



CONNECT

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Building fair, democratic,
inclusive and peaceful
societies

Note from the IJR Executive Director

As we step into 2025, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation continues to uphold its commitment to fostering inclusive peace, democracy, and reconciliation. This year carries profound significance— IJR proudly celebrates 25 years of impactful interventions across Africa.

From supporting transitional justice processes across the continent to driving national dialogues on reconciliation, we remain at the forefront of shaping policies and practices that contribute to just and inclusive societies. The themes explored in this edition of IJR Connect reflect the critical issues of our time —reparations, memorialisation, youth and democracy, and decolonising peacebuilding. As global dynamics shift, Africa's agency in shaping its future is more important than ever.

Our engagements in peacebuilding, governance, and policy advocacy are geared towards ensuring that Africa's voice is amplified on the world stage as we continue to push for accountability and justice, advocating for meaningful reparations and addressing structural inequalities that hinder reconciliation and development.

We are deeply grateful for the support of our partners, friends, and stakeholders who walk this journey with us. – **Prof Cheryl Hendricks**

African Union's Summit on Reparations: IJR Interventions on the Margins of the Assembly

By Prof Tim Murithi



In February 2025, the African Union (AU) convened its annual summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and IJR convened a series of interventions relating to the theme of the year which is: Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations.

At the Thirty-Sixth Ordinary Session of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government, held between 18 and 19 February 2023, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, a landmark decision was taken by the Union towards “building a united front to advance the cause of justice and the payment of reparations to Africans.”^[1] The AU Assembly directed the “AU Commission, in consultation with Member States, ECOSOC and other AU organs as well as the RECs to ... develop a Common African Position on Reparations.”^[2]

On 13 February 2025, at the margins of the 38th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government, the IJR, in partnership with the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS), based in Addis Ababa, Amani Africa Media and Research Services and the African Union Network of Think-Tanks for Peace (NETT4Peace), also based in Addis Ababa, jointly convened a Diplomatic Briefing on the **“African Union Common Position on Reparations: Strategies for Policy Implementation.”**

[1] African Union, Decisions, Declarations, Resolution and Motion, Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, 36th Ordinary Session, Assembly/AU/Dec.847 (XXXVI), 18 to 19 February 2023, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, p.1.

[2] African Union, Decisions, Declarations, Resolution and Motion, Assembly/AU/Dec.847 (XXXVI), p.1.

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2024 IJR Annual Review: Resetting Peacebuilding in Africa

The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation held its annual review meeting on 30 January, 2025 in Pretoria, South Africa. The event reaffirmed the organisation's steadfast commitment to fostering justice, reconciliation, and peace across the continent in 2024.

The meeting commenced with a panel discussion titled Resetting Peacebuilding in Africa, chaired by Nyasha Mpani, IJR's Project Leader for the Data for Governance Alliance. The panel featured prominent experts in peacebuilding. Professor Cheryl Hendricks, Executive Director of the IJR, spoke on Resetting the Agenda and Structures for Peacebuilding in Africa, setting the stage for a critical examination of the evolving peace and security landscape.

Professor Tim Murithi, Head of IJR's Peacebuilding Programme, highlighted Transitional Justice and Reparations as core components of sustainable peace. Professor Antoni van Nieuwkerk from the University of South Africa, provided insights into Key Issues for Peacebuilding in Southern Africa, while Dr Faith Mabera from the University of the Witwatersrand explored Trends in the Peacebuilding Scope: Normative and Practical Implications.

The discussion addressed key challenges and future directions for peacebuilding in Africa. Speakers underscored the necessity of forging a new consensus between and within states, guided by values, principles, and ethics that uphold peace and security. They stressed the urgency of tackling inequalities in global power structures and domestic contexts, advocating for renewed focus on disarmament and the decolonisation of peace. Furthermore, the panel emphasised the importance of local community involvement and thought leadership in peacebuilding efforts, alongside sustained investment in economic development and capacity building.

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Government of National Unity and National Dialogue: The Unfinished Business of Reparations



The IJR convened a diplomatic briefing on the sidelines of South Africa's State of the Nation Address (SONA) on February 4, 2025, in Cape Town. The event provided a platform for policy discussions on the Government of National Unity (GNU) and the proposed National Dialogue initiative, with a particular focus on the often-overlooked issue of reparations.

The briefing took place in the context of the African Union's (AU) adoption of reparations as its theme for 2025, alongside the development of an AU Common Position on Reparations for Africans and People of African Descent.

IJR's Executive Director, Professor Cheryl Hendricks, opened the discussion by providing an overview of the organization's ongoing work. She emphasized the significance of reparations, highlighting that IJR's South African Reconciliation Barometer would also focus on this issue in the current year. Prof. Hendricks underscored the importance of exploring the various forms that reparations can take and acknowledged that while SONA would likely address a range of global concerns—including the US Trump administration and the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo—the main focus will be on pressing domestic challenges such as unemployment and crime.

Providing an analysis of the Government of National Unity, Ms. Sanusha Naidu, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Global Dialogue, explained that the GNU will be held together by a statement of intent—an acknowledgment that no one party can govern alone.

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African Perspectives on the Emerging Global Order

The IJR and the International Peace Institute (IPI) convened a high-level focus group discussion and policy seminar in Pretoria, on 28 January, bringing together governmental, academic, and civil society experts to examine African Perspectives on the Emerging Global Order. The meeting provided a platform for thought leaders to reflect on Africa's positioning in a shifting global landscape.

The discussion, moderated by Dr. Faith Mabera, a post-doctoral fellow at the University of the Witwatersrand, engaged participants in a dynamic exchange on Africa's agency amid geopolitical realignments.

As the world transitions into a multipolar order, African agency has become increasingly crucial in defining the continent's role beyond being a passive recipient of global trends. Discussions explored how Africa can assert itself by strengthening regional integration, leveraging multilateral institutions like the African Union (AU), and diversifying economic partnerships beyond traditional Western and Chinese alliances. Experts also emphasized Africa's growing diplomatic influence, with countries increasingly engaging in South-South cooperation, advocating for United Nations reforms, and positioning themselves as key players in climate negotiations and peacebuilding efforts. The need for homegrown policy solutions was reiterated, with calls for African states to proactively shape global governance rather than merely adapting to external forces.

A key takeaway from the discussion was the need for a stronger, unified African voice in global decision-making spaces. Institutions like the AU must be empowered not just in rhetoric but in action, ensuring that they serve as effective platforms for negotiation rather than mere symbolic entities. Speakers also underscored Africa's bargaining power in global climate negotiations, urging leaders to push for policies that reflect the continent's unique vulnerabilities and strengths.

Following the focus group, the policy seminar on Africa and the emergence of multipolarity featured key insights from renowned scholars and policy analysts. Prof. Tim Murithi, Head of IJR's Peacebuilding Interventions Programme, moderated the session, guiding an in-depth exploration of how Africa can navigate and leverage emerging global power structures.

Participants acknowledged the need for African-led strategies in global decision-making, emphasizing the role of knowledge production and policy engagement in ensuring the continent's perspectives are adequately represented on the international stage.

Legal Standing on Memorialisation

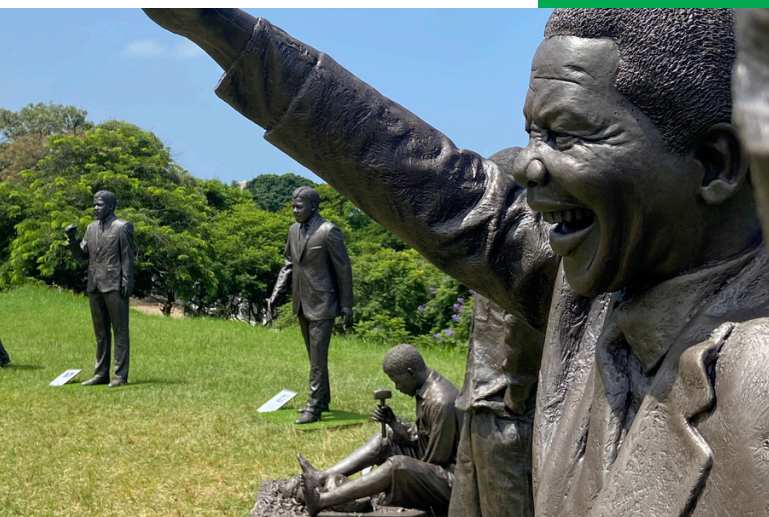
By Asemahle Tshoni

War/conflict memorialisation is not merely the act of remembering, preserving, and commemorating past events; it is deeply connected to transitional justice as it aligns with its four pillars. Memorialization plays a crucial role in justice, as forms of memory serve as acknowledgements of past wrongs. Justice requires accountability, which is tied to acknowledgement from perpetrators (Ruwanpathirana, 2016:9).

Truth-telling is also integral to memorialization, much like in transitional justice, through the use of archives, history books, and dialogues, all of which contribute to both processes (Ruwanpathirana, 2016:9). Reparations, including symbolic reparations through sites of memory, are a form of memorialization, offering remembrance and fostering reconciliation (Ruwanpathirana, 2016:9). Memorialization also supports the guarantee of non-repetition, as sites of memory and other forms of commemoration serve as constant reminders of past atrocities and the need to prevent their recurrence. Memorials thus play a key role in reparations, which are not only material but also symbolic, such as sites of memory and the renaming of significant locations tied to conflict or war.

In South Africa, efforts to memorialize are governed by legal instruments such as the constitutional framework, including the South African Constitution, the legislative and policy landscape like the National Heritage Resources Act (No. 25 of 1999), and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommendations on memorialization efforts.

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The University Housing Crisis: A Barrier to Equitable Education

By Danielle Hoffmeester



South Africa's higher education system is facing a serious challenge. There is not enough affordable and safe student accommodation, leaving many students between three unfavourable possibilities: 1) homelessness, 2) settling for substandard housing and/or 3) travelling long distances and incurring high costs as a result.

This situation affects their ability to concentrate on studies and ultimately hinders their academic success.

Research has shown that demand for student housing far exceeds available supply. A report compiled by the International Finance Corporation says that hundreds of thousands of students struggle every year to secure a decent place to live. When students do not have dignified accommodation, they are forced into costly commutes or into renting off-campus properties that may compromise their safety and well-being. The result is added financial stress and distractions from academic responsibilities.

A further complication is the funding crisis that now threatens the smooth operation of student residences. A recent article in Daily Maverick reports that the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) currently owes student accommodation providers R44-million in overdue rental fees. With these delayed payments, providers are left uncertain about their rental income. This uncertainty could result in them denying students access to their accommodation or raise rent prices further, putting severe strain on students, especially those from low-income backgrounds.

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Human Rights Are Under Threat: What Can Be Done?

By Felicity Harrison

Human rights are under attack, but this is not the first time in our history that we have seen them assaulted; nor, sadly, will it be the last. While we are experiencing a new forms of threat, this time emerging from the West, it is important for us to ensure that we don't lose perspective, or hope: we would do well to not let a good crisis go to waste.

We should also not romanticise the past and assume that there was some halcyon era where human rights were the basis of the international system and domestic politics. Human rights have always been contested and frequently used for utilitarian purposes in transactional ways. Even in the post war era, it took Raphael Lemkin three years to lobby for the UN Convention on Genocide at a time when one would have thought that the horrors of the Shoah (holocaust) would have spurred the world into action.

The notion of human rights is profoundly rooted in ideas of human dignity which arise from religious traditions. Placed as they are in the realm of politics, which often eschews such ideas in favour of "pragmatic," "real" issues such as the pursuit of power. The contradictions are obvious, since in a human rights paradigm, people are always and end in themselves; whereas in the Realist way of thinking, people are a means to an end.

In a time when world leaders are challenging not just the structures of democracy, but they are also questioning its very foundations, it is important for those who defend human rights not to be caught up in the miniature of the sound and fury which at the end of the day, signifies nothing.

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South African Reconciliation Barometer: Reimagining Apartheid Reparations



Almost three decades after the conclusion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), South Africa's vision of a reconciled and equitable nation remains unfulfilled.

While the TRC was a groundbreaking institution that inspired transitional justice processes in post-conflict societies around the world, the government of the day only partially accepted its recommendations of reparations for apartheid survivors. Neither the reparations paid nor their accompanying policy programmes succeeded at disrupting the country's deep economic and social inequalities rooted in colonialism and apartheid. More than half of all South Africans live in poverty today, income inequality levels are among the highest in the world, and almost two-thirds of young adults of working age are unemployed.

[DOWNLOAD THE FULL REPORT HERE>](#)



Policy Brief - Youth and Democracy in South Africa: Disillusioned but Engaged

by Danielle Hoffmeester

South Africa's youth face a complex reality, caught between the promises of a democratic future and the harshness of present socio-economic challenges. Many young people today feel deeply disillusioned and are disengaged from democratic processes. Persistent inequality, unemployment, violence, and the erosion of collective values have led to a growing sense of detachment from the systems meant to empower them. While young people increasingly turn inward—prioritising personal advancement through entrepreneurship, social media, and self-improvement—the tenuous connection between the individual and the community raises concerns about the sustainability of democratic participation.

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Policy Brief - Decolonising peacebuilding: A policy perspective

by Prof Tim Murithi

The pursuit of a decolonial peacebuilding is an urgent agenda given the failures and inability of state-centric liberal peacebuilding in achieving and consolidating peaceful societies across the world, notably in the post-colonial regions of the world. This policy brief assesses why an interrogation of the Eurocentric roots of state-centric liberal peacebuilding is necessary if strategies are to be developed to more effectively decolonise the Global North, which drives the global peacebuilding agenda.

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Practice Note - Social dialogue in agriculture – Western Cape

by Lucretia Arendse

This practice note describes the process that IJR embarked on to facilitate policy implementation in the agricultural sector in Western Cape, South Africa. It describes the process that IJR embarked on to facilitate policy implementation in the agricultural sector in Western Cape, South Africa.

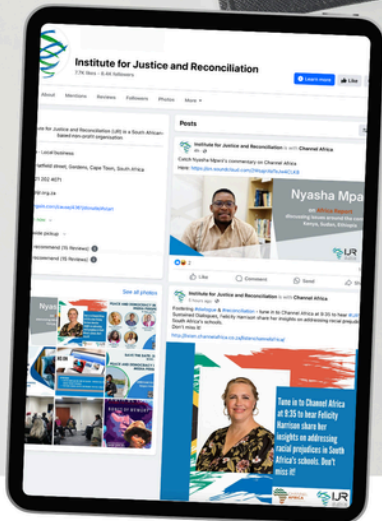
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Watch our video on YouTube



www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTaBn3IPPho

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WEBSITE
IJR.ORG.ZA



EMAIL US
INFO@IJR.ORG.ZA