

## NEWS RELEASE

### Prof Joel Modiri joins an esteemed class of University of Pretoria experts serving at the United Nations



*Professor Joel Modiri*

PRETORIA - The University of Pretoria's Faculty of Law Professor Joel Modiri has been appointed by the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General to serve on the Group of Independent Eminent Experts (GIEE) – on the Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA).

This makes Prof Modiri Africa's appointee in the five-member group of experts responsible for acting as the advisory mechanism for the Human Rights Council and the UN's General Assembly on the implementation of global efforts against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

"The news of this appointment was most welcome and gratifying," Prof Modiri said.

"It is always encouraging to receive such positive recognition for one's work and to be regarded as someone worthy of the challenge of representing the entire African region in the Group of Experts."

---

Prof Joel Modiri, an associate professor and the Head of Department of Jurisprudence at the University of Pretoria, is no stranger to taking his expertise onto the international stage. He has held two prestigious fellowships at Columbia University and the University of Oxford, where he conducted research on anti-racist approaches to legal and social theory. He has also visited the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) where he contributed to the university's critical race studies programme.

Prof Modiri says it was the late Prof Christof Heyns, the former Dean of UP's Faculty of Law from 2007 – 2010, who introduced him to the UN system and its specialist committees, working groups and advisory structures that deal with various areas of human rights.

"Prof Heyns felt strongly that these UN structures were a key site for the meeting of theory and practice in pursuit of global justice and he was keen to see more UP Faculty of Law academics take up roles within them."

"It was in part through his prodding – and I think his favourable recommendation – that around 2019, officials at the national Department of International Relations and Cooperation and the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, reached out to me with an invitation to speak at Working Group sessions in Geneva, focused on issues of race, racism, and the rights of indigenous communities and peoples of African descent," Prof Modiri said.

"This gave me an in-depth understanding of the UN Human Rights system and its work specifically on race and anti-racism, with the GIEE being central to the ongoing implementation of the DDPA."

Prof Modiri has been involved in teaching and conducting research on jurisprudence, critical race theory, African philosophy and Black Political Thought for over a decade. His main research interests include race and anti-discrimination law, the theory and history of racism, and racial ideology.

"It is certainly gratifying to be honoured with the opportunity to be able contribute to the global struggle against racism, and to be involved in shaping norms, standards and ideas to take forward the UN's bold vision for a "world beyond racism". My own aim is to deepen my continuous learning about the different histories and contexts in which the problem of racism and racial discrimination takes place, to gain knowledge on how different states and communities are responding to and resisting racism and to engage critically on the possibilities and limits of advancing a concrete, substantive and robust anti-racism project through the facility of the UN."

The four-year term appointment, Prof Modiri said, is an affirmation of the scholarship he and others have been developing which emphasis the need for a critical liberatory approach to the history and theory of race and racism drawing from the large pantheon of black radical and Pan-African intellectuals.

"The UP Faculty of Law actually boasts several "UN Professors" past and present – Professors Ann Skelton and Frans Viljoen are top of mind – so I am certainly in esteemed company. It is crucial that these pivotal UN structures are infused with cutting edge, radical, young voices on key issues of global justice in order to advance meaningful change," Prof Modiri said.

--- End ---

---

**Media enquiries** can be directed to Ms Liesel Swart - Marketing & Media Relations

## **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 its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers 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 with a Faculty of Veterinary Science, which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2024 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of Law, Veterinary Science, Accounting and Finance; Agriculture and Forestry and Electrical and Electronic Engineering. Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their 2024 World University Rankings (WUR). UP was the only South African university featured in the 2023 World University Rankings for Innovation (WURI), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

For more information, please go to [www.up.ac.za](http://www.up.ac.za)