



# CONNECT

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## Note from the IJR Executive Director

March is Human Rights Month in South Africa and on the 8<sup>th</sup> there was a global celebration of International Women's Day (IWD). The themes for Human Rights Month and IWD, respectively, are "Bill of Rights at 30: Making Human Dignity Real" and "Rights, Justice and Action for All women and girls" with a campaign of "Give and Gain." The call to action is to ensure that the lived realities of all reflect the rights to non-discrimination, gender equality and human dignity, and to live in peace and with prosperity. March is also a month where we continue to see an escalation in armed conflict globally and where the calls for resetting the peace and security architecture and recommitting to the peaceful resolution of conflict echo loudly. This edition of the IJR Connect newsletter reflects on renewal amid a rapidly changing global landscape.

The IJR is at a moment of pivotal transition. We have launched a new Organisational Strategy 2026–2030 and new ways of working that will enable the IJR to effectively respond to the changing geo-political and conflict contexts, through research, convening, and accompaniment. The IJR will work across four ecosystems focusing on Reparative and Inclusive Justice; Democratic Governance and Social Contracts; Trade, Peace and Regional Integration; and the Just Energy Transitions and Natural Resource Governance.

This new chapter coincides with my departure as Executive Director at the end of March 2026. Having served at the helm of the IJR for four years, I am deeply grateful for the privilege of leading the Institute and working with the Board, staff and partners to grow its footprint nationally and continentally. The work of the IJR, in the current contexts, has become even more important and it must continue to be enabled to collaboratively and co-creatively make its contribution to creating a more just, democratic, peaceful and thriving Africa.

At a high-level diplomatic briefing in Cape Town, the Institute called for stronger Pan-African leadership and more inclusive multilateralism, underscoring Africa's critical role in shaping a shifting global order.

Aligned with Human Rights Month and International Women's Day, IJR and its partner organisations convened dialogues on justice and anti-racism, a Women's Faith and Development Seminar (co-hosted with the SACC), and a regional Peace and Security Lab bringing together women and youth peacebuilders from across Southern Africa. The Institute also contributed to advancing transitional justice through its participation in the IGAD regional framework process.

Together, these highlights reaffirm IJR's role as a leading voice advancing human rights, reconciliation, reparations and sustainable peace across the continent. – **Prof Cheryl Hendricks**

# IJR Launches New Organisational Strategy for 2026–2030



In 2025, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation marked over 25 years of advancing reconciliation and transitional justice in South Africa and across the African continent, and now, it is stepping into a new chapter with the launch of its Organisational Strategy for 2026–2030.

## Why a New Strategy?

The decision to develop a new strategy comes at a time of profound global transformation. Since the adoption of its previous strategy in 2020, the world has undergone significant and often destabilising change. Today’s context is defined by growing uncertainty and complexity, where old assumptions about peace, governance, and cooperation are being challenged.

Globally, the geopolitical landscape is shifting. Multilateral systems are weakening, while both inter- and intra-state conflicts are on the rise. At the same time, public trust in democratic institutions and processes is declining, raising concerns about the resilience of democratic governance.

These political shifts are unfolding alongside deepening socio-economic challenges. Inequality continues to widen, human security is deteriorating, and there is an observable backlash against gender equality, diversity, inclusion, and globalisation. These trends threaten to reverse decades of progress toward more just and inclusive societies.

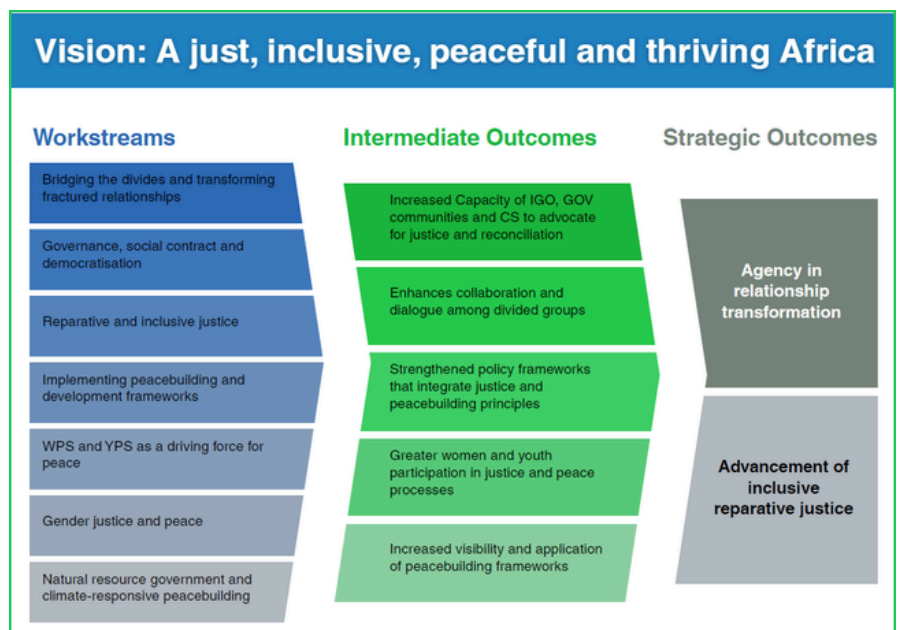
Compounding these challenges are rapid technological advancements, particularly in artificial intelligence, which are evolving faster than the ethical and regulatory frameworks needed to guide them. Meanwhile, the escalating impacts of climate change and growing energy insecurity are placing additional strain on already fragile systems.

Together, these overlapping dynamics represent what is increasingly understood as a “poly-crisis” – a convergence of multiple, interconnected crises that are disrupting social, political, economic, and ecological foundations worldwide.

## A Renewed Role for IJR

In this context of intensifying uncertainty, the need for institutions that can meaningfully contribute to long-term peace, justice, and human dignity has never been greater. The IJR’s new strategy reflects a deliberate effort to reimagine its role and relevance in responding to these challenges.

The 2026–2030 strategy positions the organisation to engage more deeply with emerging risks, strengthen its impact across Africa, and continue building pathways toward inclusive, sustainable peace. It signals a commitment not only to respond to today’s crises but to help shape resilient futures grounded in justice and reconciliation.



[DOWNLOAD THE STRATEGY HERE](#)

## Leadership Transition at the IJR



The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation announces that its Executive Director, Prof Cheryl Hendricks, has resigned effective 31 March 2026.

Prof Hendricks has guided the IJR with distinction and steadfast integrity. Her leadership has been characterised by intellectual depth and a resolute dedication to promoting justice, reconciliation, and democratic principles. During her tenure, the Institute expanded its footprint nationally, continentally, and internationally, strengthened key strategic alliances, and amplified its substantive reach and influence amid a complex global and regional landscape.

She will be stepping down in order to take up a new leadership position, as Head of the Nelson Mandela School of Governance at the University of Cape Town, which aligns with her professional path and ongoing contribution to the sector. Prof Hendricks has conveyed her deep appreciation for the privilege of serving the IJR and collaborating with its Board, staff, partners, and supporters. The Institute takes great pride in her accomplishments and is confident that she will continue to advance the values and commitments that defined her leadership at the IJR.

The IJR remains committed to its mission to foster just, democratic, peaceful, and inclusive societies.

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## IJR Calls for Pan-African Leadership and Inclusive Multilateralism at Diplomatic Briefing

The IJR hosted its Annual Review and Diplomatic Breakfast Meeting in Cape Town, on 11 February, the eve of South Africa's State of the Nation Address (SONA).

The engagement brought together diplomats, inter-governmental representatives, civil society leaders, researchers, academics and members of the South African-based diplomatic community to reflect on a year of impact and to consider pathways forward in an increasingly turbulent global context.

Opening the meeting, IJR Acting Board Chairperson Mr Lorenzo Davids emphasised the urgency of renewed global dialogue grounded in equity and respect. He noted that as the world navigates collapsing political, economic and social systems, there is an urgent need for deeper engagement with Africa.

"The world needs to talk and engage more with Africa," Davids said. "Even as we navigate through collapsing systems, we must ensure mutual respect for one another, with an equal seat at the table." Davids' remarks set the tone for the briefing, underscoring the importance of Pan-African perspectives in reshaping a global order that is increasingly marked by geopolitical rivalries, violent inter- and intra-state conflicts, economic fragmentation, climate crises, and the rapid, largely unregulated growth of artificial intelligence. These dynamics, participants noted, are straining the legitimacy and effectiveness of multilateral institutions established in the post-World War II era.

IJR Executive Director Professor Cheryl Hendricks followed with an overview of the organisation's impact and strategic direction. She highlighted IJR's work in enabling policy actors to integrate peacebuilding and governance research and practice into policy processes; engaging communities to demonstrate agency in addressing and transforming relationships in divided societies; and supporting stakeholders to implement transitional justice policies, programmes and processes across Africa and beyond.

Professor Hendricks also introduced IJR's renewed strategic focus, structured around four thematic ecosystems: **Reparative Justice; Democratic Governance; Trade, Peace and Regional Integration; and Just Energy Transitions and Natural Resource Management**. She noted that these interconnected areas reflect both the organisation's core mandate and the evolving challenges facing the continent and the global community.

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## Strengthening peace leadership in Southern Africa: The IJR Peace and Security Lab



Women and youth peacebuilders from across Southern Africa gathered in Johannesburg, South Africa from 9–11 March 2026 for a Peace and Security Lab hosted by IJR. The three-day event aimed to strengthen leadership, collaboration and policy engagement around the Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace and Security agendas across the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region.

Building on lessons, networks and momentum from the previous year's Peace and Security Labs, the 2026 edition brought together emerging leaders and practitioners working in peacebuilding across the region. The initiative sought to deepen participants' skills and support their contributions to inclusive peace and security processes in their respective countries.

Opening the lab, IJR Executive Director Cheryl Hendricks emphasised the importance of creating a supportive learning environment. She described the lab as a safe space for dialogue, reflection and knowledge sharing among participants from diverse backgrounds and contexts.

The programme, facilitated by Alison Lazarus, covered a wide range of themes related to leadership on peace and security. Participants came from Angola, Botswana, DRC, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The Peace and Security Lab forms part of ongoing efforts by the IJR to strengthen regional leadership and collaboration on WPS and YPS across Southern Africa.

## Three Events: One Urgent Conversation on Justice and Anti-Racism

In March, a series of three events brought renewed attention to the urgent need to confront racism within South Africa's constitutional democracy. Hosted during Anti-Racism Week and Human Rights Month, the programme was led by The Social Justice Agency in partnership with the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation and the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development.

The initiative, which combined two online dialogues and one in-person public event, created space for scholars, practitioners, and members of the public to engage critically on issues of justice, equality, and accountability.

The first webinar, held on 17 March, explored the theme "Anti-Racism vs. Non-Racism: What Does Anti-Racism Require in a Constitutional Democracy?" The discussion examined the distinction between passive non-racism and active anti-racism, highlighting the responsibilities of individuals and institutions in dismantling systemic inequality.

The second dialogue, convened on 19 March, focused on "The Constitution and Structural Racism: Reform, Reinforcement, or Reimagination?" Participants reflected on whether South Africa's constitutional framework remains sufficient to address deeply embedded racial inequalities or whether more transformative approaches are required.

The series culminated in an in-person Human Rights Day event on 21 March at the Camissa Museum, located at the Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town. The event featured a Slave Walk commemoration led by historian and heritage activist Patric Tariq Mellet. The walk traced the history and legacy of slavery in the Cape, offering participants a reflective and embodied engagement with the enduring impacts of historical injustice.

Together, the three events underscored the continued relevance of anti-racism work in South Africa and highlighted the importance of sustained dialogue and public engagement in advancing social justice. The programme reinforced a collective call for deeper accountability and action in building a more equitable society.



## Women's Faith and Development Seminar



On 5 March in Johannesburg, women church leaders convened for a dialogue focused on their role as agents of healing, transformation, and building a violence-free society. The engagement was hosted by the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and IJR partnered with the SACC.

The seminar formed part of ongoing efforts to strengthen women's leadership and builds on earlier engagements with women interfaith leaders in 2025. It aimed to deepen the role of women in promoting peace within communities and faith-based spaces.

Held at the Emseni Christian Centre, the gathering brought together women leaders from across the church sector, creating a platform for dialogue, collaboration, and shared learning, as well as solidarity with the global Thursdays in Black campaign and raising awareness against Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF).

Discussions emphasised that women are not only survivors of violence but also key drivers of healing, advocacy, and social transformation. Through reflections on leadership, advocacy, and personal experiences, participants explored the importance of strengthening women's voices in addressing violence and inequality.

A central theme that emerged was the importance of personal healing as a foundation for broader societal change. Participants highlighted that healing is critical not only for individual well-being but also for enabling women to lead effectively and contribute to building peaceful, resilient communities. The seminar also expanded the reach of Women, Peace and Security engagement within church networks, reinforcing the role of faith communities in fostering a culture of peace.

## Supporting regional pathways to transitional justice: IJR at IGAD validation workshop



On 5 February 2026, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), together with key regional and international partners, convened a Validation Workshop on the Draft IGAD Regional Framework for Transitional Justice at the African Union Commission (AUC) Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The workshop was held under the auspices of the Initiative for Transitional Justice in Africa (ITJA), a three-year programme supported by the European Union and the African Union, designed to facilitate the domestic application of the African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP) across the continent.

Prof Tim Murithi, Senior Advisor at the IJR, represented the organisation and delivered a presentation on transitional justice during the validation discussions. His contribution formed part of the broader dialogue on how regional institutions can support effective justice and reconciliation processes in post-conflict and transitioning societies.

The development of the IGAD Regional Framework for Transitional Justice represents a significant step toward integrated and collective regional responses to addressing past injustices, moving beyond approaches that rely solely on individual state efforts.

The IJR plays an active role in advancing transitional justice across Africa through research, policy engagement, and technical expertise. By contributing to regional initiatives such as the IGAD framework and supporting the implementation of the African Union Transitional Justice Policy, IJR works with regional bodies, governments, and civil society partners to strengthen inclusive approaches to justice, reconciliation, and sustainable peace.

# A Continent at the Centre of Global Change



**By Dr Tamuka Chekero**  
**Research Associate, Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria**

In recent years, Africa has moved from the periphery of global strategy to its centre. Once framed mainly through development challenges or humanitarian crises, the continent is now widely viewed as a decisive arena in 21st-century geopolitics. Major global powers are expanding their economic partnerships, diplomatic engagement, and security cooperation across African states—not simply out of goodwill, but because Africa's markets, resources, demographics, and strategic geography matter enormously for the future world order. This growing competition is not a return to old colonial patterns, nor is it a simple rivalry between two superpowers. Instead, it reflects a more complex, multipolar environment in which multiple actors pursue influence through investment, infrastructure, trade, and political relationships. Understanding this competition helps explain Africa's changing global role and the shift in international power.

## Why Africa Matters More Than Ever

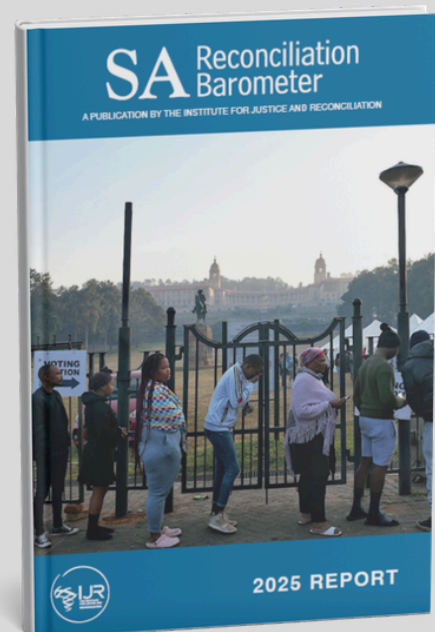
Several structural factors explain Africa's rising geopolitical significance. First, demographics. Africa is the world's fastest-growing population centre, with a rapidly expanding workforce and consumer base. For global investors and governments alike, this represents both an economic opportunity and a strategic partnership prospect.

Second, natural resources. Many African countries hold critical minerals essential to modern technology, including cobalt, lithium, rare-earth elements, and platinum. These materials are indispensable for renewable energy systems, electronics manufacturing, and advanced industrial production. Russia, the US, and China each reflect distinct ways of linking security engagement with resource access. Securing stable access to such resources is now a central concern of global economic strategy. [READ MORE >](#)

# South African Reconciliation Barometer Survey: 2025 Report

The 2025 South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) was conducted one year into the first term of the Government of National Unity (GNU), following the African National Congress's (ANC) loss of its outright majority in the 2024 national elections. This represented a historic shift from single-party dominance to a multiparty national coalition. Acceptance of the 2024 election results after a spate of political violence affirmed citizens' enduring commitment to constitutional democracy and national reconciliation. However, the survey found that public attitudes remained broadly similar to those in 2023: South Africans continued to report low confidence in political leaders and institutions, modest assessments of change since 1994, and deep concern about poverty, inequality and exclusion.

Across the Barometer's six dimensions, results pointed to persistent structural and social fault lines. Confidence in political parties and many public institutions remained low and external political efficacy was weak. Many South Africans felt that national leaders neither listen to nor act in the interests of ordinary people. Socio-economic exclusion remained a central concern: levels of lived poverty were high, black South Africans continued to experience significantly greater deprivation than white South Africans, and relatively few people believed that job opportunities, economic inequality or their own household and financial circumstances had improved.



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# We are Hiring

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## Executive Director

The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) is seeking an Executive Director to lead one of the continent's premier pan-African think tanks. The Executive Director provides institutional leadership and strategic vision to the organisation. He/She/They will drive the realisation of the organisation's new 5-year strategic plan, and ensure the long-term sustainability and relevance of the Institute.

The role requires a visionary leader with strong administrative and fundraising skills who can advance IJR's reputation as a leading voice in transitional justice, reconciliation, and peacebuilding across Africa and in transitional societies globally.

 The deadline for applications is close of business on 15 April 2026  
 Visit us at: [www.ijr.org.za](http://www.ijr.org.za)

### Contact Us

 [vacancies@ijr.org.za](mailto:vacancies@ijr.org.za)

## Help Make a Difference Today! Support the Work of the IJR

At the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, we are committed to supporting the building of fair, inclusive, democratic and peaceful societies across Africa.

Our work bridges the gap between grassroots action, evidence-based research, and policy advocacy, ensuring that healing, justice, and accountability are not just ideals, but lived realities. Join us in making transitional justice, peace and reconciliation a lived experience for all.

To make a contribution of your choice, visit:

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