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to COVID-19 on the UCT website**

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Ethical use of drones in a COVID-19 pandemic national emergency response program

In an era in which technologies are transforming society rapidly, there is a need for ethical frameworks and normative standards where societal values must be promoted as priorities.

One of the major challenges in South Africa – and worldwide – presented by the COVID-19 pandemic is the ethical and responsible use of technology that is used for public security and surveillance activities. An illustrative example is how mobile technology can covertly collect and track global citizens movement and internet activities through forensic cloud analysis.

An initiative led by Dr Sumarie Roodt and Dr Walter Uys from the newly established Tech4Good Lab within the School of Information Technology at the University of Cape Town (UCT), is a collaboration between UCT, the University of Auckland and the University of Western Australia. It aims to take the lead in building a ‘Drones4Good’ knowledge community (through the Tech4Good Lab at UCT) that will extend beyond South Africa, New Zealand and Australia to determine the main privacy, safety and utility considerations (ethical, legal and social implications) with respect to the use of drones for crowd monitoring, message broadcasting and social distancing activities related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We must seek effective and practical actions and produce high-quality solutions in a flexible and creative way to disseminate ideas, research, and programs,” shared Roodt. “This is how we can work together in an ethical way to combat the spread of this virus and avoid the abuse of human rights.”

Discussions with other national stakeholders involved in drone development and deployment in the Global South have been initiated across business, government and civil society clusters. An example is the regional not-for-profit company called the Silicon Cape initiative, Africa’s largest and most productive technology innovation ecosystem enabler, which is helping to engage regional stakeholders in the drone innovation space.

"Through our research we strive towards a collaborative research and practice platform with multi-party participation and invite the global business, academic, government, and non-governmental institutions to participate. Even the public will be welcome to participate to help us build a more complete consensus that this problem and issue requires," explained Uys.

The team plans to connect and encourage all parties to carry out targeted and interdisciplinary exchanges and cooperation in response to new problems brought about by this novel technological deployment.



Dr Sumarie Roodt

Photo: Supplied

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Dr Walter Uys

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Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

Aamirah Sonday

Media Liaison and Monitoring Officer

Communication and Marketing Department
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch
Tel: (021) 650 5427
Cell: (076) 947 6071

Email: aamirah.sonday@uct.ac.za

Website: www.uct.ac.za