

Taking stock and saying thank you: 25 years of the Centre's activities related to the promotion and protection of human rights in Africa

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, on the occasion of its 25 year celebration, on 9 October 2012, awarded its NGO Prize for the promotion and protection of human rights in Africa to the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria (Centre). This award provides an opportunity to take stock of the Centre's activities in this thematic domain, with a focus on the last few years:

Overview

The Centre is an NGO enjoying observer status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Commission) since 1993.

It has been actively involved in the **activities of the African Commission**, by participating in the sessions of the Commission, and by:

- (i) serving as the legal representative and assisting in submitting the only **communication** thus far decided against South Africa (*Prince v RSA*);
- (ii) drafting and submitting **shadow reports** to a number of state reports;
- (iii) supporting, through its Gender Unit, the mandate of the **Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women**, for example by hosting numerous training and capacity-building events on state reporting for government officials and civil society; by developing a draft and hosting a discussion on the Reporting Guidelines under the Women's Protocol; and by developing a "general comment" on article 14 of the Women's Protocol;
- (iv) by supporting the **Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa**, in raising awareness of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, to ensure its early entry into force, and the development of a Model Law on Access to Information;
- (v) working with the **Working Group on Indigenous Communities/Populations in Africa**, together with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), in the development of a comprehensive study and database on the legal protection of indigenous peoples' rights in selected African states (see http://www.chr.up.ac.za/chr_old/indigenous/); published in English, French and Arabic;
- (vi) on the occasion of the 30 year celebrations of the African Charter, developing, in collaboration with the Commission's Secretariat, a **Guide** (an informational booklet) highlighting the main features of the African human rights system (see http://www.pulp.up.ac.za/pdf/2011_13/2011_13.pdf), as well as pocket size copies of the African Charter, the Women's Protocol and the 2010 Rules of Procedure of the African Commission, of which thousands of copies were distributed;
- (vii) placing **legal interns/junior legal officers**, supported by the Centre, on a more or less continuous basis, for the last 11 years, and on occasion enabling them to attend the Commission's sessions outside Banjul;
- (viii) working with the **Working Group on the Rights of Older Persons and People with Disabilities**, on exploring, in a position paper, the advantages and disadvantages of an African-specific treaty on the rights of persons with disabilities; and
- (ix) presenting one-week intensive '**short courses**' on aspects of human rights in Africa, in particular on 'The Rights of In Indigenous Peoples in Africa' and a course on 'The African Regional Human Rights System in Comparative Perspective';

- (x) the representation of Centre members on the Commission's **Working Group on Extractive Industries, Environment and Human Rights Violations**, and the hosting of a session of this Working Group in Pretoria; and
- (xi) the representation of Centre members on the **Working Group on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights**.

In terms of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Commission (and the African Court), the Centre has since 2000 published the **African Human Rights Law Reports** in English and French, consisting of decisions of the African Commission and the African Court as well as UN treaty monitoring bodies, African sub-regional courts, and domestic courts in Africa. (See <http://www.chr.up.ac.za/index.php/publications/ahrlr.html>. The judgments and decisions published are also available in the African Human Rights Case Law Database on the Centre's website.

The Centre has presented, since 2000, the **LLM (Human Rights and Democratisation in Africa)**, which focuses on the African regional human rights system. This unique programme, which aims to provide scholarships to 30 students from all around Africa on an annual basis, has now produced over 350 alumni drawn from 37 African countries. These alumni are trained to and in fact often take positions in regional and national human rights institutions, including the African Commission. Through their subsequent activities, the LLM alumni have contributed significantly to greater awareness and knowledge of the African human rights system, in general, and the African Commission, in particular. (This programme is presented in collaboration with twelve partner faculties across the continent.)

One of the main mechanisms to create greater awareness of and insight into the African human rights system is the annual **African Human Rights Moot Court Competition** (Moot). Now in its 22nd year, the Moot has provided the opportunity to generations of law students at most of the law faculties in Africa to explore the actual potential of the African human rights system, by presenting a case to the African Court. On numerous occasions, members of the African Commission presided as 'judges' in the final round. Greater interest in the African Charter among legal academics, inspired by the Moot, contributed to the more extensive inclusion of the Charter in the curriculum of law schools. In July 2011, a conference was held in Pretoria titled '30 years of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights: Looking forward while looking back'. The conference was organized by the Centre in conjunction with the Moot. Many Commissioners participated.

The Centre publishes the **African Human Rights Law Journal**, which is the only law journal with an exclusive focus on human rights in Africa. Published twice annually since 2001, 23 issues have to date appeared. A number of issues were devoted almost exclusively to the African Charter and African Commission, and an annual update of human rights developments under the AU is published (see <http://www.chr.up.ac.za/index.php/ahrli-downloads.html>).

The Centre, together with the Human Rights Development Initiative (HRDI), presents an **LLM (HIV and International Law in Africa)**. Alumni of this programme have, with the support of HRDI, assisted Commissioners who are members of the Commission's HIV Committee, as legal officers.

Many of the Centre's staff focuses on aspects of the African Charter and African Commission as part of their **research**. Significant research outputs by Centre staff members include Frans Viljoen's *International Human Rights Law in Africa* (Oxford University Press, 2nd editions 2012), **resource material** such as the *Compendium of Key Human Rights Documents of the African Union* (in English, French, Arabic and Portuguese) and academic articles in leading international journals and books. Together with its alumni, the Centre recently published a volume of country reports on the impact of the African Charter and the

African Women's Protocol (*The impact of the African Charter and Women's Protocol in selected African states*).

Acknowledgment and thanks

The Centre thanks all its collaborating partners, alumni and donors for their support. Your contributions all fit somewhere in the framework above, or in some other way left its mark or added its value.

Because the activities described above have been only been accomplished through our cumulative endeavours, the Prize belongs to all of us. This award should also be a source of encouragement, strength and inspiration to us all.



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