



Photos sourced from publication records of the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) database.

Obituary: Architect Mthembeni Mkhize (02/09/1955 – 24/07/2021)

The South African Institute of Architects (SAIA) is deeply saddened by the untimely passing of the SAIA CEO, Architect Mthembeni Mkhize on Saturday, 24th July 2021 at the Milpark Hospital in Johannesburg, Gauteng. His involvement in architecture in South Africa stretches more than 40 years encompassing academic and professional roles locally and internationally. Mthembeni belongs to the cohort of Black Architects who are the first generation to pursue architectural studies in the late 70's when he enrolled at the University of Natal, Howard College, Durban Campus in 1978 during the dark days of Apartheid, when the architecture and engineering professions had been the preserve of white students only. After many false starts, given the challenges of the time, Mthembeni went on to obtain a Diploma in Architecture at the University of Johannesburg in 1981 and went back to complete his degree at the University of Natal in 1992. He went on to obtain a Masters in Architecture & Planning at the University of Natal and in 2006 a further qualification in Heritage Planning Management. Mthembeni did not only dedicate his adult life in the service in the profession but also made tremendous contribution in the teaching and mentoring of students and young architects.

In a curious turn of events, this culminated in him being appointed as the Academic Cluster and Head of Architecture, Planning and Housing, at the School of Built Environment and Development Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College in the period 2012 – 2015, sacrificing his involvement in private practice opting for the “less glamorous but very significant” academic role. He became the first black South African to hold this post and went on as Adjunct lecturer at the school until his retirement from the University. Among the outstanding contributions he made during his tenure as Head of School was “to formalise the participation of professional architects affiliated to the KwaZulu-Natal Institute of Architecture (KZNIA) in the teaching of architecture”, bringing practice and academia closer together.

For his contribution in the service of Architecture, he was recognized by the SAIA Region, his Province of birth, the KZN-IA (KwaZulu Natal Institute of Architecture) which awarded him “a Scroll of Honour” conferred to him by then KZN-IA President, Architect Ruben Reddy in 2015. In conferring this honour the KZN-IA President is quoted as saying that “Mr Mkhize has sacrificed a lucrative career in the private sector as a targeted practicing architect to dedicate his life to the education of

young aspirant architects". SAIA pays tribute to the role Mthembeni played in service of the profession despite all the obstacles, challenges and difficulties he faced individually, being a product of the Bantu Education system, as Black student in former 'white universities' and as a Black architectural professional, he remained dedicated to the profession which he has served until his untimely passing as SAIA CEO.

Mthembeni served SAIA as CEO since August 2020 and during this short one-year period, he served the organization and the profession with selfless commitment and dedication in adherence to and guided by the highest standards of corporate governance and accountability. During this time as CEO, Mthembeni represented SAIA within other affiliate organizations of the Built Environment, primarily SACAP (South African Council for the Architectural Profession), CBE, (Council for the Built Environment), BEPG (Built Environment Professions Group), the 2020 formed Covid-19 Response Task team, now CASA (Construction Alliance South Africa) and many others. During his role as SAIA CEO, Mthembeni was the official link to SAIA international affiliate organisations, the UIA (Union of International Architects) and the AUA (African Union of Architects).

In his personal capacity, internationally, he had pursued a Global leadership programme funded by the United Technology Corporation (UTC) and through this programme was identified to participate in the Eisenhower Fellowship Foundation, which afforded him the opportunity to visit approximately 45 cities and towns in the USA and the UK, interacting with distinguished leaders in architecture and business during that time. He was then awarded the prestigious Eisenhower Fellowship as one of the few emerging leaders in that category. The Fellowship promotes international understanding and productivity through the exchange of information, ideas and perspectives within a network of 105 participating nations. In furtherance of his quest to share his experiences and knowledge at a global stage, Mthembeni took a role as a visiting Professor at Schools of Architecture and Design in Princeton University, Harvard School of Design, University of California, Los Angeles and the Illinois Institute of Technology among others. Back in South Africa, Mthembeni was committed to the transformation of the architectural profession but also the transformation of the economy in various business platforms. In 1996/7 he participated in various initiatives and international conferences of the DTI accompanying diverse business delegations representing various sectors including a UN Conference on Trade and Development in 1996, promoting 'liberalisation of global trade between large and small businesses towards improved trade efficiency'.

He helped establish the cities Hub Africa Foundation as a centre of Excellence and sharing knowledge globally in the Design for Cities. This was an initiative of SALGA (South Africa Local Government Association) and the United Cities and Local Governments of Africa (UCLGA). He played various advisory roles for Government at Local, Provincial and National level in KZN and Gauteng and was member of the International Marketing Council of South Africa, a body which promotes business opportunities and exposure within the auspices of the Department of International Affairs and Cooperation. Among many roles he played, he previously served in the CSIR (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research) as the project leader and scientific researcher in the Educational and Health Facilities Program of the Building Technology Division. He was a registered Professional Architect with SACAP and various institutions, locally and internationally.

Mthembeni was a practicing Architect in his own right, he was a Director at Brink, Stokes, Mkhize Architects (PTY) Ltd with offices in Durban, Pretoria, George, Somerset West and Upington until he took on the position of SAIA CEO. From his own words, he described himself as "an academic, a practicing architect an urban planner, dedicated to working closely with communities in order to develop a high level of interaction and create living environments which truly reflects the needs of people who have participated in their own on-going development". This definition brings to the fore, a perspective of architecture which is so needed, and relevant in our country, may the architectural profession and other built environment professions embrace these values in memory of Mthembeni.

On behalf of SAIA and the broader architecture profession and allied built environment professions, we dip our banner in recognition of the outstanding role he played through his adult life, but specifically, during his short-lived tenure in service of the profession as the SAIA CEO, where he served the membership with distinction until his untimely and unfortunate passing. We send our deepest condolences to his wife, Lungi Mkhize and four adult children and his brother Jerome.

Written by: Dr Luyanda Mpahlwa, SAIA Immediate Past President; Architect Kate Otten, SAIA President; Architect Ruben Reddy, SAIA Vice-President

Endorsed by: Nokulunga Mtombeni (Daughter) on behalf on the Mkhize Family