

University of Pretoria Centre for Human Rights wins 2012 African Union Human Rights Prize

By Frans Viljoen

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Prof Frans Viljoen, Director of the Centre for Human Rights with Ms Dupe Atoki, Chairperson, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the oldest human rights body of the African Union, awarded its first ever NGO Prize for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights to the Centre for Human Rights of the Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria.

This Prize was awarded on the occasion of the Commission celebrating its 25th birthday, during the opening of its 52nd Ordinary Session in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, on 9 October 2012.

The award was presented by the President of Côte d'Ivoire, H.E. Mr Alasanne Ouattara, who was also the Special Guest of Honour at the commemoration ceremony. A former director of the Centre, Prof Christof Heyns (currently the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions) received the award on behalf of the Centre for Human Rights.



President Alassane Ouattara, Ivory Coast; Ms Dupe Atoki, Chairperson, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights; Dr Mary Maboreke, Executive Secretary, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights; Prof Christof Heyns, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, and former Director, Centre for Human Rights

The Commission's award is based on the positive and far-reaching influence of the **Centre's Masters Programme (the LLM in Human Rights and Democratisation in Africa)**, a unique programme presented in collaboration with twelve other law faculties, to which 30 excellently qualified individuals from African countries are admitted yearly. Students on this programme, working on the Centre's Human Rights Clinics, have strengthened various aspects of the Commission's mandate, in particular the work of its Special Rapporteurs. For more than a decade, alumni from the Centre have rendered invaluable service as legal interns and legal officers to the Commission. The Centre also publishes the **Commission's law reports**, disseminates Centre documents, and has conducted research on many aspects of the Commission's work, in particular on **indigenous peoples' rights**. The Centre has made consistent contributions to the Commission's work, for example by developing guidelines for state reporting, and by submitting shadow reports and communications. The **African Human Rights Moot Court Competition**, co-hosted by the Centre and the Commission in 2011, has for many years assisted in preparing generations of young African lawyers to make use of the AU's human rights institutions, and in raising awareness about the African human rights system.

Arriving at the Commission session from this year's Moot Court Competition, the Director of the Centre, Prof Frans Viljoen, expressed his appreciation for the award: "This Prize recognises the Centre's distinctive blend of research, teaching and activism; and the impact of its alumni and partners working across the continent for the promotion and protection of human rights." The Centre is both an academic department of the **Faculty of Law** and an NGO, and in the latter capacity it enjoys observer status with the African Commission.

The Commission was established in 1987, and monitors the implementation of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights in all African Union member states.

- **Overview: Taking stock and saying thank you: 25 years of the Centre's activities related to the promotion and protection of human rights in Africa**

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