



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

CHRISTOF HEYNS

African Human Rights Moot Court Competition
Concours Africain de Procès Simulé des Droits de l'Homme
Concurso Africano de Julgamento Fictício Sobre Direitos Humanos

Call for Papers

The **Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria**, the **Institut Universitaire of Abidjan**, and the **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** will co-host a one-day international conference. The working languages of the conference are English, French and Portuguese, with simultaneous interpretation available.

The conference will be held as part of the **35th Christof Heyns African Human Rights Moot Court Competition**.



The conference will have two sessions:

- Theme 1: Celebrating 75 years of refugee protection in Africa: Progress, challenges and future
- Theme 2: Asserting human rights through direct access to the african court: Making the case for reinstating article 34(6) declarations

Monday, 27 July 2026
Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

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UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency



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Human Rights**
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA



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CALL FOR PAPERS

Submission of Abstracts by 15 May 2026

As part of the 35th Christof Heyns African Human Rights Moot Court Competition, the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria, the Institut Universitaire d'Abidjan, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will co-host on 27 July 2026 a one-day international conference. The working languages of the conference are English, French and Portuguese, with simultaneous interpretation available.

The conference will address two main themes:

- *Theme 1: Celebrating 75 years of refugee protection in Africa: Progress, challenges and future*
- *Theme 2: Asserting human rights through direct access to the African Court: Making the case for reinstating article 34(6) declarations*

Abstracts should be emailed to africanmootconference@up.ac.za by **15 May 2026**.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE

The 35th edition of the Christof Heyns African Human Rights Moot Court Competition marks a historic occasion: It celebrates simultaneously the **35th anniversary** of the Competition, the 40th anniversary of the Centre for Human Rights, and 20 years since the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights opened its doors.

75 years of the Refugee Convention

The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol remain the cornerstone of international protection.¹ Support for the key principles of refugee protection – namely non-refoulement, non-discrimination, and the protection of the fundamental rights of refugees – remains strong across the world. Over the past 75 years, the principle of access to asylum for people fleeing conflict, violence and persecution has saved millions of lives, and benefits from steady support from public opinion in all regions.²

In Africa, the principle of asylum is enshrined in the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, which introduces an extended definition of refugee.³ This principle is reiterated in the African Charter on Human



¹ A total of 149 States are party to the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol. See Refugee Treaty and Legislation Dashboard | Rights Mapping and Analysis Platform, available at: <https://rimap.unhcr.org/refugee-treaty-legislation-dashboard>.

² In 2024, 73% of respondents to a worldwide Ipsos survey responded that “people should be able to take refuge in other countries, including in my country, to escape from war or persecution”. See Ipsos, *World Refugee Day, Global Attitudes Towards Refugees*, June 2024, available at: <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2024-06/ipsos-World-Refugee-Day-2024-Global-Report-PUBLIC.pdf>.

³ Organization of African Unity (OAU), *1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa* (“OAU Convention”), 1001 U.N.T.S. 45, 10 September 1969, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/oau/1969/13572>.

and Peoples' Rights (article 13(3)).⁴ Building on centuries-old traditions and values, African States have upheld the right to seek and enjoy asylum, providing shelter to those fleeing wars, violence and persecution.

Yet, multiplying conflicts, complexities in securing solutions for protracted refugee situations, crippling funding constraints, insufficient solidarity and burden-sharing with large refugee host countries, as well as growing mixed movements of refugees and migrants have compounded the challenges facing asylum systems, fuelling restrictive policies and populist narratives across the world and in Africa. These difficulties epitomise the challenges of implementing refugee protection in a global environment of polycrises,⁵ fragilities and complex human mobility dynamics.

While the principle of asylum remains deeply anchored in law and practices across the continent, its implementation must be strengthened through policies, practices and cooperative programmes that enhance the rights of refugees and support durable solutions.

20 years of the African Court

Simultaneously, the African regional human rights system faces a distinct and serious structural challenge. A growing number of African states have revoked their declarations under Article 34(6) of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (Court Protocol),⁶ severely curtailing individual and NGO access to the Court. Rwanda led this trend in 2016, followed by Tanzania (2019), Benin (2020), Côte d'Ivoire (2020, effective from 30 April 2021), and Tunisia (2025).⁷ In each case, withdrawals were prompted by politically sensitive Court decisions. The cumulative effect has been to hollow out the Court's individual access mechanism, leaving many Africans without a supranational avenue for direct redress.

Critically, none of these states has withdrawn from the African Court Protocol altogether – they remain State Parties to both the Court Protocol and the African Charter. The revocations apply solely to the optional Article 34(6) declaration. This distinction underlines both the partial nature of the disengagement and the realistic possibility of re-engagement. The challenge for the African human rights community is to create the conditions – political, legal, and diplomatic – under which states feel able to re-deposit their declarations and restore full individual access to the Court.

4 Organization of African Unity (OAU), *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights* ("Banjul Charter"), CAB/LEG/67/3 rev. 5, 21 I.L.M. 58 (1982), 27 June 1981, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/oau/1981/17306>.

5 The term "polycrisis" refers to simultaneous and interconnected global crises of significant impact; see Adam Tooze, "We're in a 'polycrisis' — a historian explains what that means", *World Economic Forum*, 2023, available at: <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/03/polycrisis-adam-tooze-historian-explains/>.

6 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, OAU Doc. OAU/LEG/EXP/AFCHPR/PROT(III), 9 June 1998 (entered into force 25 January 2004), available at: <https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights-establishment-african-court-human-and>.

7 Rwanda withdrew its Article 34(6) declaration in 2016; Tanzania in 2019; Benin in 2020; Côte d'Ivoire with effect from 30 April 2021; and Tunisia thereafter. For an overview, see Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria, "Withdrawals from the African Court's Jurisdiction", available at: <https://chr.up.ac.za>.



CHRISTOF HEYNS

African Human Rights Moot Court Competition
Concours Africain de Procès Simulé des Droits de l'Homme
Concurso Africano de Julgamento Fictício Sobre Direitos Humanos

The conference, held on Ivorian soil, provides a unique platform to examine Côte d'Ivoire's own withdrawal – precipitated in large part by the African Court's provisional measures order in *Soro & Others v Côte d'Ivoire*⁸ – and to initiate the kind of constructive dialogue that could support re-engagement both in Côte d'Ivoire and across the region.

THE CALL

We invite abstracts and papers that identify and address a specific question falling under **Theme 1** (including any of its three sub-themes) or **Theme 2** (including any of its four sub-themes) as specified above. The timelines for the submission of abstracts and papers are set out below.

Papers selected for presentation at this conference will be considered for publication in a respected international journal such as the African Human Rights Law Journal.

Abstracts should be between 250 and 350 words and contain the following:

1. a clear and descriptive title;
2. an indication of the main theme and sub-theme addressed;
3. the main question(s) to be addressed;
4. the methodological approach; and
5. the expected results and contribution to scholarship.

The abstract should clearly indicate the author's contact details and include a two-sentence biography.

Authors should also indicate whether their participation will be in person or virtually. Abstracts should be sent to: africanmootconference@up.ac.za by **15 May 2026**.

IMPORTANT DATES

There are three main stages in the process: Submission of abstracts, presentation of a draft paper, and submission of a full article.

Stage 1

- Abstracts should be submitted to: africanmootconference@up.ac.za by **15 May 2026**;
- Authors of selected abstracts will be informed by **22 May 2026**.

Stage 2

- Draft papers should be sent to: africanmootconference@up.ac.za by **6 July 2026**;
- Papers will be presented in person or virtually on **27 July 2026**.

Stage 3

- Presented papers, revised after presentation, must be submitted as full articles for peer-review by **14 September 2026**.

AFRICA: FROM HUMAN WRONGS TO HUMAN RIGHTS

35

CHRISTOPHER HEYNS

African Human Rights Moot Court Competition

Concours Africain de Droits de l'Homme et des Droits de l'Homme

2026

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⁸ African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, *Soro Guillaume & 18 Others v. Republic of Côte d'Ivoire*, Application No. 010/2020, Order for Provisional Measures, 22 April 2020.

Theme 1: Celebrating 75 years of refugee protection in Africa: Progress, challenges and future

This theme examines Africa's engagement with international refugee law over the past 75 years, the ongoing challenges to refugee protection on the continent, and the path towards durable and rights-respecting solutions. It is organised around three sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1.1: Africa's contribution to international refugee law: Norms and practices

Africa has been both a major producer and host of refugees, and its engagement with international refugee law has shaped the global protection framework in distinctive ways. The 1969 OAU Convention's expanded refugee definition – covering persons fleeing events seriously disturbing public order – represented a landmark regional contribution. This sub-theme invites papers that examine Africa's normative and institutional contributions to international refugee law, including the development of regional standards, the jurisprudence of African human rights bodies, and the evolving practices of African states in receiving and protecting refugees.

Relevant questions include:

- What has been the impact of the 1969 OAU Convention on regional and global refugee law over the past 75 years?
- How have African human rights institutions – including the African Commission and the African Court – contributed to the development of refugee protection standards?
- What lessons can be drawn from African state practice in hosting refugees for the global refugee protection framework?
- How have recent regional developments – such as the adoption of the Kampala Convention – interacted with international refugee law?

Sub-theme 1.2: Climate change and refugee protection in Africa

Climate change is increasingly recognised as a driver of forced displacement, particularly in Africa. While the 1951 Refugee Convention does not expressly cover climate-induced displacement, the interaction between environmental degradation, conflict, food insecurity and human mobility is generating new and urgent protection challenges. This sub-theme invites papers that explore the

legal and policy implications of climate change for refugee and forced migration protection in Africa.

Relevant questions include:

- To what extent does existing international and regional refugee law protect persons displaced by climate change and environmental disasters?
- What are the protection gaps for climate-displaced persons in Africa, and how might they be addressed through legal or policy reforms?
- How are African states and regional bodies responding to climate-induced displacement in practice?
- What role should African states play in shaping emerging international norms on climate displacement and the rights of environmental migrants?

Sub-theme 1.3: Durable solutions for refugees in Africa: Barriers and novel approaches

Africa hosts some of the world's largest and most protracted refugee situations. Despite longstanding commitments to durable solutions – voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement – the gap between aspiration and reality remains vast. This sub-theme invites papers that critically examine the barriers to durable solutions in Africa and explore innovative legal, policy and programmatic approaches to addressing them.

Relevant questions include:

- What structural legal and policy barriers prevent the realisation of durable solutions for refugees in Africa?
- What innovative approaches – including regional free movement frameworks, development-based solutions, or complementary pathways – have shown promise in the African context?
- How can the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and the Global Compact on Refugees be more effectively implemented in Africa?
- What role can host communities, civil society and the private sector play in supporting durable solutions?

Theme 2: Asserting human rights through direct access to the African Court: Making the case for reinstating article 34(6) declarations

The African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights was established to provide individuals and NGOs with a mechanism to seek justice beyond national courts. Central to this mandate is the optional declaration under Article 34(6) of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, which enables individuals and NGOs to bring cases directly before the Court. Though optional, this mechanism is foundational to the Court's practical effectiveness and its promise of justice to ordinary Africans. This theme invites papers that examine the legal, political and strategic dimensions of Article 34(6) withdrawals and explore pathways to renewed commitment.

Sub-theme 2.1: The African Court and Individual Access: A Critical Appraisal

This sub-theme examines the function of the Article 34(6) declaration mechanism – why it was made optional, how it has worked in practice, and why it is critical to the Court's effectiveness. It also invites a critical assessment of the broader pattern of state backlash against the African Court and its consequences for access to justice.¹

Relevant questions include:

- What is the legal and institutional significance of Article 34(6) declarations for the African Court's mandate and effectiveness?
- What have been the practical consequences of Article 34(6) withdrawals for individuals and NGOs seeking access to justice?
- How does the pattern of Article 34(6) withdrawals compare with state backlash against international human rights bodies in other regions?
- What obligations, if any, continue to bind states that have withdrawn their Article 34(6) declarations?

Sub-theme 2.2: Sovereignty, Accountability and the Regional Human Rights System

This sub-theme engages directly with the rationale

1 See generally Frans Viljoen and Lirette Louw, "State Compliance with the Recommendations of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1994–2004" (2007) 101 *American Journal of International Law* 1; and Kofi Oteng Kufuor, *The African Human Rights System: Origin and Evolution* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

commonly invoked for Article 34(6) withdrawals — namely, that Court orders constituted undue interference with national sovereignty. It invites papers that explore the relationship between sovereignty and international human rights obligations, and the extent to which states can reconcile these commitments without undermining the independence of the Court.²

Relevant questions include:

- How should international law balance state sovereignty with the imperatives of international human rights accountability?
- To what extent are Article 34(6) withdrawals legally and politically justifiable under the African Charter framework?
- What procedural or structural reforms to the African Court's framework might address states' legitimate concerns while preserving the integrity of individual access?
- What comparative lessons can be drawn from other regional human rights systems that have navigated similar tensions?

Sub-theme 2.3: Civil Society as a Catalyst for Re-engagement

This sub-theme focuses on the role that local and regional civil society organisations (CSOs) have played, and can play, in documenting the human rights impact of Article 34(6) withdrawals and in building public and political momentum for re-engagement. It invites both analytical papers and practice-based contributions drawing on civil society experience.³

Relevant questions include:

- How have CSOs documented and responded to the impact of Article 34(6) withdrawals on affected individuals and communities?
- What advocacy strategies have proven effective in engaging states on the question of re-depositing Article 34(6) declarations?

2 On the relationship between sovereignty and international human rights accountability in the African system, see Makau Mutua, "The African Human Rights System: A Critical Evaluation", UNDP Human Development Report Office Occasional Paper 2000/7; and Christof Heyns and Frans Viljoen, *The Impact of the United Nations Human Rights Treaties on the Domestic Level* (Kluwer Law International, 2002).

3 On the role of civil society in the African human rights system, see Rachel Murray, *The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and International Law* (Hart Publishing, 2000); and Magnus Killander (ed.), *International Law and Domestic Human Rights Litigation in Africa* (PULP, 2010).

- How can regional and international networks of civil society actors be mobilised to support re-engagement?
- What role can academic research and strategic litigation play in complementing civil society advocacy?

Sub-theme 2.4: Pathways to renewed commitment: Legal, political and diplomatic options

This sub-theme explores the concrete mechanisms through which states that have withdrawn their Article 34(6) declarations could re-deposit them. It invites papers that examine precedents for re-engagement, potential procedural reforms, and the diplomatic and political channels available to civil society and academics to advance the case for reinstatement.⁴

⁴ On pathways to re-engagement and procedural reform, see Solomon Dersso, "The African Court after 20 Years: Achievements, Challenges and Prospects" (2026) *African Human Rights Law Journal* (forthcoming); and African Union, *Report of the Independent Review Mechanism on the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights*, AU Doc. EX. CL/1213(XXXVI), 2020.

Relevant questions include:

- Are there precedents – within the African system or elsewhere – for the re-deposit of optional individual access declarations following withdrawal?
- What political, legal, or diplomatic conditions would need to be created to facilitate re-engagement by Côte d'Ivoire and other withdrawing states?
- What role can African Union bodies, the African Commission, and other continental institutions play in encouraging re-engagement?
- How can the African human rights community use the 20th anniversary of the African Court to generate momentum for renewed commitment to the individual access mechanism?

