory tower' academic. She has always linked her work to the world of practice and activism and, in an utterly unassuming way, has done her best to address injustice where she has seen it.

Chairman, I ask that Professor Light be admitted as an honorary fellow of the London School of Economics and Political Science.