

Faculty celebrates opening of Institute for International and Comparative Law in Africa (ICLA)

The Faculty of Law at the University of Pretoria (UP) celebrated the official opening of the Institute for International and Comparative Law in Africa (ICLA) on 1 and 2 August 2011. This celebration coincided with a three-day conference on "African Constitutionalism: Present Challenges and Prospects for the Future".

The Deputy Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development, Mr Andries Nel, officially opened the ICLA and the Conference on 1 August. The keynote address at the opening function was delivered by Professor Emeritus Yash Ghai from the University of Hong Kong and former chairperson of the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission. On the evening of 2 August, Ms Naledi Pandor, Minister of Science and Technology, delivered an address during a dinner at the ICLA.

The ICLA, which opened its doors in January 2011, is a postgraduate research institute of the UP Faculty of Law. Its mission is to conduct advanced legal research in the fields of international and comparative law as it applies to Africa, and to strengthen the role and rule of law in Africa. In many parts of the world, governments, inter-governmental organisations and corporations have access to advanced legal research institutions to guide them in the designing of legal frameworks that accommodate the developmental needs of a particular society. The ICLA aspires to fulfill a similar role in Africa and to serve as a gateway between Africa and the rest of the world in relation to advanced legal research.

Profs Erika de Wet and Christof Heyns have been appointed co-directors of the ICLA, housed in the double-storey Christo Coetzee Museum next to the Law Building on the Hatfield Campus. The responsibility for the daily running of the ICLA will be rotated between the two co-directors on an annual basis –Prof de Wet is appointed in this role for 2011.

The ICLA will build on the very successful work done and international networks developed by the University's Centre for Human Rights. On the African continent this network includes partnerships with the University of Ghana, Makerere University (Uganda), the University of the Western Cape, the Catholic University of Central Africa (Cameroon), the American University in Cairo, the University of Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Eduardo Mondlane University (Mozambique) and the University of Mauritius.

In August 2010, Prof Heyns was appointed as United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. The ICLA anchors the research team attached to this mandate. Other areas in which the ICLA is currently supporting capacity building include comparative constitutional law with an African focus. It coordinates the 54 African country reports for the Oxford Constitutions Online, a leading international database on constitutionalism published by Oxford University Press and under the editorship of the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law, Heidelberg, Germany.

Prof De Wet, who returned to South Africa in January 2011 after 20 years abroad, will lead research pertaining to collective security. Her work on the UN Security Council has been widely cited in international courts and she will focus her research on the relationship between the UN Security Council and Africa.

The regulation of education in Africa will also receive attention at the ICLA through cooperation with the yet to be appointed UNESCO Chair in Education Law in Africa. The Chair was granted to the Faculty of Law and is in the process of being established.

The ICLA is also involved in developing specialisation in the master's programme in International Law at the Faculty of Law. In cooperation with the Department of Public Law, a specialised module in air, space and telecommunications law is currently being developed. This module, which is unique in its kind in Africa, is supported by the South African Department of Trade and Industry and planned in cooperation with the Institute of Air and Space Law at the University of Cologne, Germany. Several other partnerships are currently being established, including partnerships with the Centre of Governance and Human Rights, Cambridge University (United Kingdom) and Cornell Law School (USA).

