

**In this issue:**

- Ohio University Student visit
- Events – Africa Day at Orange Farm
Human Rights Advice Centre
– PILnet call for registrations
- OCAY Back-a-Buddy campaign
- Legal Lifeline Partnership on Radio 919 FM
- Women in Immigration Detention Mini Institute
- RDP Title Deed Backlog and the Threat of Eviction
- Staff news

Ohio University Students Explore Law and Democracy in South Africa



Partners in Justice: OHIO and ProBono.Org at 30 Years of the Constitution

By Larry Hayman

A group of eleven Ohio University students recently returned from Law, Justice & Transition to Democracy in South Africa, a study abroad programme co-directed by Larry Hayman and Dr. Haley Duschinski. Now in its third year, the programme coincided with the 30th anniversary of the adoption of South Africa's Constitution, widely regarded as one of the most progressive in the world.

Developed in partnership with Advocate Shafie Ameerma, National Director of ProBono.Org and a former Visiting Professor at Ohio University, the programme immerses students in the study of constitutional law, human rights, and access to justice in a global context. Through this collaboration, students engaged directly with the institutions, advocates, and communities working to give meaning to constitutional rights in everyday life.



Ohio University students and faculty meet with Adv. Shafie Ameerma and Enver Surty, former Deputy Minister of Justice, at Pro Bono National Office in Johannesburg

Travelling through Cape Town and Johannesburg, students explored South Africa's legal and historical landscape. Visits to sites such as the District Six Museum, Constitution Hill, and Soweto underscored the legacy of apartheid and the ongoing struggle to realise equality. Along the way, students examined how rights guaranteed on paper, such as access to housing, healthcare, water, and education, remain contested in practice.

The academic core of the programme challenged students to grapple with these issues firsthand. Each student developed a constitutional case addressing contemporary human rights questions, including access to healthcare, freedom of protest, and indigenous land rights. These projects culminated in a moot court competition, where students presented oral arguments before South African legal scholars and practitioners.

A hallmark of the programme is its engagement with leading voices in law and justice. Through ProBono.Org, students met with advocates and public leaders working to expand access to legal services and strengthen democratic institutions. These interactions highlighted a central lesson of the programme: that constitutional rights are not self-executing, but depend on sustained effort by lawyers, judges, and civil society.



Thirty years after its adoption, South Africa's Constitution remains both aspirational and unfinished. For OHIO students, studying law in this context offers a powerful reminder that access to justice is not guaranteed, but rather it is built, contested, and continually renewed.

Through its partnership with ProBono.Org, Ohio University continues to provide students with a transformative opportunity to witness that work firsthand.

Africa Day celebrated at Orange Farm

On 25 May, the Orange Farm Human Rights Advice Centre hosted an Africa Day Festival in partnership with the Itsoeng Women's Project and local Early Childhood Development (ECD) associations. The event aimed to promote unity, diversity, and social cohesion within the Orange Farm community while raising awareness about the challenges facing migrant communities, including discrimination, xenophobia, racism, and other basic rights violations.

Through cultural celebrations, educational activities, and community engagement, the Africa Day Festival brought residents together to celebrate Africa's rich diversity, and advocate for the rights and dignity of all children and families, regardless of their background.

The Orange Farm Human Rights Advice Centre remains committed to advancing human rights, promoting social justice, and supporting vulnerable members of the community through legal assistance, advocacy, and community outreach initiatives.

ORANGE FARM HUMAN RIGHTS ADVICE CENTRE
Unity in the Community – Together for Rights, Dignity & Development
NPO NO: 078 480

AFRICA DAY AWARENESS

KNOW | RESPECT | PROTECT | DEVELOP

Join us this Africa Day as we build knowledge, promote human rights and work together for a safer, fairer and more prosperous community.

PURPOSE OF THE DAY

- Research on Understanding of Africa
- Understanding the words: Xenophobia, Racism, Discrimination & more
- Immigrants: Legal & Illegal Work in South Africa
Understanding the role of the Department of Home Affairs and Social Services in terms of work, business, marriage & more
- Community Safety: Working together for safer neighbourhoods

WHAT TO EXPECT

- Informative Presentations
- Q&A with Legal & Government Representatives
- Community Dialogues
- Resources & Referrals
- Networking & Support

UNITED IN DIVERSITY, STRONGER IN UNITY!

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

- Community Members
- Immigrants & Foreign Nationals
- Business Owners
- Youth & Students
- Civil Society & Faith Groups
- Government Stakeholders
- Anyone who cares about a better South Africa!

OUR APPROACH – ABCD FOR CHANGE

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| A ASSETS We identify and value the skills, talents and resources within our community. | B BUILD We build relationships, trust and local leadership. | C CO-CREATE We work collectively to solve problems and create opportunities. | D DEVELOP We promote self-reliance, economic growth and sustainable development. |
|--|---|--|--|

DATE: 25 MAY 2026
TIME: 10h00 till 12h00
VENUE: ORANGE FARM HUMAN RIGHTS ADVICE CENTRE HALL, 3748 Draciek 1, Orange Farm, 1805
CONTACT: 011 850 1010 / 072 175 8948

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS. RESPECT OTHERS. BUILD OUR FUTURE.
LET'S GROW TOGETHER – LEGALLY, SAFELY, ECONOMICALLY.
BE INFORMED. BE EMPOWERED. BE THE CHANGE!

orangefarmadvicecentre@gmail.com | www.orangefarmadvicecentre.org.za

PILnet call for Registrations

PILnet ProBono.Org®

ProBono.Org in partnership with PILnet, is hosting the 2026 PILnet Global Forum in Cape Town

When : 10 - 12 November 2026
Where : Century City Conference Center

Spaces are limited
Registration fees payable

REGISTER NOW!

Join us in Cape Town, South Africa, on 10-12 November for the #2026PILnetGlobalForum.

This year's forum takes legal professionals, partners, and changemakers to Cape Town for three days of insightful discussions, interactive workshops, and valuable networking opportunities focused on strengthening civil society through the law.

Super early bird registration closes on 30 June 2026

Register here: www.pilnet.org/event/pilnet-global-forum/registration-details/

Registration closes on 27 October 2026, or when capacity is reached.

No on-site registration is available.

OCAY Back-a-Buddy campaign

As ProBono.Org, our mission is to facilitate access to justice for the most vulnerable and marginalised members of our society. We aim to bridge the gap between community needs and free and professional legal services. One of our most impactful community interventions is the Booyens Magistrate's Court mediation project, where we facilitate peaceful and out-of-court dispute resolutions and parenting plans to save those involved from lengthy legal battles.

Right now, this critical space lacks basic furniture. We need tables and chairs to conduct confidential, dignified mediation sessions. Help us equip this room so our volunteer attorneys and clients have a professional space to find peaceful resolutions. Our goal is to raise R7,000.

Support our Back-a-Buddy campaign today

www.backabuddy.co.za/campaign/support-probonoorgs-booyens-court-mediation



Legal Lifeline Partnership on Radio 919 FM

FERGUSON MEDIA

LEGAL LIFELINE

Topic: The importance of Wills and estate planning.

Thursdays 18:00 -18:30

TUNE IN

HOSTED BY Advocate GUSHWELL BROOKS

919

The Legal Lifeline is a practical and informative radio show and podcast on 919 FM, a community radio station based in Sandton, Johannesburg. Produced in partnership with ProBono.Org, the show is designed to help listeners understand their legal rights and navigate everyday challenges.

The show is hosted by Advocate Gushwell Brooks featuring expert insights and clear explanations on topics such as:

- Consumer rights and contracts.
- Family law and mediation.
- Workplace issues.
- Cyber law and medical practice law

Time: Every Thursday from 18:00 to 19:00.

Tune in to 919 FM in the Johannesburg/Sandton area, or listen live via the 919 FM official website. Missed episodes are available on iono.fm and the station's podcast page. Listeners can send questions or interact with the show via the station's WhatsApp number at 084 221 2919.

ProBono.Org attends the Women in Immigration Detention Mini Institute

By Pearl Khumalo, Acting Regional Manager, Durban

ProBono.Org Durban attended the Women in Immigration Detention Mini Institute for migrant lawyers, a two-day conference held from 19 to 20 May 2026. The event was hosted by the Initiative for Strategic Litigation in Africa (ISLA) in collaboration with Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR). It brought together female legal practitioners, legal researchers, academics, social workers, and other human rights activists from countries including Kenya, Botswana, Sudan, and Nigeria to discuss the challenges facing women in immigration detention and to strengthen efforts to protect their rights.

LHR attorney Zekhethelo Cele explored the historical and legislative context of women in detention, barriers to documentation, and the need to approach migration and litigation from a gendered and rights-based perspective. LHR attorney Nyelethi Baloyi explained that women in immigration detention are often left vulnerable to sexual abuse and other forms of bodily violence, while little protection is available for unaccompanied and separated minors, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ persons, and pregnant and lactating mothers. Advocate Achieng Orero (Kenya) emphasised the importance of feminist and intersectional approaches to strategic litigation, particularly in recognising how legal issues affecting women intersect with race, gender, disability, and migration. She noted that effective strategic litigation requires an enabling legal framework, a knowledgeable and willing judiciary, a feminist strategic litigator, and public awareness.



Dr Michelle Maziwisa of the Centre for Human Rights discussed the role of lawyers in engaging clients with empathy, avoiding re-traumatisation, and maintaining confidentiality during evidence gathering. LHR Deputy Director Kayan Leung highlighted the importance of every stakeholder within the litigation ecosystem and the value of effective referral pathways. Advocate Tamika Thumbiran explained that comparative jurisprudence can be persuasive and can strengthen domestic litigation. She also stressed the importance of combining lived experience with expert knowledge. Thumbiran encouraged migrant lawyers to see themselves as knowledge producers by drawing on African legal sources as comparative jurisprudence, identifying structural harms, and applying a human rights-based approach. Mashoabathe Noko of the Foundation for Human Rights added that strategic litigation must adopt an intersectional and rights-based approach that works alongside the communities it seeks to empower. She further emphasised that movement-building depends on community, accountability, and meaningful partnerships.

ProBono.Org Durban was grateful for the opportunity to participate in this meaningful engagement and looks forward to further collaboration with the network.



RDP Title Deed Backlog and the Threat of Eviction

By Nhlakanipho Mbatha - Durban intern



After South Africa's first democratic election in 1994, the new government sought to redress the housing inequalities of Apartheid. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), enacted on 13 July 1994, aimed to provide adequate housing for previously disadvantaged communities. Funded through public resources, the programme became the largest government-subsidised housing initiative in the world. According to the Department of Human Settlements, more than three million RDP houses had been delivered by 2016, benefitting over 20 million South Africans, and the figure has since grown closer to five million units.

Despite these achievements, the backlog in issuing title deeds remains severe, estimated at more than 900,000 nationally. KwaZulu-Natal alone has delivered only 27,017 deeds since 1994, with over 105,000 still pending. Section 26 of the Constitution guarantees the right of access to adequate housing, and obliges the state to take reasonable steps to realise this right. Yet, delays of more than 20 years in transferring ownership undermine that constitutional duty. The absence of title deeds has created fertile ground for fraud. Without legal proof of ownership, beneficiaries struggle to protect their homes against corrupt officials, illegal occupants, and scammers who exploit the gap by selling or reallocating properties multiple times. This confusion erodes the very purpose of RDP housing which is to provide poor families with security and dignity.

The backlog also complicates estate administration. When an RDP homeowner dies without a title deed, heirs face significant obstacles in proving ownership. As a legal intern, I have managed several cases where families could not prove ownership, which delayed the transfer of a property. The Master of the High Court and the Deeds Office cannot easily register such properties, leaving families in limbo. While organisations such as ProBono.Org assist with drafting wills, the absence of deeds continues to delay transfers and destabilise households.

Legal protections exist under the Prevention of Illegal Eviction from and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act 19 of 1998 (PIE Act), which prohibits unlawful evictions and sets out procedures for removing occupiers. However, many RDP beneficiaries are unaware of these rights, leaving them vulnerable to displacement.

Without title deeds, families cannot prove ownership, are exposed to fraud, risk unlawful eviction, and face difficulties in securing inheritance rights. Until the state resolves this backlog, RDP housing will fall short of its promise to provide lasting stability and dignity to South Africa's poorest communities.



Course

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STAFF NEWS

Cape Town



Bronwyn Japhta currently serves as a legal intern at ProBono.Org Cape Town, where she supports the organisation's mandate of expanding access to justice for marginalised individuals and communities. She is an LLB graduate and LLM candidate at the University of the Western Cape. Currently her academic research focuses on redressing social inequalities of previously disadvantaged individuals within corporate governance structures, in the context of gender and racial board diversity.

Her commitment to social justice extends to her volunteer work with the UNICEF UWC Club which engages students in UNICEF-aligned advocacy, awareness, and initiatives that promote children's social development.

She was also a mentee in the South African Chapter of the International Association of Women Judges (SAC-IAWJ), a judicial network advancing gender justice and the protection of women and children through education, advocacy, and legal awareness programmes, including gender-based violence-focused initiatives.

Johannesburg



Cathy-Ann Potgeiter joins ProBono.Org as a Senior Staff Attorney, bringing with her a strong commitment to social justice, human rights, and expanding access to justice for vulnerable communities. An admitted attorney, Cathy-Ann has spent much of her career working in the public interest sector, focusing on issues including gender-based violence, transitional justice, corporate accountability, constitutional rights, and victim-centred advocacy. She has worked across legal practice, research, policy development, and community engagement, supporting initiatives aimed at addressing inequality and strengthening accountability.

Most recently, Cathy-Ann worked at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR), where she contributed to programmes focused on violence prevention, gender justice, reparations, and social cohesion.

She is passionate about using the law as a tool for positive social change and believes that access to legal services is essential for building a more just and equitable society. Cathy-Ann is excited to join the ProBono.Org team and looks forward to working alongside colleagues, partner organisations and clients to help ensure that legal assistance is accessible to those who need it most.



Precious Masenya is a Bachelor of Arts in Communication Sciences graduate who earned her degree cum laude and also holds a Diploma in Journalism. She has a keen interest in strategic communication, public relations, and digital media, and is also passionate about using strategic communication to inform, engage, and empower communities, particularly in the social justice space.

Precious joins us as a communications intern after having served as a volunteer at our Johannesburg office for the past six months and is committed to continuous learning and professional growth at ProBono.Org.



VISIT OUR WEBSITE AND
FACEBOOK PAGE WHERE
YOU CAN READ MORE ABOUT
OUR WORK

www.probono.org.za

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