

## MUT supports family of slain student

A dark cloud fell on MUT on 1 May 2018, the day the University received the news that one of its students, Zolile Khumalo, had been killed. Zolile, then a first-year Quantity Surveying student, had been shot at Lonsdale Hotel, an off-campus student residence, by her ex-boyfriend Thabani Mzolo. In the last few years a number of South African university students have been killed by people they knew, and Zolile's death brought home the horror of gender-based violence.

The Department of Marketing and Communications was one of the departments that acted as soon as they got the shocking news. In addition to disseminating key information, they decided to find out more about the student and her family. They knew that the incident would grow into a big story, and that it would include more hardship for the family in Eshowe, in northern KwaZulu-Natal. This assumption proved very true for Solomuzi Khumalo and his wife Princess. Zolile was the fifth child they had lost, leaving them with only one child, Senamile, who lives in Ngonyameni on the west of Umlazi Township.

Solomuzi, a pensioner, said life was hard for the family. "We are struggling financially. We have to look after our grandchildren," he said. The family had pinned their hopes on Zolile to look after them after graduating and securing a job. Solomuzi and Princess were badly affected by Zolile's passing. Senamile said her father cries a lot, and one day told her "not to be in a relationship with a man who did not go to church. He is always aware that some men do not accept that the relationship has ended, and resort to violence," said Senamile.

Solomuzi and Princess said they were coping with the situation because of their religion. "This is what gives us strength. Other church members in our area pray for us, and with us on Wednesday when we meet at different houses," said Solomuzi.

On the afternoon of 5 March 2020, the last day of Thabani Mzolo's trial, they called the church members and informed them that Thabani had been sentenced to life imprisonment. Zolile's parents were very happy with this verdict. Solomuzi and Princess had sat on the



*Dr Malaza giving the media MUT's response to the outcome of the trial*



*The Khumalo family outside Durban High Court: from left, Senamile, Zolile's sister, Mr Khumalo, Mrs Khumalo, and Zolile's aunt, Mrs Khethiwe Ngema*

hard, unforgiving court benches for a week, listening to the recounting of the events that unfolded on 1 May 2018 and in the days that followed. Senamile said her parents were wrecked by the court visit; it brought back all the sad times they had been through.

Being aware of how tough it would be for the Khumalo family to be in court, MUT made arrangements to soften the blow. On the first day of that week, the University arranged a gender-based violence protest walk from the Lonsdale Hotel, where Zolile was murdered. "Although we did not know how long the trial was going to last, we decided to continue supporting the family as we were aware of how hard it has been for them. On the first day of the trial we drove them home, and fetched them the following morning. We arranged a place for them to stay as the distance from Durban to Eshowe is more than 140km. Imagine having to drive that distance twice a day," said Mbali Mkhize, Senior Director: Marketing and Communications. Mbali's department drove the family home on the last day of the trial too, a gesture greatly appreciated by the Khumalos. Solomuzi and Princess were also very happy to meet the Vice-Chancellor of the University, Dr Enoch Duma Malaza.