

FREE STATE CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

*A decade of human rights
and transformation*

2016-2026



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*Inspiring excellence, transforming lives
through quality, impact, and care.*



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Free State Centre for Human Rights Faculty of Law

University of the Free State

A decade of human rights and transformation
2016-2026

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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE FREE STATE CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Ten years ago, when the **Free State Centre for Human Rights** was established, it consisted of only two full-time academic staff, one part-time acting director, an administrator, and a student assistant.



Prof Danie Brand, Director of the Free State Centre for Human Rights.

From these humble beginnings, our centre has grown to the extent that today it comprises a community of 30 people: five full-time academic staff, three administrators, three research assistants, two candidate attorneys, four postdoctoral fellows, and 13 research fellows and extraordinary professors.

Our work and output have also grown exponentially. Over the past five years, our centre has produced an average of 26 scholarly publications annually, 18 of which emanated from our full-time academic staff; staff from the centre also published six books as editors or co-editors. A total of 37 postgraduate students

including master and doctoral students graduated at the centre between 2023 and 2026. Our advocacy programme trains and places more than 50 human rights ambassadors per year in every student residence and college across all three UFS campuses, reaching more than 1 000 students annually through its various programmes. Our impact litigation unit is currently running five active cases, of which one is an opposition to an eviction application where we represent more than 5 000 people.

But these figures tell very little about the place and space the centre has become: a vibrant community of people committed to achieving transformation through human rights and actively working towards that goal. On a personal note – since my arrival in 2018, the centre has become my academic home where I have not only encountered colleagues and comrades, but also quickly made friends.

Many people and institutions deserve thanks for their contributions to our centre. While I cannot mention them all, let me try. Successive vice-chancellors of the UFS (Prof Jonathan Jansen, Prof Francis Petersen, and now Prof Hester Klopper), deputy vice-chancellors for research and institutional change (Prof Corli Witthuhn, Prof Puleng LenkaBula, Dr

Molapo Qhobela, and Prof Vasu Reddy), and deans of the Faculty of Law (Prof Caroline Nicholson, Prof John Mubangizi, and now Prof Serges Djoyou Kamga) have been unwavering in their commitment to our project, not least by providing sustained financial support under difficult circumstances.

Our founding director, Prof Leon Wessels, oversaw the establishment of the centre, steadied the ship for the first two years, and then retired. Prof Loot Pretorius conceptualised the centre and expertly supervised our research and postgraduate study for the first few years (Prof Pretorius has since retired but continues to serve as an extraordinary professor in the centre, remaining actively engaged in publishing and postgraduate supervision).

Past and present members of our Advisory Board have kept us honest and focused: Prof Tshepo Madlingozi and Adv Shafi Ameermia (currently and formerly of the South African Human Rights Commission, respectively); Judge Cagney Musi, Judge President of the Free State High Court; Justice Mahube Molemela, President of the Supreme Court of Appeal; Judge Azhar Cachalia of the Supreme Court of Appeal; Prof Frans Viljoen; Helene Schroeder; JC van der Merwe; Louise du Plessis; and Anna-Marie de Vos.

The staff members of the centre over the past 10 years have not only been committed and inspiring colleagues, but also thoroughly pleasant people: Annelie de Man, who has worked at our centre from the outset and previously occupied the Human Rights Desk of the former Institute for Reconciliation and Social Justice, our centre's precursor; Prof Loot Pretorius, already mentioned; Mamello Serasengwe, our first administrator; Dr Rita Ozoemena, the first coordinator of our litigation unit, who has since left us; Mawanda Mokoena, our current office

administrator; Dr Gerard Kamdem Kamga, coordinator of our research and postgraduate supervision; and Dr Martie Bloem, the current coordinator of our litigation unit.

A succession of postdoctoral fellows (Mwiza Nkhata, Carol Ngang, Liezl Dick, Isolde de Villiers, Bright Nkrumah, Claire Westman, George Wara, Lindani Mhlanga, Shirley Genga, and Elisabeth Achancho), research fellows, and extraordinary professors (Prof Gracienne Lauwers, Prof Mwiza Nkhata, Prof Chuks Okpaluba, Dr Marelize Marais, Prof Joachim Wolf, Dr Georgia du Plessis, Dr Loammi Wolf, Prof Beatri Kruger, Judge Dennis Davis, Prof Lucy Williams, Prof Serges Kamga, Prof Karl Klare, Dr Natalia Angel, Dr Marcel van der Watt, Prof Karin van Marle, Judge Dhaya Pillay, Dr George Wara, Prof Isolde de Villiers, Prof Sandra Liebenberg, JC van der Merwe, Dr Zukiswa Nzo, Prof Isaac Shai, Prof Rita Ozoemena, Prof Adeshina Ofolayan, and Olivia Lwabukuna) contributed greatly to our research productivity and postgraduate work.

We were also supported through our collaborations with other institutions. Among the more informal collaborations with entities such as Lawyers for Human Rights, the international Socio-Economic Rights Project, and the International Conference on the Right to Development, three arrangements stand out. At the UFS, our longest-running cooperation has been with the UFS Law Clinic – most recently through its new director, Christopher Rawson – and with the Centre for Development Support through Prof Lochner Marais. Externally, our sustained collaboration with the South African Human Rights Commission has recently deepened through our involvement in the drafting of the commission's report to Parliament in terms of Section 184(3) of the Constitution.

I would be remiss not to acknowledge our various donors who have supported us over the years: the Royal Academy (UK), the Open Society Foundation, the Joffe Trust, and the William Kentridge Foundation. Most recently – over the past three years – we have received considerable and sustained support from the RAITH Foundation, coupled with (in my experience) a most unusual level of trust that, in spending the money as we see fit, we would advance their goal of rendering us sustainable. For all of this we are most grateful.

In conclusion, it is a happy accident that our centre's 10th anniversary coincides with the celebration of the 30th anniversary of our country's constitution. It gives me the opportunity to again use one of my favourite quotes from Justice Johan Froneman's separate concurring judgment in the matter of *Daniels v Scribante*: "The values of the Constitution are not only aimed at the past and the present, but also the future." While we look back on the past 10 years with great pleasure and no small measure of satisfaction and appropriately keep our focus on what is currently in front of us, we are already glancing at what lies ahead with excitement and expectation.

I thank you.

Prof Danie Brand

INTRODUCING THE FREE STATE CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Ten years ago, the Free State Centre for Human Rights (FSCHR) was born from a bold idea – to study human rights as lived realities that shape and challenge transformation. The establishment of the FSCHR arose out of conflict.

In 2008, several young male UFS students residing in the Reitz men's residence subjected a number of older black women on the cleaning staff to a humiliating, racially charged 'initiation' practice. One of the students filmed the incident, which went viral on the internet. The event caused an international outcry and led to the University of the Free State (UFS) being hauled before the Equality Court by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC). The UFS and the SAHRC settled the case before the Equality Court. The settlement order required the UFS to enact a sweeping transformation project. One of the elements of this project was the establishment of a centre for human rights at the UFS. After the Human Rights Desk operated for several years as part of the former Institute for Reconciliation and Social Justice, the FSCHR was established in 2016 by a

Council decision to work towards the transformation of the UFS and the surrounding areas through human rights.

This report briefly highlights the activities and achievements of the centre over the past 10 years since its establishment. The FSCHR is a critical, interdisciplinary, and contextually engaged research, advocacy, and legal practice institution, focusing on the relationship between human rights and transformation. This relationship is approached from a critical perspective that recognises its dual nature; human rights, in whatever context, relate both positively and negatively to transformation, and can both enable and hinder transformation. Recognition of this dual nature has guided the work from the start.

Within its broad concern with the relationship between human rights and transformation, the centre's work is organised around three focus areas: impoverishment, democracy, and identity. This means that the centre's work and its research community are interdisciplinary, drawing on a range of disciplines and combining insights and wisdom from a variety of fields.

What makes the centre distinctive is that although it is primarily an academic research institution, its work is contextually engaged. Apart from its Research and Postgraduate Division, the centre comprises an Advocacy Division that brings human rights into public conversations, and a Legal Services Division that operates as a public-interest litigation unit in cooperation with the UFS Law Clinic, taking human rights principles to the courts to ensure that they are tested and defended in real cases across the Free State.

Grounded in its immediate surroundings, the centre's work takes shape through the issues that arise on the UFS campuses, in Bloemfontein, and across the Free State. Research projects, advocacy initiatives, and litigation all reflect this local focus. At the same time, the centre provides postgraduate teaching up to doctoral level and welcomes postdoctoral fellows into its community.

Bloemfontein Campus.



Qwaqwa Campus.



South Campus.



The FSCHR grounds its work in local issues across the three UFS campuses and the Free State.

RESEARCH AND POSTGRADUATE DIVISION

The centre's mission is to deepen critical and interdisciplinary study of human rights and to advance practices that keep those rights alive in real contexts.

This is done by

- conducting research and generating publications on various aspects of the relationship between human rights and transformation, drawing on national, regional, and international scholarship;
- generating local, regional, and international research initiatives on the scholarship of human rights and transformation; and
- growing an interdisciplinary research community through the appointment of extraordinary professors, research fellows, and postdoctoral fellows and the recruitment of full-time postgraduate students who focus on these themes.



The Research and Postgraduate Division is coordinated by Prof Gerard Kamga.

Postgraduate programmes

The FSCHR's teaching and postgraduate supervision reflect its commitment to building a community of scholars around human rights. The centre offers an interdisciplinary master's in human rights, designed for students and professionals from different academic backgrounds. Supervision is also provided for master's degrees by full dissertation under the LLM programme in the Faculty of Law.

The centre is also active in doctoral supervision. It offers an LLD in human rights for candidates with a law background and a PhD in human rights for those from other disciplines, ensuring that human rights research draws on a wide range of perspectives.

Between 2023 and 2026, the centre celebrated the graduation of 12 doctoral students and 2 master's students by full dissertation, alongside 23 students who completed the Master of Human Rights programme. Each graduate adds to the centre's legacy, showing how its work is carried forward through the people it has trained.



The centre offers an interdisciplinary master's degree in human rights, an LLD in human rights for candidates with a law background, and a PhD in human rights for candidates from other disciplines.

Research activities

Research at the FSCHR focuses on producing critical scholarly work on human rights and transformation that can impact its context while drawing on and being informed by that context. Our research specifically engages the relationships between human rights and transformation within the areas of poverty, democracy, and identity. The centre produces scholarly publications, conceptualises and enacts collaborative research projects, and presents scholarly conferences, seminars, and workshops.

Between 2016 and 2025, the FSCHR's permanent academic staff, postdoctoral fellows, extraordinary professors, and research associates produced more than a hundred scholarly publications on a wide range of topics concerning human rights and transformation. Access the FSCHR publications [here](#).

The following are highlights of the FSCHR's research over the past 10 years.



The UFS Impact Report

In 2023, the centre's voice was part of a larger story about how the University of the Free State measures its impact.

The report used the United Nations Agenda 2030 as its lens, linking the Sustainable Development Goals to the African Union's Agenda 2063 and to the UFS' own strategies. The work of **Prof Danie Brand** and **Prof Gerard Kamga** from the Free State Centre for Human Rights was highlighted in the report as particularly impactful. Their work strengthened the university's role in advancing SDG 16, which focuses on peace, justice, and strong institutions.



Prof Gerard Kamga's work featured in the 2023 UFS Impact Report, advancing SDG 16 on justice and strong institutions.



Prof Danie Brand contributed to the 2023 UFS Impact Report, highlighting the centre's role in promoting peace and justice.



The FSCHR collaborates with the South African Human Rights Commission.

The centre combines collaboration with national partners such as the South African Human Rights Commission and the UNCAC Coalition Working Group on Corruption and Human Rights, while also extending to institutions across the world.

Internationally engaged scholarship and partnership

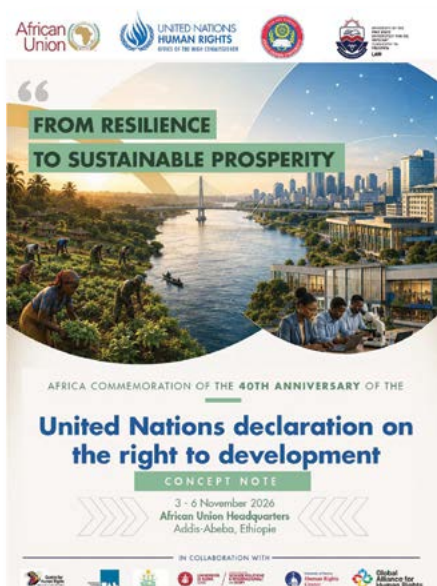
The centre's research has always reached beyond Bloemfontein, connecting local questions to global conversations. Its work combines collaboration with national partners such as the South African Human Rights Commission, while also extending to institutions across the world, including the UNCAC Coalition Working Group on Corruption and Human Rights.

FSCHR colleagues regularly present papers at major national and international conferences, and their research has helped shape global and local policy debates through partnerships with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Working Group on the Right to Development, and other international research partners.

The centre also presents scholarly conferences, seminars, and workshops, often resulting from research projects in collaboration with local and international partners. Examples include the Home/City/World project in cooperation with the University of Kent, United Kingdom, and the Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil, which resulted in three conferences – in Bloemfontein (2018), Canterbury, United Kingdom (2019), and Belo Horizonte, Brazil (2019); the annual meeting of the international Socio-Economic Rights Project (iSERP) in Bloemfontein (2019); the Endurance of Inequality Project (2021) in Bloemfontein; and more recently, the Corruption and Human Rights Colloquium (2025) and the Litigating Municipal Failure seminar (2026), both in Bloemfontein.

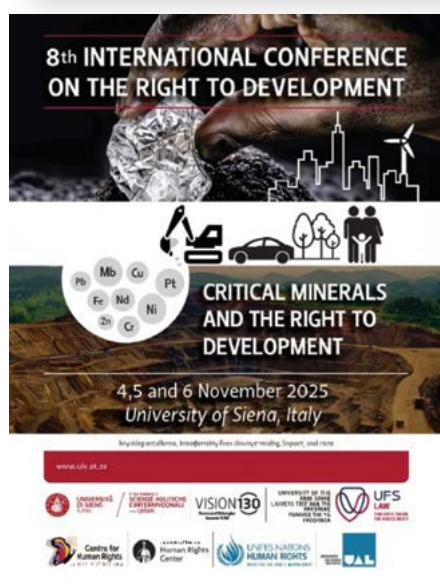
These collaborative research projects and events have often given rise to the publication of books or special editions of journals. Three recent examples are Van Marle, Marais & Brand (eds) *The Endurance of Inequality: Race, Property and Spatiality in Bloemfontein and Surrounds* (2025), Mubangizi (ed) *Corruption in South Africa: A Legal Perspective* (2024), and Kamdem Kamga, Kamga, Kwesiga (eds) *Right to Development and Illicit Financial Flows from Africa* (2024). A complete list of books published through the centre or by centre members can be found [here](#).

The most enduring example of this kind of scholarly collaboration is the International Conference on the Right to Development (ICRD), where the centre works alongside institutions such as the Department of Law and Political Science, University of Siena, Italy; the Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria, South Africa; the Human Rights Center, University of Dayton, United States of America; the Autonomous University of Lisbon, Portugal; the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; and more recently, the Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia. The conference was launched in 2017 with the aim of advancing the right to development both in Africa and internationally. Annually attracting up to 150 participants from all over the world, the event's third edition was hosted by the FSCHR for the first time in 2019. Below is a brief overview of this annual international event, spanning from the upcoming ninth edition back to the third.



The upcoming ninth edition of the ICRD will take place from 3 to 6 November 2026 at the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Organised with the above-mentioned partners – and, for the first time, with the African Union and the Addis Ababa University – the event forms part of Africa’s commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development.

Keynote speakers will include Prof Bonny Ibhawoh, Professor and Senator William McMaster Chair in Global Human Rights at McMaster University, Canada, and former Expert Rapporteur of the United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development.



The eighth edition of the ICRD was held from 4 to 6 November 2025 in Siena, Italy, under the theme *Critical Minerals and the Right to Development*. The two keynote speakers were Prof Elisa Morgera, Special Rapporteur on Climate Change and Professor of International Law and Sustainability at Durham University, and Adjunct Professor in International and European Union Environmental Law at the University of Eastern Finland; and

Prof Surya Deva, Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development and Professor and Director of the Centre for Environmental Law at Macquarie University (Australia).



The seventh edition of the ICRD was held in Lisbon, Portugal, from 6 to 8 November 2024, under the theme *Development, Sustainability, Law and Human Rights*.

Three keynote speakers were part of the discussions: Dr Mihir Kanade, Academic Coordinator of the University for Peace, Head of the Department of International Law, and Director of the UPEACE Human Rights Centre; Dr Ramona Biholar, Deputy Dean for Graduate Studies and Research and Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Law at the University of the West Indies; and Prof Vusi Gumede, Dean of the Faculty of Economics, Development and Business Sciences at the University of Mpumalanga and President of the National Council of the South African Association of Political Studies.



In 2023, the centre joined forces with the University of Dayton's Human Rights Center to host the Joint Convening of the Social Practice of Human Rights and the sixth edition of the ICRD. Held in Ohio, USA, the event carried the theme *Decolonisation and Development for Africa and People of African Descent*.

Among the keynote speakers was Prof Sabelo J Ndlovu-Gatsheni, author of *Decolonisation, Development and Knowledge in Africa: Turning Over a New Leaf*.



The fifth edition of the ICRD was hosted at the University of the Free State from 1 to 3 November 2022 under the theme *Realising the Right to Development: Between Coups d'État and the Syndrome of Life Presidency in Africa*.

The keynote address was delivered by Judge Dhaya Pillay of the High Court of South Africa, who also serves as Extraordinary Professor at the FSCHR. Her address was followed by a response from Prof Azubike Onuora-Oguno, Head of the Department of Jurisprudence and International Law in the Faculty of Law, University of Ilorin.



The fourth edition of the ICRD was held from 1 to 2 November 2021 under the theme *Right to Development and Illicit Financial Flows from Africa*.

The keynote address was delivered by Prof Toyin Falola, Jacob and Frances Sanger Mossiker Chair in the Humanities and Distinguished Teaching Professor at the University of Texas at Austin.



Prof John C Mubangizi delivered the keynote at the third edition of the ICRD that was hosted for the first time at the UFS in 2019.

The third edition of the ICRD was hosted for the first time at the UFS from 25 to 27 September 2019. Held under the theme *The Right to Development and Natural Resource Ownership*, the three-day event brought together 35 participants from Africa and beyond, marking the centre's entry into convening this global dialogue.

The keynote address was delivered by Prof John C Mubangizi, then Dean of the Faculty of Law at the UFS.

Another significant international collaborative research project that the centre has been involved in over the past 10 years is the international Socio-Economic Rights Project (iSERP). iSERP is a group of approximately 20 scholars, lawyers, and activists from South Africa, the United States of America, Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Canada, India, Australia, Japan, and the United Kingdom. Formed in 2008 to share knowledge and insights, the group develops collaborative projects on the interpretation and realisation of constitutional socio-economic rights, such as the right to food, water, housing, healthcare, and education. iSERP meets annually in different locations across the world. Its 2019 meeting took place at the UFS in Bloemfontein, arranged by the FSCHR. In July 2026, the centre took over the administration and management of iSERP as its secretariat for the foreseeable future.

The centre's most recent research-related highlight is the awarding of a UFS Research Chair to its director, Prof Brand. The chair, titled the UFS Research Chair in Poverty, Rights and Democracy, will commence work in January 2027 for a renewable term of five years. Based in the centre, it will advance work on the relationships between human rights, poverty, and democracy.

ADVOCACY DIVISION

The Advocacy Division is the centre's bridge between research and everyday life. It takes the principles explored in research and turns them into action, promoting transformation through human rights education and advocacy.

From the UFS campuses to communities in the Free State and Lesotho, its work ensures that human rights are not only studied but lived.

Through flagship projects and creative initiatives, the division builds awareness, sparks dialogue, and nurtures a culture of respect and inclusion. Below is an outline of the programmes and activities that have become central to this mission.

Human rights ambassadors

The Human Rights Ambassadors Programme, launched in 2016, has become a flagship initiative. The main objectives of the programme are to establish and strengthen a culture of human rights within all UFS residences across its three campuses. Each residence appoints an ambassador tasked with promoting a culture of respect and inclusion. Their activities – from dialogue sessions and art exhibitions to poetry, music events, plays, and interactive games – have explored themes such as the right to equality, respect for dignity, culture, diversity, safety and security. Working closely with residence leadership, ambassadors ensure that human rights values remain central to student life.



The Human Rights Ambassadors Programme works to strengthen a culture of human rights across all UFS residences.

Human Rights Month activities

Human Rights Month, with Human Rights Day commemorated on 21 March, has also become a platform for advocacy. **Projects to promote human rights** have included social media campaigns (sharing informative videos and posters), online quizzes (raising awareness on the importance of human rights), booklets, art exhibitions of posters made by participating UFS residences, and pledge-signing events where students and staff commit to respecting and promoting human rights. These activities bring the broader community into the conversation, making human rights visible and tangible.



During Human Rights Month, activities draw the broader student community into the conversation, making rights more visible.



Projects promoting human rights have included poster designs among other activities.

Annual multilingual debate tournament

Since 2023, the centre has hosted an annual multilingual debate tournament under the theme *Creating a diplomatic space for multilingualism*. Teams debate in at least two of the UFS' recognised languages – English, IsiZulu, Afrikaans, and Sesotho – on themes such as the recognition of minority languages and the protection of oppressed cultures and identities. With participation from residences, faculty associations, independent teams, and local schools, the tournament reflects the centre's commitment to dialogue that is inclusive, diverse, and transformative.



Teams debate in at least two of the UFS's recognised languages – English, IsiZulu, Afrikaans, and Sesotho – at the annual multilingual debate tournament.

Read about
the lecture.



Moments that strengthened the FSCHR's impact

Bram Fischer Memorial Lecture

Since 2023, the centre has had the honour of hosting the Bram Fischer Memorial Lecture on behalf of the UFS Vice-Chancellor. Presented as part of the Vice-Chancellor's Prestige Lecture Series, the event has welcomed distinguished speakers including Stephen Clingman and Tembeka Ngcukaitobi (2023), Premesh Lalu and Steven Friedman (2024), and Issa Shivji and Tshepo Madlingozi (2025). In 2026, the lecture was delivered by Mahube Molemela, President of the Supreme Court of Appeal, together with Anna-Marie de Vos, marking another memorable occasion in this growing tradition.



In 2023, the UFS hosted Stephen Clingman and Tembeka Ngcukaitobi as speakers at the Bram Fischer Memorial Lecture. Pictured are Prof Serkes Kamga; Stephen Clingman, Bram Fischer biographer; Ilse Fischer Wilson, Bram Fischer's daughter; Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, author and advocate; and Prof Danie Brand at the back.

Justice Albie Sachs delivers UFS Faculty of Law's annual Prestige Lectures

In celebration of its 80th anniversary, the Faculty of Law hosted the second annual Dean's Prestige Lecture on 29 July 2025, in partnership with the FSCHR and the Albie Sachs Constitutionalism and Rule of Law Trust (ASCAROL). Born from student enthusiasm after the inaugural event, the collaboration was formalised as a five-year agreement to promote justice, memory, and constitutional integrity – values that lie at the heart of the Free State Centre for Human Rights.

Justice Albie Sachs, Emeritus Justice of the Constitutional Court, delivered the 2025 lecture titled *No, You Can't, Yes You Can, Mr President: How the Constitutional Court Held the President Accountable*. With wit and reflection, he guided the audience through landmark constitutional cases that tested the balance between presidential power and constitutional principle.

In 2026, the lecture took a new shape. At 91, Justice Sachs returned

to the Faculty of Law, but this time three students placed his Constitutional Court judgments under scrutiny before inviting him to respond. Their focus ranged from same-sex marriage in *Fourie*, to presidential power in *Masetlha*, and the right of prisoners to vote in August. Justice Sachs reflected on how human stories shape constitutional law, reminding the audience that "law is about human beings."



Justice Albie Sachs delivered a lecture at the Dean's Prestige Lecture.



Read about
the lecture.

FSCHR Human Rights Day Exhibition 2026

The FSCHR marked Human Rights Month 2026 with an exhibition that brought history to life, inviting students to reflect on milestones in the struggle for dignity and rights across the broader Free State region. On 20 March 2026, the centre, in collaboration with the UFS Library, UFS Archives, the Free State Archives, and the Anglo-Boer War Museum, hosted a Human Rights Day exhibition. The event aimed to educate students about key human rights milestones within the institution and the broader Free State region.



The exhibition was presented as an immersive gallery experience, showcasing a carefully curated collection of photographs, documents, and archival material. These elements collectively traced the region's journey towards the protection and promotion of human rights. Students were encouraged to engage with the exhibition at their own pace, reading, listening, and reflecting on the narratives presented. The initiative sought not only to enhance students' historical awareness, but also to cultivate an appreciation of the progress achieved over time. In doing so, it inspired continuous reflection and a strengthened commitment to advancing human rights in the future.

Students engage with an exhibition that brought history to life, at the FSCHR Human Rights Month exhibition.

Free State Centre for Human Rights graduate exposes gaps undermining children's rights across Africa

At the Faculty of Law's graduations on 11 December 2025, the FSCHR celebrated a doctoral achievement that placed children's rights at the centre of Africa's future, linking research to the continent's Agenda 2063 vision.



Dr Megha Nkem received her Doctor of Laws in 2025, specialising in Human Rights with a focus on children's rights.

Read about
Dr Megha Nkem's
degree.



Dr Megha Nkem, who received her Doctor of Laws specialising in Human Rights under the FSCHR, centred her work on a question that spoke directly to the continent's future: how can Africa realise its Agenda 2063 vision if children's rights remain unevenly implemented or overlooked in practice? Her thesis, *Exploring the Implementation of Children's Rights within the Framework of Agenda 2063: Key to Achieving 'The Africa We Want'*, examines the gap between strong legal protections and the weak implementation that has prevented many African children from realising their full potential. Her work shows that progress towards 2063 relies on governments turning commitments into consistent, well-resourced action.

Free State Centre for Human Rights colloquium on corruption as human rights crisis

In September 2025, the FSCHR confronted corruption as a human rights crisis, convening a colloquium that exposed its impact on dignity, equality, and governance across Africa.

The two-day gathering on Corruption and Human Rights on 18 and 19 September 2025, hosted on the UFS Bloemfontein Campus, brought together leading scholars, legal practitioners, human rights experts, policymakers, and students from across the continent to interrogate how corruption undermines rights, and to explore strategies for more accountable, just governance. The programme included a wide range of panel discussions addressing issues such as the impact of corruption on vulnerable groups, sextortion as a form of gender-based violence, the fragility of anti-corruption agencies, the links between corruption and access to health and education, and the protection of whistleblowers across Africa. During this event, Prof Themba Maseko, Head of the Wits School of Governance and Chairperson of Corruption Watch, delivered a keynote address on *The Rights and Role of Whistleblowers in Combating Corruption and Protecting Human Rights in a Constitutional Democracy*. With extensive experience in government and civil society, Prof Maseko emphasised the crucial role of whistleblowers in safeguarding accountability and transparency in public life.



Read about the lecture.

In 2025, the centre hosted a colloquium on corruption and human rights.



The Free State Centre for Human Rights and the Environmental Law Association host student research workshop on environmental law

In July 2025, the FSCHR reaffirmed its commitment to transformation through one of its postdoctoral fellows, Dr Lindani Mhlanga, who convened a student research workshop on environmental law, creating space for critical debate on just transitions and their social cost.

The workshop was hosted at the UFS on 21 July under the theme *Just Transitions – Weighing Development Against Social Cost*. The FSCHR convened the event in partnership with the Environmental

Law Association. It marked a significant step in restoring environmental law to the centre of scholarly and student life at the UFS. The keynote address was delivered by Prof Melanie Murcott, Chairperson of the Environmental Law Association and a senior academic at the University of Cape Town. In her presentation, *Mapping Just Transitions in South Africa*, she challenged attendees to think critically about the local and international structural dimensions of a just transition in South Africa, urging scholars and students alike to see the law not only as a regulatory tool but as a contested site for transformation.



Student research is another area of focus. In 2025, the centre hosted a research workshop on environmental law in partnership with the Environmental Law Association.

UFS academic strengthens UN presence as key voice on development justice

The UFS continues to cement its global footprint in the space of human rights and development policy. **Prof Gerard Kamga**, Associate Professor in the UFS FSCHR and Programme Director for Research and Postgraduate Studies in the Faculty of Law, contributed to the 26th session of the United Nations Intergovernmental Working Group on the Right to Development, held from 12 to 15 May 2025 in Geneva.

This high-level session brought together diplomats, legal experts, and civil society leaders from across the globe to engage in structured dialogue around operationalising the right to development. Prof Kamga was among a select group of international experts invited to lead the conversation – this time delivering a focused intervention on the global challenge of illicit financial flows and their impact on the Global South. Prof Kamga delivered a presentation

titled *Draining Prosperity: How Illicit Financial Flows Undermine the Right to Development*, highlighting how the illegal movement of money out of Africa continues to weaken public services, entrench inequality, and cripple sustainable development efforts on the continent. Through this contribution, the FSCHR's voice resonated on the global stage, affirming its role in shaping debates that connect human rights research to urgent international challenges.



Prof Gerard Kamga contributed to the 26th session of the United Nations Intergovernmental Working Group on the Right to Development. The event took place in Geneva, Switzerland.

Free State Centre for Human Rights hosts inaugural Human Rights Day Lecture

As South Africa commemorated Human Rights Month, the FSCHR in the Faculty of Law at the UFS hosted its first Human Rights Day Lecture on 19 March 2025.

The inaugural Human Rights Day Lecture affirmed the FSCHR as a space where constitutional research meets lived democratic responsibility. By inviting Prof Loot Pretorius – a founding figure in the centre's establishment – to deliver the first lecture, the Faculty of Law honoured both his legacy and the centre's enduring mission to foster critical reflection on dignity, freedom, and equality.

This annual lecture now stands as a lasting commitment to human rights discourse at the UFS. Rooted in the centre's vision, it ensures that Human Rights Month is marked not only by commemoration, but by rigorous engagement with the principles that shape South Africa's constitutional democracy.



Read about the lecture.

The UFS hosted its first Human Rights Day Lecture on 19 March 2025.



UFS law scholars contribute to key UN Human Rights Council forum in Geneva

In 2024, the FSCHR took its research to the global stage when UFS law scholars contributed to the United Nations Human Rights Council's Social Forum in Geneva, engaging in critical debates on financing for development in Africa.

Two distinguished academics from the UFS, Prof Serges Kamga, Dean of the Faculty of Law, and Prof Gerard Kamga, Associate Professor in the FSCHR, attended the 2024 Social Forum of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland. The Social Forum is an annual gathering organised by the UN Human Rights Council to foster open discussions between governments, intergovernmental organisations, civil society, and academic experts. Unlike formal UN meetings, this forum serves as an interactive space for global discussions on human rights issues and sustainable development.



Read about
the lecture.

The Social Forum of the United Nations Human Rights Council, held annually in Geneva, Switzerland, provides a space for open dialogue among governments, intergovernmental organisations, civil society, and academics.

South African Human Rights Commission: Annual report to Parliament in terms of Section 184(3) of the Constitution

Since the end of 2024, the FSCHR has assisted the SAHRC with drafting its annual report to Parliament on the realisation of socio-economic rights, as required by Section 184(3) of the Constitution. In 2024/25, a team from the centre drafted the entire report on behalf of the commission. In 2025/26, the same team assisted with drafting several chapters. The centre will continue to assist in this capacity, while also advising the SAHRC to streamline and improve this important human rights monitoring process.

UFS Qwaqwa Campus empowers students through human rights dialogue

In April 2024, the UFS Qwaqwa Campus brought human rights into everyday student life by hosting a roundtable dialogue that empowered young voices to claim their rights and engage critically with issues of dignity and justice.

The Division of Student Affairs, Residence Life, and Human Rights Ambassadors collaborated to educate students about their human rights and empower them to stand up for themselves.



In April 2024, UFS Qwaqwa Campus hosted a Human Rights dialogue empowering students to claim their rights.

First UFS international conference on disability rights advances inclusion and equality



Read about the conference.



Therina Wentzel-du Toit, National Director at the National Council of and for Persons with Disabilities, spoke at the UFS International Conference on Disability Rights.

FSCHR featured on SABC News' Leihlo La Sechaba: How freedom enhances human rights

On 3 April 2023, the centre brought its work into the national spotlight when it was featured on **SABC News' Leihlo La Sechaba**, underscoring how freedom and constitutional rights remain central to South Africa's democratic journey.

Freedom cannot be achieved without rights being observed. As South Africa celebrated 29 years of democracy, the programme highlighted the rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and questioned the progress made to date.



The Free State Centre for Human Rights featured on SABC News' Leihlo La Sechaba, talking about freedom and constitutional rights.

Social media, freedom of expression, and the law: Protecting yourself

On 30 May 2022, the centre deepened its public engagement by hosting a lecture titled *Social Media and the Limits on Expressing Yourself*, affirming its role as a bridge between constitutional principles, cultural life, and the everyday realities of rights in South Africa.

The Honourable Deputy Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development, John Jeffery, delivered the lecture.



Read about the lecture.

*In 2022 the centre hosted a lecture titled *Social Media and the Limits on Expressing Yourself*. John Jeffery (second from the left) delivered the lecture.*

Under the theme of artistic freedom of expression, the Odeion String Quartet played two short works on the Quartet of Peace instruments.

Since October 2021, the UFS Odeion String Quartet has become the new custodian of the Quartet of Peace instruments. The four string instruments represent South Africa's four Nobel Laureates – Luthuli, Tutu, De Klerk, and Mandela – symbolising Freedom, Peace, Reconciliation, and Hope.



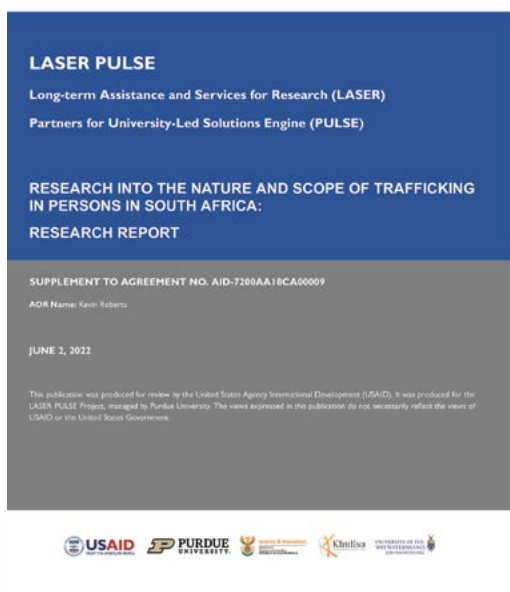
The UFS Odeion String Quartet has become the new custodian of the Quartet of Peace instruments.

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Release of the comprehensive 2022 research study on the scope and nature of human trafficking in South Africa

In 2022, the centre advanced its mission of evidence-based advocacy by releasing South Africa's most comprehensive study on human trafficking, positioning its research at the heart of national and global policy debates.



In 2022 the centre released South Africa's most comprehensive study on human trafficking.

Dr Marcel van der Watt, research fellow in the FSCHR – in collaboration with key research partners at LASER PULSE from Purdue University, Khulisa Management Services, and the University of the Witwatersrand – released the final multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary study on the scope and nature of human trafficking in South Africa. The national Trafficking in Persons (TIP) study, *Research into the Nature and Scope of Trafficking in Persons in South Africa: Research Report*, was conducted between 2020 and early 2022 to provide evidence on the nature and magnitude of TIP in South Africa to policymakers in the South African government and to development partners, implementing partners, and service providers. The evidence from this comprehensive study aimed to elevate data to a more prominent role in public policy debates and amplify South African institutional capacity to participate in and lead this process through partnership with institutions in the United States and engagement with the South African government.

Launch of independent international panel of experts' report on alleged violations of international law committed against Muslims in India since 2019

Alarmed by reports of increasing attacks against Muslims in India, three eminent human rights experts formed the Panel of Independent International Experts to examine alleged violations of international law and India's obligations towards victims. The FSCHR assisted the panel in converting its findings into a comprehensive report. On 24 June 2022, the FSCHR also hosted the launch of the initial report by the Panel of Independent International Experts (PIIE), examining the violations of international law against Muslims in India since 2019. Composed of eminent jurists and investigators, including Stephen Rapp, Marzuki Darusman, and Sonja Biserko, the panel concluded that there was credible evidence of widespread human rights violations, warning that Indian Muslims were at risk of becoming a persecuted minority. The FSCHR's involvement in drafting the report and convening this launch underscored its role as a hub for global human rights dialogue, connecting South African research to urgent international concerns.



Report of the Panel of Independent International Experts.

Human Rights Day Panel Discussion 2021: Africa, Human Rights, and Transformation, a conversation with Johan Froneman, Dhaya Pillay, and Toyin Falola



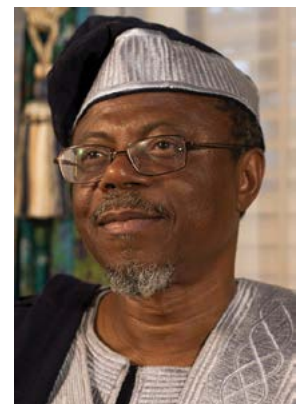
Justice Johan Froneman.



Judge Dhaya Pillay.



Prof Karin van Marle.



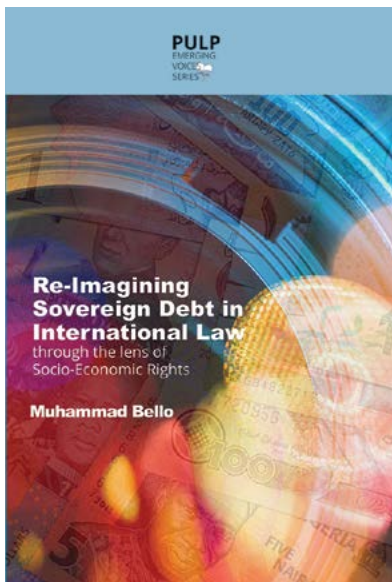
Prof Toyin Falola.

Through its Human Rights Day Panel Discussion on *Africa, Human Rights, and Transformation*, the FSCHR positioned itself as a space where judges, scholars, and thinkers could interrogate the meaning of rights in Africa, asking whether they serve as tools of transformation, remnants of colonial imposition, or pathways towards genuine decolonisation.

On 16 March 2021, the centre, in collaboration with the UFS Department of Public Law, hosted a panel discussion in celebration of Human Rights Day 2021, talking to the following themes from their perspectives as judges, academics, and politically aware Africans of different hues and origins: What do Africa, human rights, and transformation have to do with one another? Are human rights instruments for transformation in Africa, neo-colonial impositions, or the last refuge of the privileged? Is transformation a desirable goal for Africa, or a red herring to make us forget about the real work – decolonisation?



See the
invitation to
the conference.



Christof Heyns Memorial Thesis Award: FSCHR and Faculty of Law doctoral student awarded second prize

By celebrating the achievements of its doctoral students, the Free State Centre for Human Rights demonstrates how its academic community contributes to global conversations on justice and rights. This commitment was recently reflected when Dr Muhammad Bello – a doctoral student from the FSCHR and the Department of Mercantile Law – received second prize in the Christof Heyns Memorial Thesis Award for his doctoral thesis *The Place of Socio-Economic Rights in Sovereign Debt Governance* under the supervision of Prof Elizabeth Snyman-Van Deventer and Dr Annelie de Man, coordinator of the Advocacy Division of the FSCHR.

Dr Muhammad Bello received second prize in the Christof Heyns Memorial Thesis Award for his doctoral thesis.

The human rights impact of individual members of the FSCHR

Several staff members of the centre are engaged in impactful human rights-related work in their individual capacities. Since 2025, **Dr Annelie de Man**, coordinator of the Advocacy Division, has served as a member of the Global Civil Society Coalition for the UNCAC Working Group on Human Rights and Corruption. Dr De Man is also currently a co-editor of the *African Journal of International and Comparative Law* and the *African Network of Constitutional Lawyers human rights blog*. **Dr Martie Bloem**, coordinator of the Legal Services Division, lectures at the Bloemfontein Law School (Law Society of South Africa) for candidate attorneys and is vice-chair of the National Council of the Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools (FEDSAS). Prof Danie Brand, the centre's current director, has since 2017 regularly acted as judge in the Gauteng Division of the High Court.

Prof Gerard Kamga, coordinator of Research and Postgraduate Division also serves as Programme Director, Research and Postgraduate Studies in the Faculty of Law. He is a member of the steering committee of the annual international conference on the right to development. Prof Kamga also collaborates with the Right to Development Section at the United Nations where he is often invited as speaker.



*Dr Annelie de Man,
the coordinator of the
Advocacy Division in
the Free State Centre for
Human Rights.*



*Dr Martie Bloem,
coordinator of the Legal
Services Division, lectures
at the Bloemfontein Law
School.*

Shaping policy and legislation

The FSCHR regularly participates in policy formulation and legislative processes. In 2021, the centre – in collaboration with several members of the Faculty of Law – submitted formal comments to the South African Law Reform Commission on its Draft Uniform Marriage Bill. In 2023, the centre collaborated with a group of academics from Stellenbosch University, the University of Cape Town, and the University of Pretoria to submit comments on proposals to amend Section 25 of the Constitution. Most recently, in 2026, Prof Brand and Dr Bloem and Dr Lindani Mhlanga of the centre, with colleagues from the Department of Private Law, submitted comments on the proposed amendments to the Prevention of Illegal Eviction from and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act.



LEGAL SERVICES DIVISION

If the Advocacy Division is the centre's bridge between research and everyday life, then the Legal Services Division is its anchor in the courts. Over the past decade, the FSCHR has studied and advocated for rights and defended them directly through practice.

The centre's vision is carried into the courts, ensuring that human rights are not only researched and taught, but actively defended where they matter most.

Operating as the FSCHR Law Clinic, the division embodies this practical dimension of the centre's mission.

Unlike a general walk-in clinic, its focus is deliberate: carefully chosen cases that raise pressing human rights questions or reveal systemic failures affecting vulnerable communities in the Free State. This approach complements the broader services of the UFS Law Clinic while reflecting the centre's distinctive identity as an academic human-rights hub.

Through its litigation and legal services, the division has shown how individual disputes can illuminate larger issues of poverty, transformation, and accountability. In this way, the centre's vision is carried into the courts, ensuring that human rights are not only researched and taught, but actively defended where they matter most.

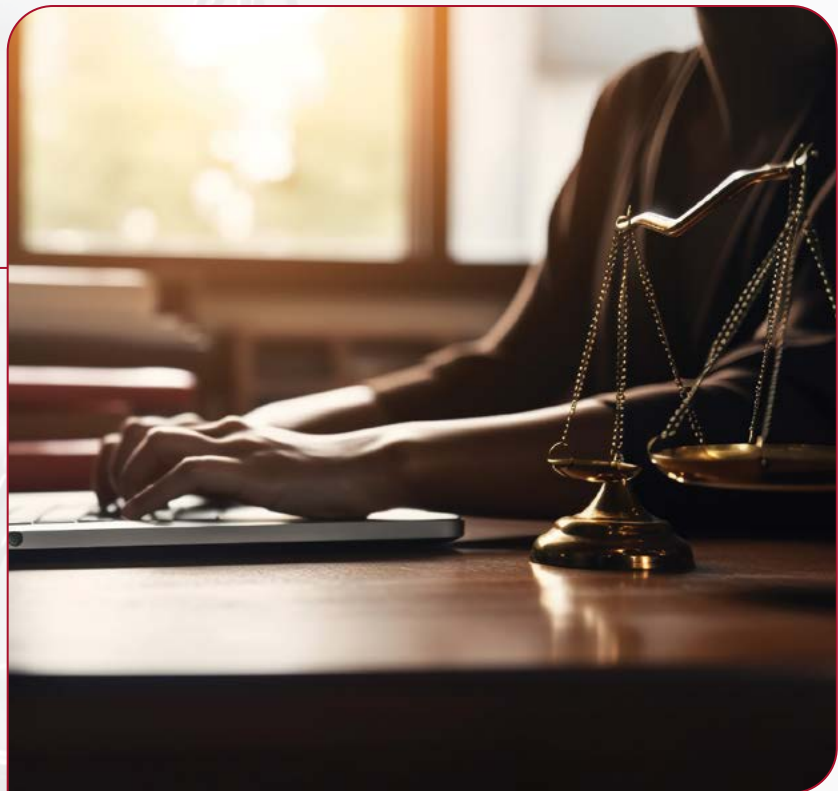
From a small strategic litigation unit to an accredited law clinic

The Legal Services Division began modestly, with early work focused on *amicus curiae* interventions and matters referred by other public-interest litigation organisations. Even in those first steps, the division carried the centre's vision into practice, showing how research could translate into real protection for vulnerable communities.

As its work expanded, the division's distinctive role came into sharper focus. Rooted in human rights impact litigation, public accountability, and strategic interventions, it remained closely connected to the centre's research and advocacy mandate. This deliberate focus ensured that the division complemented, rather than duplicated, the services of the UFS Law Clinic, while carving out its own identity as part of an academic human-rights centre.

A major milestone came in November 2025, when the Free State Provincial Council of the Legal Practice Council approved the FSCHR's application for accreditation as a law clinic. Recognition as a law clinic in its own right marked a new stage in the centre's development, affirming the division's place as a strategic vehicle for human-rights litigation in the Free State.

In November 2025, the FSCHR was approved as a law clinic by the Legal Practice Council.



External support also played a vital role. Renewable external funding and strong relationships with the Free State Society of Advocates enabled the division to expand its capacity, strengthening its ability to identify and pursue impact litigation in the public interest. In this way, the Legal Services Division grew from a small unit into an accredited clinic, carrying forward the centre's mission of ensuring that human rights are not only studied and advocated, but defended in practice.

A distinctive approach to strategic litigation

Over the decade, the work of the Legal Services Division has included

- public-interest and impact litigation;
- representation of vulnerable individuals and communities;
- amicus curiae interventions in matters raising broader constitutional questions;
- specialist human-rights legal opinions;
- referrals and collaboration with other public-interest organisations; and
- strategic interventions concerning systemic human-rights and governance problems.

The substantive focus of this work has included evictions and security of tenure, housing and homelessness, access to basic services, socio-economic rights, municipal and provincial accountability, corruption and governance failures, children's rights, and questions of dignity, identity, and personal autonomy.

Dr Bloem also contributed to national oversight efforts following the Jagersfontein tailings-dam disaster, serving on a panel at a South African Human Rights Commission symposium held three years after the incident. Her involvement formed part of the division's broader engagement with systemic governance failures affecting vulnerable communities.

Because many of these matters involve vulnerable clients or remain pending before the courts, individual names are not identified in this publication. Instead, the examples highlight the issues, values, and public interest objectives that have shaped the Law Clinic's work – showing how, across its first decade, the division has carried the centre's vision into practice by defending rights where they matter most.



*The FSCHR convened a conference, *Litigating Municipal Failure in South Africa?* to examine how litigation and collaborative strategies can address municipal dysfunction.*

This decade of work also informed the centre's decision to convene the national conference, *Litigating Municipal Failure in South Africa?* – which examined the growing reliance on courts to address dysfunction in the local sphere of government. Drawing on its litigation around water provision, housing, and basic services, the centre brought together practitioners, officials, civil-society organisations, and oversight bodies to reflect on the practical and institutional challenges of addressing municipal failure through legal action. The discussions explored how litigation interacts with systemic governance problems and the conditions that shape its effectiveness as an accountability tool.

Building partnerships for public-interest litigation

From its earliest years, the Law Clinic's growth has been shaped by the partnerships it built. Collaboration has been the thread that strengthened its capacity, allowing a relatively small specialist unit to become part of a wider community committed to constitutionalism, social justice, and human rights.

The establishment of the FSCHR in 2016 was accompanied by a Memorandum of Understanding concluded with the SAHRC. This MoU was extended and updated in 2021, with the UFS Law Clinic being added as a partner. Apart from confirming the existing relationship between the FSCHR and the SAHRC, the MoU now provides for more detailed collaboration among the three entities, specifically concerning human rights advocacy and litigation.

The centre has also developed relationships with other public-interest litigation organisations, enabling matters to be referred to the FSCHR and allowing its lawyers and researchers to contribute specialist expertise to broader public-interest initiatives.

For a relatively small specialist litigation unit, these networks are particularly important. They enable the centre to concentrate its resources on matters that align with its expertise while contributing to a broader national community of organisations committed to constitutionalism, social justice, and human rights.

Candidate legal practitioners and students gain practical experience through the Law Clinic, where they see how legal principles apply to the real-life challenges faced by vulnerable communities.



Developing human-rights lawyers

The Law Clinic's contribution extends well beyond the individual cases and legal opinions in which it has been involved. Over its first decade, it has provided a space where the practice of law meets the lived realities of those whom the Constitution seeks to protect.

Its legal practice provides an environment in which candidate legal practitioners and students can encounter the relationship between legal doctrine and the actual experiences of these marginalised communities.

The Law Clinic enables the centre to encounter legal problems in their lived context.



From lived experience to research, litigation, and change

Over its first decade, the centre has built a distinctive identity by connecting research with practice. Perhaps the most important contribution of the Legal Services Division over the centre's first decade lies in the connections it has created among the FSCHR's different functions.

The Law Clinic enables the centre to encounter legal problems in their lived context. These experiences inform research; research strengthens litigation and legal analysis; and the knowledge generated through both can inform advocacy, public engagement, and law reform.

2016 - 2026

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