



## 'Disinvited' UCT speaker hits out at Max Price

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Free speech advocate Flemming Rose has delivered a stinging rebuke of the University of Cape Town for “disinviting” him last year - and revealed that he had got his own back by speaking to a class on campus on his visit to the city this week.

The Danish journalist was a guest of the Institute of Race Relations, and gave its 44th Hoernlé Memorial Lecture in the city on Thursday night.

Rose, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute in Washington DC, gained international prominence in 2005 when, as the cultural editor of the newspaper, Jyllands-Posten, he was chiefly responsible for publishing cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed whose later exploitation led to violent controversy.

The intention behind publishing the drawings (an examination of insidious and creeping self-censorship), and many of the facts associated with it, had been “distorted and misrepresented”, and cynically misused for political purposes, he said.

It was on the strength of the controversy over the cartoons that UCT’s leadership lost heart over the invitation to Rose to deliver its 2016 TB Davie academic freedom lecture, and “disinvited” him.

This week, he described the volte-face as “an intellectual disgrace”.

Rose began his address on Thursday by thanking the “former” academic freedom committee at UCT “because they did not cave in to the pressure and intimidation that (vice-chancellor) Max Price tried to put on them, and let him make the decision to disinvite me himself”.

“Last year, according to Max Price, if I had been allowed to speak at UCT - which, in fact, I did today, in a class, and it was a nice experience - it might have provoked conflict, created security risks and retarded rather than advanced academic freedom. So, UCT wanted to promote academic freedom by limiting it.”

Rose added: “I think it was an intellectual disgrace on the part of Max Price, not only because he disinvited me, but because of the basis of it. In 2015 already, I had published a book about the cartoons crisis (Tyranny of Silence), and the history of free speech and tolerance across cultures and times, but instead of quoting from my work (to weigh the merits or demerits of the invitation), he quoted people who have in fact misrepresented my position and distorted my argument. I think for an academic institution not to go to primary sources and make its own assertions is a kind of capitulation of its intellectual worth.”

Gwen Ngwenya, chief operations officer of the Institute of Race Relations, who introduced Rose at this week's well-attended lecture, said the invitation to him to visit South Africa was "a small corrective nudge towards openness and rigour in public discourse".

In contrast, she wrote in an online article this week, UCT's disinvitation of Rose had "nudged the needle further towards fear, intellectual cowardice and the violation of freedom of expression; not only of the speaker's, but the potential audience's freedom to receive information or ideas".

She went on: "Freedom of expression and its narrow limitations is a constitutional principle which sits uncomfortably with many, if not the majority, of South Africans."