

**To: The UCT community**

**From: Historians and Archivists at the University of the Witwatersrand**

**Letter of Support**

Last week we watched in horror as parts of Table Mountain were engulfed in flames and were gripped with fear as thousands of students were forced to evacuate their residences when the fire rapidly spread to UCT. Thankfully, no lives were lost. The mountain, which is routinely ravaged by fire, will undoubtedly recover its splendour. However, the destruction of the Jagger Building and archives represents an irreparable loss to the academy and society at large. We share your pain at the damage to one of the most important archives in the country and, indeed, globally. The rich collections, meticulously collected and curated over generations, have been wonderful sources for historians and other researchers. Some of us have spent many hours in the library and reading room working with your unique archival material, without which we would not have been able to produce theses, articles and books. The possibility that future generations of scholars may not have access to these research treasures fills us with despair. We are heartened by the news that many collections are held in safe storage and have been digitized, but also know that some materials have been permanently lost. An important part of our collective memory has been erased.

The destruction of the Jagger Building comes at a time of deep crisis of archives in the country, especially due to the neglect of public archives. Against such neglect, universities have come to assume an even more critical role as custodians of archives, even in the face of limited resources. The recent tragedy reminds us of the importance of valuing and safeguarding our archives. It also brings into relief the broader challenges faced by libraries, which also require our attention. We, as historians and archivists, stand with you in these difficult times and undertake to support your efforts to rise from the ashes. We need the UCT archives to resume their special place in our society.

Sincerely

**History Department  
History Workshop  
Historical Papers and Research Archives  
South African Historical Archives**