

Southern Illinois University
Board of Trustees
February 10, 2011

RECOMMENDATION FOR HONORARY DEGREE, SIUC

Summary

The President, on the recommendation of the Honorary Degree and Distinguished Service Award Committee and the Chancellor of Southern Illinois University Carbondale, presents to the Board of Trustees a resolution recommending that Mr. Nuruddin Farah be awarded the Honorary Degree, Doctorate of Humane Letters at the May 2011 commencement of the College of Liberal Arts, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

Rationale for Adoption

Mr. Nuruddin Farah was born in 1945 in what was then British-occupied Italian Somaliland, now part of the Republic of Somalia. He was one of eleven children of a Muslim farmer; his mother was a poet in the oral tradition. However, Mr. Farah, who writes in English but is fluent in five languages, is thoroughly cosmopolitan, having lived in India, various countries in Europe, several African countries, and the United States. Currently he resides in Cape Town, South Africa.

The Somali language did not have a written form until 1972, which is a major reason why Mr. Farah writes in English; more direct access to a global audience is another reason. In 1973, however, Farah wrote the first novel in Somali, several chapters of which were serialized in a newspaper before its publication was halted as a result of government censorship.

Mr. Farah's first novel, *From a Crooked Rib* (1970), attracted attention because of its strong critique of the repression experienced by women in Somali society. For a long time, many people believed that Farah was a woman, so unprecedented was the book's assault on African patriarchy. Doris Lessing (Nobel Prize, 2007) has cited Farah as "one of the few African men who write wonderfully about women." Farah's second novel, *A Naked Needle* (1976), earned him the ire of then Somali dictator Siad Barre, forcing Farah into exile for more than two decades. Even then, he was subjected to several assassination attempts. Since the Barre regime was overthrown in 1991, Farah has visited Somalia numerous times, despite the civil war and ensuing chaos. His subsequent novels continue to deal critically with the problems of his country and his continent. "A writer has to be a dreamer for his people," Farah has said (*TheIndependent*, Cape Twon, S.A., January 6, 2006).

Although Farah has said that he strives to keep his country alive by writing about it, nonetheless, “He is a passionate proponent of “one-world literature” (*Washington Post*, April 13, 2001), that is, literature which, whatever its particulars, participates in the “universal” project of humanity’s best and most profound expressions of our being here on this planet.

In the concluding paragraph of his letter nominating Farah for the 1998 Neudstadt Award, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, another famous African author, stated, “Nuruddin Farah questions all the oppressive stabilities, whether rooted in the family, the clan, the nation, or in the supranational claims of religion and political systems. He is a Somali writer, an African writer, an important voice in postcolonial modernism, and speaks to our age in a very compelling prose.”

The nominator of Mr. Farah has a profound respect for his artistry and his personal courage and believes that Mr. Nuruddin Farah is the kind of person we should celebrate with an honorary degree.

Considerations Against Adoption

University officers are aware of none.

Constituency Involvement

The Honorary Degree and Distinguished Service Award Committee of Southern Illinois University Carbondale, composed of members from the appropriate faculty and constituency groups, recommended this award. The Chancellor reviewed the recommendation from the Committee and, in consultation with the Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor and the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, recommends this Honorary Degree.

Resolution

BE IT RESOLVED, By the Board of Trustees of Southern Illinois University in regular meeting assembled, That the Honorary Degree, Doctorate of Humane Letters be presented to Mr. Nuruddin Farah at the May 2011 commencement or some commencement thereafter of Southern Illinois University Carbondale.