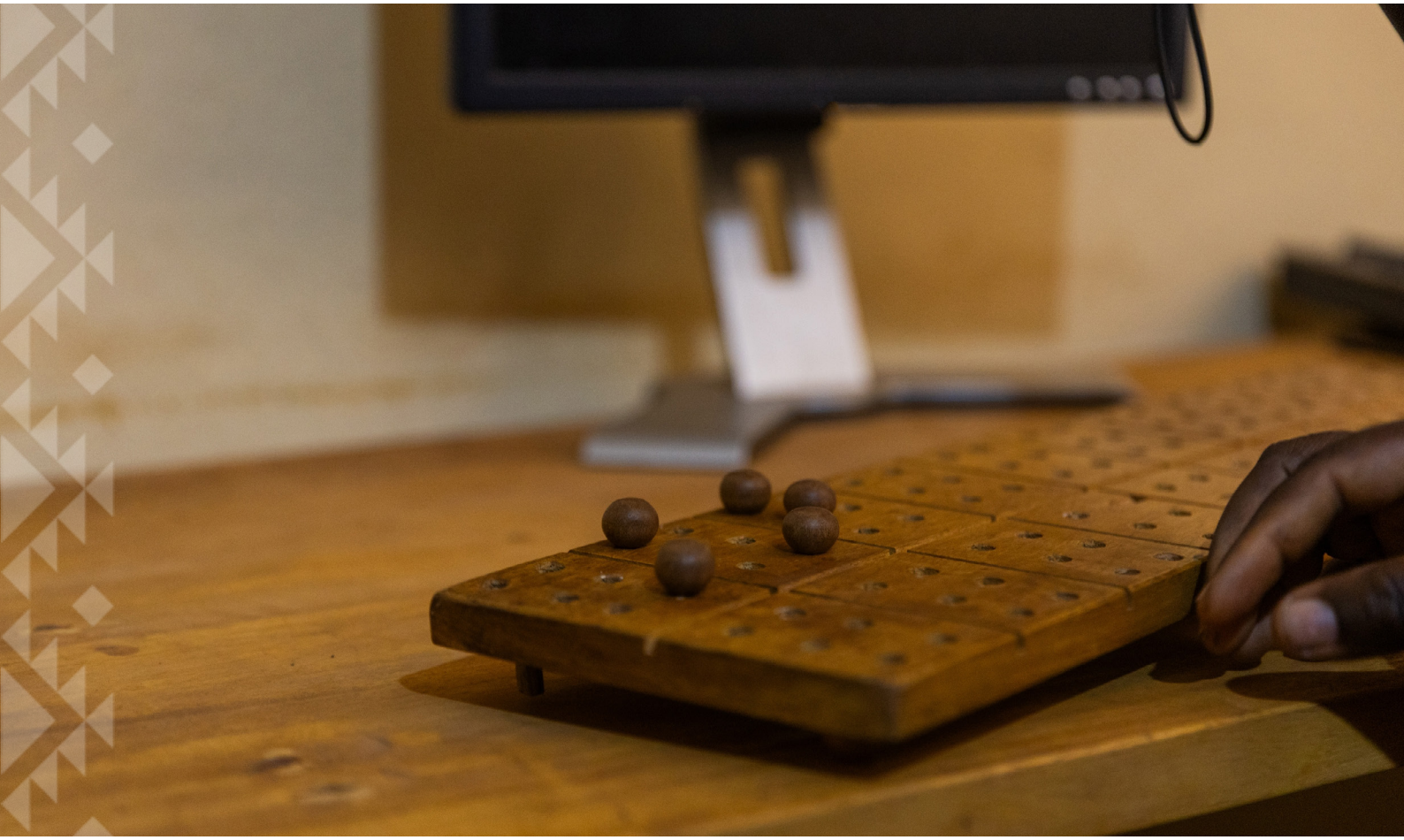

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

14th Annual Disability Rights in Africa conference

Equality and non-discrimination: Realising the rights of persons with disabilities in Africa

5 - 6 November 2026

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Centre for Human Rights
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

About the conference

The Centre for Human Rights in the Faculty of Law at the University of Pretoria will be convening the 14th annual Disability Rights in Africa conference in hybrid format from 5 to 6 November 2026 (Thursday to Friday). The theme for this year's conference is 'Equality and non-discrimination: Realising the rights of persons with disabilities in Africa.' The conference aims to achieve two primary objectives: First, to critically examine the extent to which laws, policies, practices, programmes and ideologies related to the rights of persons with disabilities in Africa align with the right to equality and non-discrimination as enshrined in the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa (African Disability Protocol) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Second, to facilitate open dialogue on innovative strategies and measures that can be implemented to promote equality and eliminate discrimination against persons with disabilities in Africa. It is anticipated that papers presented at the conference will be re-worked by authors and submitted for potential publication in the 2027 edition of the *African Disability Rights Yearbook*.

The Centre for Human Rights hosts the annual Disability Rights in Africa conference every November. The conference provides a platform for convening open dialogue amongst key stakeholders on disability rights, and spotlights pertinent and emerging issues across Africa.

For more details on past editions of the conference, please visit: **https://www.chr.up.ac.za/disability-rights-projects/dru-annual-conference**.

BACKGROUND

Equality and non-discrimination are fundamental human rights protected under International Human Rights Law. At the global level, the right to equality and non-discrimination is enshrined in article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). At the African regional level, the right to equality and non-discrimination is enshrined in articles 2 and 3 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights respectively. Disability-specific instruments at the global and regional levels also protect persons with disabilities' right to equality and non-discrimination. The right to equality is enshrined in article 6 of the African Disability Protocol whilst the right to non-discrimination is enshrined in article 5 of the same Protocol. The CRPD enshrines the right to equality and non-discrimination in article 5.

Despite the protection of persons with disabilities' right to equality and non-discrimination under global and regional human rights frameworks, persons with disabilities across Africa continue to experience pervasive and systemic discrimination, exclusion, and marginalisation in numerous spheres including education, employment, healthcare, access to justice, political and public

participation, among others. These challenges are often compounded by structural barriers, such as inaccessible environments, entrenched social stigma, and inadequate implementation of legal standards. The gap between normative commitments and lived realities highlights the limitations of a purely formal approach to equality, which focuses on identical treatment rather than on addressing the complex historical disadvantage and structural inequality that persons with disabilities experience. In order to give meaningful effect to the right to equality and non-discrimination as envisaged under the CRPD and the African Disability Protocol, greater emphasis should be placed on achieving substantive equality. Substantive equality requires not only the removal of discriminatory laws and practices but also the adoption of specific measures, including reasonable accommodation, accessibility, and targeted interventions, to address the disadvantage faced by persons with disabilities and ensure their full and effective participation in society. Both the African Disability Protocol and the CRPD take cognizance of this by extending the definition of 'discrimination on the basis of disability' to include the denial of reasonable accommodation (art 1 African Disability Protocol and article 2 CRPD) thereby moving beyond formal equality towards substantive equality. Against this backdrop, the conference seeks to explore innovative legal, policy, and practical approaches to advancing substantive equality and eliminating the discrimination faced by persons with disabilities in Africa. It aims to critically examine existing frameworks, share best practices, and identify strategies for effective implementation of right to equality and non-discrimination at regional and national levels.

PARTICIPATION

The conference will bring together a wide range of stakeholders interested in promoting the rights of persons with disabilities in Africa, including persons with disabilities and their representative organisations, scholars, law and policymakers, individual researchers, and other human rights defenders.

The conference will be held in hybrid format, with some participants attending in person in Johannesburg, South Africa and others virtually.

Possible topics to consider

To inform the deliberations at the conference, a number of papers will be presented and discussed. These will be selected from amongst abstract submissions on a number of topics including:

- The various formulations of equality (e.g., formal equality, substantive equality)
- The meaning and scope of equality and non-discrimination under the African Disability Protocol and the CRPD
- The significance of equality and non-discrimination to the realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms

- Barriers to realising the right to equality and non-discrimination
- Denial of reasonable accommodation as a form of discrimination on the basis of disability
- Intersectionality and multiple discrimination
- Good practices on implementing the right to equality and non-discrimination for persons with disabilities
- Strategies for promoting equality and eliminating discrimination on the basis of disability
- The role of various stakeholders (academics, organisations of persons with disabilities, government, national human rights institutions etc) in ensuring the right to equality and non-discrimination for persons with disabilities in Africa

As part of underscoring the importance of multi-sectoral responses and partnerships in the production of knowledge, we particularly encourage joint abstracts between scholars, policymakers and persons with disabilities together with their representative organisations.

Abstract submission specifications

1. Written in English
2. Length: 300 – 350 words
3. Format: MS Word document (not pdf)

Submissions must include the following in a single document

1. Title of abstract
2. Author's name
3. Affiliation
4. Qualifications
5. E-mail address

Abstracts must be sent by e-mail to the following e-mail address:
sabeeha.majid@up.ac.za copying merga.dibaba@up.ac.za

Deadline for submission of abstracts

Tuesday, 30 June 2026

Authors will be notified by **Friday, 31 July 2026** whether their abstract has been accepted. Authors whose abstracts are accepted will be required to submit their full papers by **Tuesday, 15 September 2026**.

For any inquiries, please contact **Sabeeha Majid** (sabeeha.majid@up.ac.za) with **Merga Dibaba** in copy (merga.dibaba@up.ac.za).