



AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
THANKSGIVING DINNER  
25 November 2009

The AmCham Leadership Award

As is known AmCham recognizes outstanding contributions to social investment activities by member companies through the Stars of Africa Awards. In addition there has been the Star of the Community Award which provides recognition to an outstanding community leader.

Earlier this year the AmCham Board took a decision to also institute the AmCham Leadership Award which is intended to recognize outstanding citizens who through their work and endeavors have given expression to the broad aims and objectives of the American Chamber of Commerce.

Through the AmCham Leadership Award the American Business Community can recognize and honour outstanding people and in so doing provide encouragement for greater effort and commitment for the betterment of South Africa.

In essence a recipient of an AmCham Leadership Award would have, through their life's work, facilitated business dialogue, economic growth and the strengthening of democratic processes.

To further honour the recipient of an AmCham Leadership Award a financial contribution will be made to the AmCham Bursary Fund which supports students who are pursuing degrees in business, finance and commerce.



## AmCham Leadership Award

### Mr. Pravin Jamnadas Gordhan

Tonight Mr. Pravin Gordhan, our guest of honour, will be the recipient of the AmCham Leadership Award.

It is probably true that in 1998 when Pravin Gordhan became the Deputy Commissioner of the South African Revenue Services (SARS) few in the business community knew who he was but there were countless citizens of this country associated with the liberation struggle and underground networks who celebrated this appointment because they knew who he was and what he stood for.

If indeed his relative obscurity was true it was soon to change because when, some eighteen months later, he became the Commissioner of the Revenue Services his name quickly became synonymous with the rapid transformation of SARS into an autonomous, user friendly and effective service provider where a culture of service excellence prevailed.

Under his energetic leadership tax collection targets were exceeded because new financial controls were introduced, innovative talent was recruited, technology was upgraded and staff structures were streamlined. Such rapid and successful transformation essentially meant that more money became available for poverty relief and infrastructure expansion in South Africa.

At this time he was, for four successive years, elected as the Chairman of the Council of World Customs which is a body that promotes regulation of customs and trade between countries. He was honored for these efforts when he was inducted as a Commander of the Order of the Crown by King Albert of Belgium.

Durban born Pravin Gordhan began his political activity in the 1960s and sharpened his political skills while he was a pharmacy student at the University of Durban-Westville. Upon graduation he was appointed as a pharmacist at the King Edward VIII Hospital in Durban.

Pravin Gordhan is a stalwart of the prolonged struggle to end racial discrimination and injustice in South Africa. He was a committed member of the Natal Indian Congress and the African National Congress. After his release from solitary confinement in 1983 he played a strategic role in the formation of the United Democratic Front. He was a grassroots activist who empathised with the rank and file and who saw communism as a vehicle for mass mobilization and used the structures of the organizations to which he devoted himself to develop one of the most important underground political networks in the country.

It is not surprising to know that there were many encounters with the security police which led to three extended periods of incarceration and solitary confinement where he was tortured. He was dismissed from his position as a hospital pharmacist due to his detention which brought emotional and material hardship to he and his family.

In the early 1990s when South Africa was poised between peace and calamity Pravin Gordhan was again incarcerated. Shortly after his release he was part of the ANC delegation in its first meeting with President F. W. de Klerk's government. It must have been a surreal experience to come face-to-face with those who had imprisoned him and to begin the negotiation for the transfer of power.

Pravin Gordhan was at the centre of the complex negotiations that gave birth to South Africa's democracy and which ultimately led to the election of Nelson Mandela as president of the free South Africa.. He chaired the convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) and was Co-Chairperson of the Transitional Executive Council which ushered in the first democratically elected government. As a member of the first democratically elected parliament, Pravin Gordhan chaired the Constitutional Committee in parliament which had oversight of the new constitution which was adopted in 1996.

In a brief citation such as this justice cannot be done to a life of extraordinary commitment and courage but it is clear that Pravin Gordhan has played a pivotal role in the process of liberation and in every National Forum since CODESA and has displayed a life-long, single minded commitment to justice and democracy.

To those who sat beside him or opposite him during those many marathon negotiating sessions he is recognised as a formidable negotiator who displayed flexibility to end deadlocks and was extraordinarily skillful in directing meetings. At the time that he was leading and changing the revenue service a commentator remarked that "under the Commissioner's placid demeanour, is a mind that is razor sharp and a heart that is fearless".

It is with humility that AmCham salutes a veteran anti-apartheid activist, leading constitutional negotiator, shrewd strategist and an innovative tax reformer.

It is my honour to ask the president of the American Chamber of Commerce, Doug Franke, to present the 2009 AmCham Leadership Award to the Minister of Finance, Pravin Jamnadas Gordhan, for his life's work of promoting Justice and Democracy, Business Dialogue and Economic Growth.

Roger D Crawford  
Immediate Past President  
25<sup>th</sup> November 2009