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## **Afrikan Futures Catalyst team wins United Nations global design award**

The Afrikan Futures Catalyst team has been selected as one of the five winners of the United Nations (UN) global design competition for their project: "Driving change for peace in institutions of higher education in Afrika".

To mark the UN's 75th anniversary, the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and Design Futures Initiative called on designers and futurists to create ideas on how to better sustain peace. Projects had to consider what new and innovative tools could make UN diplomacy and peace processes more effective and sustainable.

The projects had to address how emerging technologies and methods might help to prevent armed conflict around the world. Inspired by their work with the University of Cape Town (UCT) Futures Think Tank, the Afrikan Futures Catalyst Toolkit was the only submission from Africa awarded this honour.

Abbas Jamie and Zoë Palmer are the drivers behind the Afrikan Futures Catalyst Toolkit. They were initially appointed to facilitate the work of the UCT Futures Think Tank, which was established by Vice-Chancellor Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng in 2018, but their role soon evolved into working with the university's Vision 2030 task team. They worked closely with UCT's leadership, bringing in new methodologies like futures studies, complexity and design thinking to help shape the university's vision.

Jamie said one of the first things they did was to change the question from 'How does UCT respond to disruption that's happening?' to 'How does UCT become a disruptor?'

"Through our intervention UCT has come up with its massive transformative purpose (MTP), which is 'Unleash human potential to create a fair and just society'," said Jamie.

When the call came for entries, Jamie and Palmer immediately saw the connection. The UN typically responds to violence by sending in peace-keeping initiatives after the event, but this competition wanted to explore changing this narrative to one of building peace before the violence.

“An important part of the intervention and change is embracing creativity, which gave birth to the Afrikan Futures Catalyst group. The work we are doing at UCT inspired us to enter the UN peace competition and showcase our methodology,” said Palmer.

“The core of the work that we do is, ‘How do we get people to feel agency?’ ” said Jamie. “It’s about making people realise that if you don’t create a future, you are going to end up in someone else’s future.”

The university, they said, has committed to the idea that because of who UCT is, the institution has a responsibility to shape a better future.

Jamie said: “Winning this competition is a fantastic opportunity for UCT to showcase this journey that the institution is on. It also gives us confidence in the approach that we have taken.”



Abbas Jamie and Zoë Palmer, the drivers behind the Afrikan Futures Catalyst Toolkit.

Photo: Frank Joe Palmer

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***ENDS***

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