



## **Short Interview with Dr. Robbie Francis Watene**

### **Her Abilities Award Winner in Rights 2020**

#### **What achievement are you most proud of?**

The achievement I am most proud of is contributing towards a shift in thinking where the lived experience of disability is no longer considered a weakness, but a strength. For too long the knowledge of people with disabilities has been subjugated and considered inferior to the knowledge of professionals, experts, and people without disabilities. I am incredibly honoured to be considered as having expertise in disability rights - not only because of my qualifications, and not despite my disability, but because of my experiences as a woman with a disability.

#### **What's your message to women with disabilities?**

Women with disabilities belong. We belong in the room, at the table, in the conversation, in negotiations, and where decisions are being made. We belong just as we are.

#### **What is your vision for an inclusive society?**

An inclusive society is one that values and celebrates our community - the disability community - in its entirety. It is one that upholds our civil and political human rights, as well as our economic, social and cultural rights. It is also a society that unreservedly justifies the quality of the implementation of our rights.

#### **What are the barriers you have faced in your life and how did you overcome them?**

Growing up, I didn't see many people like me in positions of power or leadership, which led to feelings of loneliness and a lack of confidence in my ability to affect change. So, I began to actively search for allies working in the social justice space - other women and people with disabilities, marginalised populations, people with lived experience of injustice, indigenous persons, and others. I soon discovered that I was, in fact, standing on the shoulders of giants and journeying alongside an infinite number of passionate, driven, and experienced social justice and human rights warriors. It was then that I realised that I am not, and will never be, alone on this journey.

#### **What is your response to winning Her Abilities?**

It is an absolute privilege to be named the winner of the Her Abilities Award in Rights for 2020, in fact I feel quite overwhelmed! But it is also important to acknowledge that this honour is not about my work as an individual, but the tireless efforts of a global community who have paved the way for the realisation of my rights as a woman with a disability. I can only do what I do because of those who have supported, encouraged, and believed in my work, and the work of the Donald Beasley Institute and The Lucy Foundation. For this I am eternally grateful.