

BIOGRAPHY – DR ZUKISWA YOLISWA ZINHLE NZO

Dr Zukiswa Yoliswa Zinhle Nzo is a Research Fellow at the University of the Free State's Free State Centre for Human Rights in the Faculty of Law. She is an inclusion researcher, social entrepreneur, and facilitator with over 16 years of experience spanning government, academia, civil society, and the private sector. She holds a PhD in Social Governance from Waseda University (Japan), and her work is grounded in a deep commitment to human rights, intersectional justice, and inclusive development.

Her academic and professional trajectory was profoundly shaped by a life-altering experience of disability following a gunshot injury in her youth—an event that intensified her pursuit of justice and equity, particularly for those historically marginalised. This formative experience, along with early community advocacy, led to her selection as a Mandela Washington Fellow, where she was recognised for her leadership in disability inclusion and her dedication to mentorship and training of emerging change agents.

Dr. Nzo's work is deeply intergenerational and rooted in lived experience. She mentors and advocates alongside youth, women, and persons with disabilities, with a strong belief in the transformative power of equitable systems. She has collaborated with global institutions including the United Nations, OHCHR, JICA, and GIZ, contributing to initiatives in digital inclusion, independent living, empowerment and rights monitoring, and inclusive policy development across the African continent and globally.

Her leadership was recently marked by her appointment as Co-Chair of the Civil Society 20 (C20) under South Africa's G20 Presidency—a historic milestone for disability inclusion at multilateral levels. Her nomination by the South African disability sector reflects a collective assertion of visibility, voice, and capability within high-level global governance spaces.

A recipient of the Social Transformation Award, Dr Nzo has also served on the Presidential Working Group on Disability in South Africa. She is a published author and international speaker whose contributions span topics such as disability, ageing, economic justice, accessible transport, and the systemic exclusion of disability from global development

agendas. She holds multiple governance roles, where she continues to champion ethical leadership, inclusive innovation, and sustainable transformation.

At the core of her work is the conviction that fairness—when embedded in law, policy, and institutional design—is the cornerstone of just and sustainable societies.