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MEDIA RELEASE

UP researchers draft new UN standards on use of force by police

PRETORIA – The United Nations in Geneva has released global standards on the use of force by the police worldwide. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet welcomed the new United Nations Human Rights Guidance on the Use of Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement and urged all states to follow it.

The Guidance sets out the different kinds of weapons that are available to the police today, and identifies the conditions under which they may and may not be used. The High Commissioner thanked the University of Pretoria and the Geneva Academy and in particular Professor Christof Heyns, who teaches at both these institutions and lead the process of drafting the Guidance in collaboration with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Heyns proposed the drafting of such standards in a report to the UN Human Rights Council when he served as UN Special Rapporteur on arbitrary executions six years ago. According to Heyns: “After the abuses that came with the Arab Spring we all thought something must be done.” Three years ago a group of global experts – including members of the police, ballistics experts, and lawyers – was convened. They met regularly in Geneva to draft the standards, with Heyns chairing meetings. “We certainly hope this will make a difference, and we are getting reports that police forces and others are using it,” he said. “It is to be welcomed that the police in many countries today have weapons that are less lethal than firearms, but the potential for abuse is sometimes even greater, precisely because they are labelled less dangerous. And as we know too well, they still kill and wound people.”

The world has recently witnessed shocking examples of the excessive use of force by law enforcement officials in many countries. The deaths of George Floyd in the USA and Collins Khoza in South Africa are just the latest examples of a long line of such tragic events, for example during demonstrations, arrest, and enforcement of COVID-19 regulations. One in 25 violent deaths worldwide takes place at the hands of the police and, in many cases, this is exacerbated by racial bias.

Speaking during an urgent debate in the Human Rights Council on racism and excessive use of force in policing on 17 June, Bachelet, expressed her exasperation about the killings, saying, “Too little has changed over too many years.” She praised the new standards as a significant addition to the efforts of the UN to provide law-enforcement officials with guidance on the use of force. “The Guidance is concise and user-friendly, outlining international norms and standards on the use of less-lethal weapons in a scenario-based, weapon-specific manner.”

The advance version of the Guidance was made available last year, and has already been used widely by police forces and others globally, including in countries such as Chile, Jamaica, Iraq, and Russia and in South Africa in the Khoza judgement, in addition to the UN and the Red Cross.

Heyns, together with UP colleagues Professor Stuart Maslen and Dr Thomas Probert, also lead the drafting of the 2016 UN standards on the investigation of unlawful death, and he is currently leading the process in the UN Human Rights Committee to develop new comprehensive UN guidelines on how states should handle gatherings.

For further information, contact Pumeza Matwa pumeza.matwa@up.ac.za.

The full Guidance can be found at the link below:



English (*Other UN official languages forthcoming*)

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Media inquiries:

Prof Christof Heyns is a director of the Institute for International and Comparative Law in Africa and Professor of Human Rights Law at the University of Pretoria, where he has also directed the Centre for Human Rights, and has engaged in wide-reaching initiatives on human rights in Africa. He has advised a number of international, regional and national entities on human rights issues.

For more information or interviews, contact Prof Heyns on email christof.heyns@up.ac.za or cell: 082 467 3820.

ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on the Hatfield Campus, Pretoria. This 112-year-old institution is also the largest producer of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only university in the country that has a Faculty of Veterinary Science which is ranked top in Africa, and overall has 120 academic departments, as well as 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 55 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes.

UP is one of the top five universities in South Africa, according to the 2019-2020 rankings by the Center for World University Rankings. It is also ranked among the top 100 universities worldwide in three fields of study (veterinary science, theology and law), and among the top 1% in eight fields of study (agricultural sciences, clinical medicine, engineering, environment/ecology, immunology, microbiology, plant and animal sciences and social sciences).

In May 2020, the annual UK Financial Times Executive Education Rankings once again ranked GIBS as the top South African and African business school. The University also has an extensive community engagement programme with approximately 33 000 students involved in community upliftment. Furthermore, UP is building considerable capacities and strengths for the Fourth Industrial Revolution by preparing students for the world beyond university and offering work-readiness and entrepreneurship training to its students.

As one of South Africa's research-intensive universities, UP launched the *Future Africa Campus* in March 2019 as a hub for inter- and transdisciplinary research networks within UP and the global research

community to maximise 4IR innovation and address the challenges and stresses our continent and world is facing. In addition UP also launched the Javett Art Centre in September 2019 as a driver of transdisciplinary research development between the Humanities and other faculties. In 2020 UP will launch Engineering 4.0. as a hub not only for Smart Cities and Transport, but also to link the vast resources in technology and data sciences to other faculties via Future Africa. These initiatives are stimulating new thinking at the frontier of 'science for transformation'.

For more information, go to www.up.ac.za