WEBINAR INVITATION

A DIALOGUE ON POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Monday, 8 June 2026
14:30 -15:30 (SAST)

Prof David Bilchitz

The Centre for Human Rights, Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria cordially invites you to a webinar series on 'Dialogue on Poverty and Human Rights'. We are honoured to have Prof David Bilchitz as the first keynote speaker in this webinar series. The webinar will be graced by H.E Fatoumatta Jahumpa Ceesay High Commissioner of the Gambia to South Africa.

Date: Monday, 8 June 2026 | **Time**: 14:30-15:30 (SAST)
Venue: Online (Zoom)

REGISTER ON ZOOM

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BACKGROUND

Poverty remains one of the most severe human rights issues globally, particularly in developing nations and especially in Africa. It is commonly perceived as a social, or economic concern; nevertheless, its implications and consequences transcend these categories. According to the World bank 2026 update, 847 million people worldwide were living in poverty in 2024, with Sub-Saharan Africa accounting for about 464 million in extreme poverty, making the region the most affected globally. In south Africa, statistics show that in 2023, about 10.8 million people were living below the food poverty line, while 66.7% of the population fell below the upper-bound poverty line. This situation is closely linked to the enduring legacy of apartheid which institutionalised racial dispossession, unequal education, labour exclusion and spatial inequalities. Poverty manifests not merely as economic deprivation but as a lived experience that undermines human dignity, equality, freedom, and access to essential needs such as food, water, housing, healthcare, education, employment, and social protection. Extreme poverty confines individuals and communities, particularly marginalized groups, to exclusion, insecurity, discrimination, and restricted engagement in social, economic, and political spheres. It is a manifestation of social injustice. In many African countries, poverty is exacerbated by structural inequality, unemployment, gender injustice, inadequate public services, environmental degradation, and the impacts of climate change. Consequently, it constitutes a significant infringement of human rights.

A human rights-based approach to poverty is crucial as it transitions the discourse from charity to justice, and from needs to rights and accountability. It acknowledges that individuals in poverty are right holders, whereas states and other entities are duty bearers with responsibilities to respect, preserve, and fulfil these rights. Against this backdrop, the Centre for Human Rights is commencing a series of webinars titled 'Dialogue on Human Rights'.

Aim

This dialogue seeks to establish a space for critical examination of the connection between poverty and human rights, as well as how legal and policy frameworks might facilitate inclusive and accountable responses.

OBJECTIVES

- To analyse poverty from a human rights perspective and to foster discourse on rights-based approaches to poverty, especially within the African setting.
- To stimulate debate on how inequality and social injustice can exacerbate poverty
- To highlight states' obligations in addressing poverty as a human rights challenge
- To explore the multidimensional perspective of poverty
- To share good practices among African states regarding policy formulations and programme to address poverty.

GOALS

The dialogue seeks to examine the correlation between poverty and the realization of human rights; to emphasize poverty as both a catalyst and result of human rights infringements; to underscore relevant international and African regional human rights frameworks; and to promote contemplation on pragmatic, legal, and policy measures addressing poverty rooted in dignity, equality, and social justice.

NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK

While none of the international or regional human rights instruments contains explicit provisions on poverty, the various provisions of these instruments can be applied directly or indirectly to address poverty. Poverty can undermine the enjoyment of human rights such as dignity and life. Conversely, human rights violations can exacerbate poverty conditions. For instance, a denial of access to adequate housing can expose an individual to poor living conditions.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, at the international level, asserts the intrinsic dignity and equal rights of all individuals and acknowledges rights essential to combating poverty, such as the right to social security, employment, education, and an appropriate quality of living. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is notably important, as it guarantees the rights to employment, social security, sufficient nourishment, clothes, housing, health care, and education, and mandates that states undertake measures for the progressive realization of these rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women are pertinent, particularly in illustrating the disproportionate impact of poverty on children and women.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities emphasizes the necessity for inclusive strategies to tackle the specific susceptibility of individuals with disabilities to poverty and marginalization. The UN Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights emphasize that poverty is both a cause and a result of human rights breaches, asserting that anti-poverty initiatives must be formulated within a human rights framework.

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights serves as a significant normative framework at the regional level for combating poverty through rights including dignity, equality, health, education, property, and development. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child is pertinent in acknowledging children's rights to survival, development, health, and education, all of which are jeopardized by poverty. The Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) is significant in tackling the gendered aspects of poverty and in advancing women's rights to dignity, health, food security, and sustainable development. African Union Agenda 2063 envisions an Africa characterized by inclusive growth, sustainable development, social justice, and enhanced quality of life, thereby serving as a valuable additional framework for this discourse. The Guidelines and Principles for the Implementation of socio-economic rights in the African Charter outline states' obligations to realise the socio-economic rights in the Charter, including addressing poverty.

The dialogue corresponds with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically SDG 1 aimed at eradicating poverty in all its manifestations globally, while also closely relating to SDG 2 concerning zero hunger, SDG 3 focused on health and well-being, SDG 4 regarding quality education, SDG 5 promoting gender equality, SDG 6 addressing clean water and sanitation, SDG 10 aimed at reducing inequalities, and SDG 16 pertaining to justice and inclusive institutions.

ANTICIPATED RESULTS

The debate aims to enhance comprehension of poverty as a human rights concern, bolster awareness of pertinent legal and policy frameworks, and provoke discourse on rights-based approaches to poverty in Africa. The objective is to promote more participation among academics, students, practitioners, politicians, and civil society regarding the necessity for accountable and inclusive anti-poverty initiatives.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

Academics, researchers, students, legal professionals, politicians, civil society organizations, development practitioners, and members of the public concerned with poverty, social justice, and human rights.

STRUCTURE

This will be an hour's program, including a welcome address, Expert speaker's introduction, a keynote address, a moderated discussion, audience engagement, and closing remarks.

PROGRAMME

14:30 - 14:35 Moderator Introduction

14:35 - 14:45 Welcome address H.E Fatoumatta Jahumpa Ceesay, High Commissioner of the Gambia to South Africa.

14:45 - 15:05 Expert keynote address Prof David Bilchitz Faculty of Law, University of Johannesburg

15:05 - 15:15 Moderated discussion

15:15 - 15:25 Audience engagement

15:25 - 15:30 Closing remarks

SPEAKER'S BIO

Prof David Bilchitz

David Bilchitz is a Professor of Fundamental Rights and Constitutional Law at the University of Johannesburg and Director of the South African Institute for Advanced Constitutional, Public, Human Rights and International Law (SAIFAC). He is also a part-time Professor of Law at the University of Reading in the United Kingdom.

He was appointed as an Acting Justice of the Constitutional Court of South Africa from February to May 2024, the first full-time academic to have been appointed directly to act as judge on the Court in over 20 years. He is also a Vice-President of the International Association of Constitutional Law and a Member of the Academy of Sciences of South Africa.

Bilchitz has multiple publications covering a wide range of topics including writings on proportionality, socio-economic rights, business and fundamental rights, the separation of powers, and the rights of non-human animals. In the field of socio-economic rights, his monograph Poverty and Fundamental Rights (OUP, 2007) remains a central text in defending the minimum core approach to determining the content of socio-economic rights. In addition to impactful journal articles and book chapters, teaching and conference presentations, he has, notably, developed an important course on socio-economic rights for the Mexican judiciary.

H.E Fatoumatta Jahumpa Ceesay

Fatoumatta Jahumpa Ceesay (born 25 October 1957) is a Gambian politician, diplomat, and journalist she is also the daughter of Garba Jahumpa, the first indigenous mayor of Banjul. In January 2007, she was nominated to join the National Assembly of the Gambia.

The following month, she was nominated to the ECOWAS Parliament, where she assumed the role of Coordinator for the Economic Community Female Parliamentarians Association (ECOFEPA) and became the first woman appointed as the 4th Deputy Speaker. Later in 2007, President Jammeh appointed her Speaker of the National Assembly, a position she held until 2009.

Jahumpa Ceesay founding member of the APRC since its inception in 1996. She was appointed as the party's General Secretary in May 2022, becoming the first woman to hold this position.

Jahumpa Ceesay is the founder of the Family Rights Advancement and Protection (FRAI) organization. An organization that focus on the rights and welfare of families. In April 2021, she donated a drilling machine worth D125,000 to the women of Farato Bojang Kunda to assist in their domestic work. She currently serves as the Gambia's Ambassador to South Africa and is the General Secretary of the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC).