

Tribute to Prof Narend Bajinath, Chair, COL Board of Governors



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Celebratory Memorial for Professor Narend Bajinath
Organised Jointly by the Council of Higher Education (CHE) and UNISA
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Video Presentation

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Thank you for inviting the Commonwealth of Learning to be part of this very special occasion to celebrate a very special friend. I'm recording this message in Kigali where the Commonwealth Heads of Government are meeting. Prof Narend Bajinath was scheduled to lead the COL delegation to CHOGM 2022 and we have missed his presence every step of the way!

My association with Narend goes way back to the nineties when he visited the Indira Gandhi National Open University as a faculty member at UNISA. Since then I met him on many occasions in international conferences. Narend had organised a lively conference on Open Education at the Spiers Wine Estate, Stellenbosch—a memorable event with plenty of food for thought and nectar for the soul! Being the connoisseur that he was, the participants were introduced to some of the finest South African wines.

In 2012, Narend joined the COL Board representing South Africa where he also served as the chair of the audit committee for a three-year term. When he came to Vancouver for the annual Board meetings, his bicycle accompanied him and he made sure that he enjoyed the local sights while maintaining his fitness regime.

Because of his stature and valuable contributions, the COL Board of Governors appointed him as the Chair. That was also the time when the world shut down due to covid and all meetings were held online. He was really looking forward to his first in person meeting as Chair in London next week. This has created a huge vacuum as he was the anchor and mainstay for members, who looked up to him.

I for one, couldn't have asked for a better chair. He assured me that I would never have to look over my shoulder during his tenure—he trusted me to do my job while at the same time being available at short notice when I needed his advice. This sometimes meant that he would have to miss his favourite cricket match on TV at its most gripping moments!

Many of you might know what a meticulous editor he was and this was reflected in all the documents finalised under his watch. He combined his deep knowledge of the education sector with

strategic management practices to guide and direct Board discussions. South African eloquence at its best!

Finally, after two years in the Chair, Narend travelled to Nairobi for the Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers at the end of April. He enjoyed being there and attended every session and event. In the mornings, the COL delegation would meet him for breakfast at the poolside to discuss the day's activities. Narend was fit, relaxed and in his element networking with a range of stakeholders.

Narend didn't lose his cool easily—not even when the power cord for his laptop didn't work nor when he was told that there were traffic disruptions on the way to the airport when he was catching that fateful flight to Johannesburg. He brushed aside our concerns saying, “All will be well, and I will be on time”.

I was among the last few colleagues to see him in Nairobi and his last duty was for COL. He was always there for us as a wise elder, a caring brother and a passionate development professional determined to make a difference in the Commonwealth. His legacy will endure.