



**rijksuniversiteit
 groningen**

Alumnus of the Year 2023: jury report

The University of Groningen is proud of its alumni. They are our ambassadors and our links to society. Every year, we award one of our alumni the title Alumnus of the Year, as an expression of appreciation and encouragement. The title is awarded to a UG alumnus who, in our eyes, has made an extraordinary contribution to society, academia or culture, is a source of inspiration for others and shows promise for the future.

The Alumnus of the Year 2023 is Takudzwa Mutezo, nature conservation lawyer, farmer, and sustainable entrepreneur.

'I'm a tiny drop in the ocean but if not me, then who?' That is the motto of Takudzwa Mutezo, Taku for short. It is impressive to see in how many fields and in how many ways she is bringing this motto into practice.

Taku Mutezo is committed to nature preservation, fights against nature crime at an international level, contributes to legislation, generates worldwide awareness of how important nature is to us, initiates innovative projects, and is a sustainable farmer with her own urban farm.

In short, Taku inspires and astonishes. She truly leads the change she wants to see in the world! In doing so, she uses her legal background to solidify her work, address injustice, and hold people accountable who are destroying our planet. Not from a utopian activism, but with facts and measurable data.

She sees the law as a tool, not as a last resort. Because this goes further than guilt and penance. What is more important to Taku is explaining, raising awareness, and connecting, so that the problem can be addressed at the root. These are values that we emphatically want to pass on to our students.

As a young leader, Taku commands a power that is creating real change. She is showing us that when you combine wonder and frustrations with academic knowledge, you can actually change the world. Taku Mutezo is a paragon of perseverance and a role model. In Zimbabwe and Africa, but also in Groningen and in the rest of the world. An alumna we can be really proud of!

About Takudzwa S. Mutezo

Takudzwa, Taku for short (1992), is one of the new young female leaders in Africa. She is a nature conservation lawyer in Zimbabwe, specialized in combatting national and international illegal animal trade. Until mid-2022, she led the legal department of the Tikki Hywood Foundation, an international non-profit organization in Africa devoted to the sustainable,

holistic protection of ecosystems. She recently started working as a freelancer, among other things for the protection of pangolins in Mozambique, the development of legislation in the field of water issues in Zimbabwe, and the creation of Hambai Wild, a non-profit organization that tries to involve local communities as much as possible in the protection and conservation of nature and the environment. She was one of the authors of the Handbook for Prosecuting Wildlife Crimes on legislation and prosecution around wildlife crimes. Since 2021, she has been the youngest and the only female board member of the Nyanga Rhodes Estate, one of the most important national parks in Zimbabwe. She is a member of Women for Environment and a Mandela Washington Fellow, a US programme for young African leaders.

For the past few years, she has also co-owned a small urban farm that delivers vegetables to supermarkets and other parties. Taku Mutezo came to Groningen in 2013 to follow a Bachelor's degree programme in International and European Law, which she successfully completed in 2017. During her studies, she was active in many areas, among other things as the founder of the International Student Council and a member of the Green Office. She was also the first international student in the University Council.

The jury

This year, the jury for the Alumnus of the Year award comprised:

Cisca Wijmenga, Rector Magnificus, chair

Iris de Graaf, NOS Russia correspondent, Alumnus of the Year 2022

Joost Frenken, Dean of the Faculty of Science and Engineering

Remco Kouwenhoven, Director of Alumni Relations & Fundraising/Ubbo Emmius Fund

Previous winners

2022* – Iris de Graaf, NOS Russia correspondent, Slavonic Languages and Russian Studies

2020 - Laurien Meuter (1976), founder Tiny Miracles Foundation, economics

2019 - Sander de Hosson (1977), pulmonary specialist and pioneer of good palliative care; Medicine

2018 - Christiaan Triebert (1991), visual investigative journalist for the New York Times/Bellingcat; IRIO

2017 - Carolien de Bruin (1977), founder of C-Change, which helps international companies and organizations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals; Business and Finance

2016 - Merel Rumping (1984), founder of Carewithinreach, making orthopaedic care accessible to all; IRIO

2015 - Luuk van Middelaar (1973), writer, professor and expert on Europe; History/Philosophy

2014 - Monica Arac de Nyeko (1979), Ugandan writer and humanitarian specialist for UNICEF, one of the writers on the Africa39 list and winner of the 2007 Caine Prize for a short story about two lesbian teenagers that served as the inspiration for the film Rafiki; Humanitarian Assistance

2013 - Wim Pijbes (1961), former Director of the Rijksmuseum; Art History

2012 - Matthijs Bierman (1964), Director of Triodos Bank; Business Administration and Law

2011 - Stine Jensen (1972), philosopher, writer, programme maker; Philosophy

2010 - Jelle Brandt Corstius (1978), writer, programme maker; History

** since 2022, the nomination and the presentation of the prize take place in the same year.