



Communication and Marketing Department  
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso  
Kommunikasie en Bemerkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa  
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town  
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

[www.uct.ac.za](http://www.uct.ac.za)

**26 March 2026**

## **UCT to confer honorary doctorates on Sooliman and Werner**

The University of Cape Town (UCT) will confer honorary doctorates on Dr Imtiaz Ismail Sooliman and Mr Cornelius George Werner at its upcoming autumn graduation ceremonies from 28 March to 2 April 2026.

- [Download a short audio version.](#)

Dr Sooliman will be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (honoris causa) for his humanitarian work on Monday, 30 March 2026 at 14:00; while the degree of Doctor of Music (honoris causa) will be conferred on Mr Werner on Wednesday, 1 April 2026 at 10:00 in recognition of his exceptional contribution to South African jazz.

UCT Vice-Chancellor Professor Mosa Moshabela said: "These two distinguished South Africans have shaped lives, strengthened communities and advanced values that lie at the heart of our institution. Through very different fields, they demonstrate what it means to lead with purpose and to serve society with integrity."

An honorary doctorate is the highest recognition UCT confers, acknowledging individuals whose lives and work have made a sustained and meaningful contribution to society.

"By honouring Dr Sooliman and Mr Werner, we affirm that humanitarian leadership and cultural stewardship are central to building a just, creative and humane society. We also send a message to our students and graduates that excellence must be matched by service, and talent must be guided by values," said Moshabela.

Dr Sooliman is the founder of Gift of the Givers, the largest disaster-response organisation of African origin on the continent. For more than three decades, he has dedicated his life to humanitarian service without discrimination.

After qualifying in medicine at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, he built a successful private practice. In 1994, he made the profound decision to leave that practice and commit himself fully to serving humanity.

Under his leadership, Gift of the Givers has delivered more than R6 billion in aid and responded to major crises across 47 countries. The organisation pioneered the first containerised mobile hospital deployed in war-torn Bosnia, as well as the first containerised primary health-care unit. It has supported communities affected by droughts, fires and floods in South Africa; earthquakes in Haiti and Turkey; famine in Somalia; and conflict in Gaza and Syria. It has also provided critical assistance to 210 hospitals during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sooliman's work gives practical expression to the constitutional values of dignity, equality and freedom. He has shown that decisive, compassionate leadership can restore hope in times of crisis.

"In recognising Dr Sooliman, we affirm our commitment to engaged citizenship and service. His life reminds us that knowledge and expertise carry a responsibility to advance the public good," said Moshabela.

Werner was born in Mthatha in the Eastern Cape and raised in Athlone, Cape Town. He developed his love of music within his family and community. Although he did not receive formal training, he became a self-taught professional pianist and performed with leading jazz artists such as Winston Mankunku, Ezra Ngcukana, Duke Ngcukana, Robbie Jansen, Errol Dyers, Sylvia Mdunyelwa, Tandie Klaasen and Donald Tshomela.

While his performance career is distinguished, his most enduring contribution has been as an educator and mentor. For decades, he has worked with young musicians across communities – including Langa, Khayelitsha, Nyanga, Gugulethu, Delft, Elsie's River and Hanover Park – as well as at schools such as the South African College High School. He participates annually in the Makhanda National Youth Jazz Festival and continues to nurture emerging talent.

Werner has also played a critical role in preserving our jazz heritage. He has transcribed and collated the works of artists such as Winston Mankunku, Robbie Jansen and McCoy Mrubata, creating archives now preserved by the National Library Service. He has also made significant contributions through initiatives such as Musical Action for People's Progress and as co-founder of The Little Giants with Ezra Ngcukana.

"He has mentored generations of musicians who have gone on to national and international stages. Through his teaching, he has shaped not only musicians but also responsible citizens who carry forward our cultural legacy," remarked Moshabela.

***ENDS***

***Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department***

**Elijah Moholola**

Spokesperson  
Communication and Marketing Department  
University of Cape Town  
Rondebosch  
Tel: 021 650 5674  
Cell: 083 981 7770

Email: [elijah.moholola@uct.ac.za](mailto:elijah.moholola@uct.ac.za)  
Website: [www.uct.ac.za](http://www.uct.ac.za)