

Story by Rogers Atukunda | October 27, 2023 | Adopted from <https://softpower.ug/>

Uganda poet and literary scholar, Associate Professor Susan Kiguli, has received the Lifetime Achievement Award in Poetry in Italy.

Dr Kiguli, 54, was awarded on Wednesday 25 October at 9 p.m. in the Vercelli Seminar. A Senior lecturer of Literature at Makerere University, she was the Guest of Honour for the 2023 International Civil Poetry Festival held in Vercelli, Italy.

She follows in the giant footsteps of previously awarded prestigious names in the literary fraternity including; Ukrainian poet Aleksandr Mikhailovich Kabanov, Adam Zagajewski one of the protagonists of the “Nowa Fala” movement, the Syrian dissident Faraj Bayrakdar, the poet-biologist Katherine Larson, the Nobel candidate Márcia Theóphilo, the angry poet Tony Harrison, Lambert Schlechter, Adonis, Luciano Erba and Ryszard Krynicki.

This recognition makes her the first African to receive this prestigious prize.

“When your doctoral advisor reminds you that part of your work is to go places like she has. At @MakLiterature we are proud of you, Prof Susan Kiguli. Keep shining with this Lifetime Achievement Award at the Civil Poetry Festival. You keep @MakerereCHUSS on the move,” said Isaac Kiiza Tibasiima, an Academic in the Literature Department, in a congratulatory message.

“Congratulations to my friend Prof. Susan Kiguli upon being awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award at the International Civil Poetry Festival, Italy. I particularly envy the yearning for knowledge from those seeking for her autograph,” said Dr Jimmy Spire Ssentongo, a cartoonist and lecturer at Makerere University.

Dr Kiguli who denounces violence and abuse of power in the black context is at the centre of the festival now in its 19th edition from 25 October (premiere in Milan) promoted by il Ponte and the University of Eastern Piedmont.

The Civil Poetry Festival, admitted to UNESCO’s World Poetry Directory, is aimed in particular at the young generations, through the Inter-University prize for the translation of civil poetry unpublished in Italy.

The award-winning poet

This year, the civil poetry festival project chaired by Luigi Di Meglio rewarded Dr Kiguli who is not only active in supporting women’s writing in Africa but is also a founding member of FEMRITE, a judge for the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize and a member of the advisory board for the African Writers Trust.

As a poet, Dr Kiguli is known for her 1998 collection *The African Saga*, while as a scholar she is known for her work on oral poetry and performance.

On the occasion of the festival, Dr Kiguli’s first book in Italy was published, *Terre che pipianto* edited by Antonella Sinopoli with a translation by Marta Zonca (Interlinea).

The Ugandan poet has a peculiarity: she speaks about horrors – such as the genocide of 1994 in Rwanda or the violence in her country – with a severe gaze that at the same time rejects blind anger.

A look and a word that remain tender and enveloping: “I observed you / with the curious interest of a confused little girl / while you embodied the survive and win philosophy / I am convinced that/if I learned these lessons and learned them well / a revolution / a revolution to support / the splendid nation / in which I was born”.

In addition to her critically acclaimed collection *The African Saga*, which won the National Book Trust of Uganda Poetry Award (1999), Dr Kiguli has also written poems for children – four of which were featured by Books LIVE, as “Animal Portraits by Susan Kiguli (Note of Affection No. 4, Love Africa Carnival)” and selected by readers as “one of the most loved Love Notes of its month.” She has discussed her own childhood reading experiences in an interview with BooksLIVE.

She has also contributed poetry for children to the collection *Michael’s Eyes: The War against the Ugandan Child*, an international collaborative effort “intended to raise the global awareness of the situation in Northern Uganda,” particularly concerning the troubles caused by the Lord’s Resistance Army.

Dr Kiguli’s poems were also featured in *Eye of the Storm: A Photographic Journey Across Uganda*, with photography by David Pluth and Pierre-Francois Didek.

She has also been featured by *Ultra Violet: Indian feminists unplugged* and by the Department of English & Creative Writing, Lancaster University. Her work is included in the 2019 anthology *New Daughters of Africa*, edited by Margaret Busby.