

Mzolisi Toni
for the Doctor of Social Science (*honoris causa*)

As Secretary General of Disabled People South Africa (DPSA), the national disability rights movement, Mr Mzolisi Toni has been in a long established relationship with the UCT Division of Occupational Therapy since the early 1990's. An activist at heart, Mr Toni was initially sceptical about the potential of a partnership between a university and a disability rights organisation to advance the human potential of persons with disability. Based on his own journey in the national disability rights movement, he believed that the lived experience of disability was the key source of knowledge in the field and the essential driver of disability activism. His position changed during engagements between Occupational Therapy (OT) scholars and DPSA on the development of a new ANC Primary Health Care policy on the rights of persons with disability to equal health and rehabilitation services.

At that time he was invited to bring his considerable personal and leadership experience in the disability movement into the academy as a guest lecturer on the Disability Studies course in the MSc OT programme. Later he also led a team from DPSA, the Disabled Children's Action Group and the SA Federal Council on Disability in making a distinguished and generative contribution in a collaboration between UCT and the Centre for Disability Studies at Leeds University over a two year period through a British Council Higher Education Link Programme Award. The outcome was the development of an innovative disability studies curriculum at UCT, the first of its kind in Africa. This collaboration endorsed the developmental principle of learning through the co-creation of knowledge.

Mr Toni's efforts to advance disability rights in South Africa culminated in the first Postgraduate Diploma In Disability Studies being launched at UCT in 2003. Today the Division of Disability Studies in the Department of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences has a staff complement of six people, reflecting diversity, and offers four academic programmes, namely, the Postgraduate Diploma, MPhil, PhD, and since 2012 a Higher Certificate in Disability Practice for community-based workers. Two research units have been established in the Department of Health and Rehabilitation that have their roots in the growth and sustainability of the Division of Disability Studies, namely Inclusive Practices Africa and Including Disability in Education Africa. Mr Toni continues to give strategic advice and leadership.

UCT has gained immensely from Mr Toni's expertise and personal experience in leading transformation, inclusivity, and sustainability through co-creating knowledge with the disability sector that extends the influence of the global South to achieve disability inclusion in the Sustainable Development Goals in South Africa, the continent and globally. He is an eminently worthy recipient of an honorary doctorate.