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## **Update on UCT's recovery from April 2021 fire**

After suffering a disastrous blow when the Table Mountain fire raged on campus and caused catastrophic damage to property in this month two years ago, the University of Cape Town (UCT) has provided an update on the Jagger Library restoration process and on other affected buildings.

UCT remained both grateful and relieved that no lives were lost and that no student or staff member was harmed during the sudden evacuation process in April 2021, said Interim Vice-Chancellor Emeritus Professor Daya Reddy.

"Though the passage of time has eased our sense of shock and loss, we remain on the long journey to recovery. Fortunately, we have not been alone in this process. We are so grateful for the outpouring of support – in words, financial assistance and deeds – from alumni, friends and supporters all over the country, the continent and globally," said Reddy.

On 18 April 2023, UCT co-hosted the launch of a remarkable book titled *Stories from the Ashes – Africa's Story Through the Last Millennium*, a collaborative project between DStv, Ogilvy and UCT Libraries Special Collections. This book, a compilation of remnants and texts salvaged from the burnt Reading Room and flooded basements, commemorates the destruction of significant African Studies monographs, film and government publications and collections, and the work of the professionals who painstakingly curated these collections.

The book includes personal reflections by distinguished UCT alumni including Justice Albie Sachs; former UCT Vice-Chancellor Dr Mamphela Ramphele; founder member and former Chief Executive Officer of the Steve Biko Foundation, Mr Nkosinathi Biko; and Chair of UCT Convocation, Mr Carl Manlan.

- [Read more about this amazing project and the African stories it has preserved.](#)

After two years of recovery and consideration of ideas for contemporary academic libraries and archives, UCT is now in a better position to proceed with the reconstruction of the Jagger Library. The architect's project brief for UCT Libraries – master-planning of the

network of libraries incorporating the post-fire rehabilitation, refurbishment, upgrade and integration of the JW Jagger Library Reading Room; and the reconceptualisation of the new Special Collections Archives – has been signed off.

“The next step is the appointment of an architect in accordance with the UCT Properties & Services processes. The user group that will guide and advise the master planning process has been finalised and relevant individuals identified for participation. Consideration of how and where to store a new working archive in the future is an important factor in designing and rebuilding the Jagger Library,” Reddy said.

Over the past two years, UCT hosted a series of workshops to consider how the university might “reimagine” the space as a research library with a focus on African history, identity and creative expression. Additional surveys and consultations will be undertaken to provide ideas and suggestions that will inform the final design brief for this important university resource.

“The Jagger Library’s status as a heritage building will also inform this process. Our overall intention is to keep the process as transformative and transparent as possible and in alignment to both UCT’s Vision 2030 and UCT Libraries’ vision,” he added.

The Jagger Library was not the only building affected by the fire. Reddy shared an update on other areas of the campus that were affected by the fire.

### **Damages sustained by the Department of Biological Science**

The HW Pearson Building suffered extensive damage that has affected key research entities such as the Plant Conservation Unit (PCU), the Institute for Communities and Wildlife in Africa and the Bolus Herbarium. Final repairs to the building are pending City of Cape Town approval, while staff and students working in the fields of botany, zoology and ecology remain in temporary venues on campus. Both greenhouses attached to the building also sustained damage.

He remarked: “The destruction of the PCU’s entire collection of historical photographs – some dating back to 1876 – is a terrible and irreplaceable loss. This collection was essential in chronicling the ecological history of South Africa. Fortunately, the specimen collections in the Bolus Herbarium, also irreplaceable, did not sustain permanent damage.

### **Damage sustained by other buildings on upper campus**

Repairs to AC Jordan, Botany Glass House, Molecular & Cell Biology, RW James, Maintenance Place, and the Mathematics Building, as well as the Tennis Club, Sports Centre and the two affected residences on upper campus have been completed.

### **Damages sustained by buildings on middle campus**

Both Cadbol House and La Grotta were damaged beyond repair and were approved for demolition under the oversight of a heritage architect. The staff members in both buildings

have been accommodated in different venues. The land on which these two buildings stood will be used to serve UCT in other ways.

“Our workplaces are like a second home and the destruction of the fire has been personal for many of us. Staff and students alike have shown courage in continuing with their activities under the “new normal” conditions. On behalf of UCT, I thank each of [them] for pursuing [their] academic goals under such trying circumstances,” concluded Reddy.

***ENDS***

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

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