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## **UCT adds indigenous Khoisan to its language courses**

The University of Cape Town (UCT) will offer a short course on Khoekhoegowab, the indigenous Khoisan language, through its Centre for Extra-Mural Studies (EMS).

"The bigger plan is for Khoekhoegowab to become a fourth language at UCT after IsiXhosa, English and Afrikaans," said EMS director Dr Medee Rall.

Khoisan heritage activist Bradley van Sitters said unfortunately many of the continent's indigenous languages - such as the Khoisan's Khoekhoegowab spoken by the Nama, Damara and Hailom ethnic groups - were endangered. Colonialism was one of the main causes of this decimation, he said.

"We cannot celebrate things that are African without celebrating the languages. One-third of the world's 6 000 languages are spoken in Africa," he added.

Retired University of Namibia scholar Professor Wilfrid Haacke, a Khoekhoegowab language expert and also a UCT alumnus, added: "Today there are about 167 000 speakers of Khoekhoegowab. Roughly 39% are Nama and 60% are Damara."

Professor Haacke has been instrumental in efforts to preserve the language through various orthographies, or conventions for writing the language, dictionaries and glossaries (two-way with English or Afrikaans), compiled with Pastor Eliphaz Eiseb.

Van Sitters said that the different names given to Africa, its settlements, rivers and natural features – and even its people – has a multi-layered history that reflects the different indigenous languages spoken through time, many now lost and others on the brink of extinction.

As a younger man Van Sitters left his home in Cape Town with his friend's passport and crossed the Gariep River into Namibia to find his Khoisan ancestors.

He is now a Khoisan language and heritage activist, visiting communities and schools north and south of the Gariep River where Khoekhoegowab is still in use.

As part of his campaign to "decolonise the tongue and the mind", Van Sitters is also taking the language onto the Cape Flats, to communities such as Lavender Hill.

Referring to the lost names of Africa, he said the colonial ships that had reached the Cape shores centuries ago had been like missiles, creating craters of impact that still ripple outwards in language and culture today.

"The indigenous languages and knowledge were destroyed. The language that was once spoken here is no longer spoken before this place," he said, referring to CHED's headquarters in the HuriꞤoaxa building. "There were people living here."

***ENDS***

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

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