



MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE
FOR COMPARATIVE PUBLIC LAW
AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

Human Rights: Rising under Distress? The African Court at 20

Workshop, 14 October 2026

Max Planck Institute, Heidelberg

in cooperation with Wits University, Johannesburg

Call for Engaged Listeners

To mark the 20th anniversary of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law is hosting a one-day workshop on Thursday, 14 October 2026. The Workshop will zoom in on the paradox of two simultaneous developments in human rights law: on the one hand, the African Court and other human rights courts have handed down judgments expanding the geographic, temporal, and social scope of human rights. Examples include cases on the extraterritorial scope of human rights, intergenerational justice, diversity, the rule of law, and the rights of nature. On the other hand, the African Court and other human rights institutions are increasingly under distress. Member states, political movements and societal groups reject human rights controls of specific domestic or international policies. The significance of human rights for international relations might be changing.

The workshop has the aim of mapping these diverging developments and the role of the African Court in this context. Moreover, the ambition is to analyze the driving factors behind the expansion of human rights and the backlashes against them. For this purpose, the workshop takes a trans-continental angle that brings together African with European perspectives with the goal of mutual learning. A preliminary program is below.

A limited number of places are available for engaged listeners, who will participate in the workshop as audience members. The organisers would like to extend a warm invitation to participate to all those with an interest in the topics to be discussed, in particular human rights, African constitutional and international legal developments, and African-European relations.

If you are interested in participating in the workshop as an engaged listener, please send an **application** with a short letter of motivation (maximum 400 words) explaining your interest in the workshop together with an up-to-date CV to Ms Rocío Bargón Sánchez via office-aust@mpil.de by **15 September 2026**. We particularly welcome applications from early-career scholars, including current doctoral students, and from scholars working in institutions in the global south. Successful applicants will be notified by 20 September the latest.

Participation in the workshop is free of charge, but will in general be at the expense of the participant. Admitted engaged listeners will need to cover the costs of their own accommodation and to arrange their own travel, and are strongly advised to do this early.

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Preliminary Program

09:00 Welcome remarks:

Prof. Helmut Aust (Director, Max Planck Institute), Prof. Marius Pieterse (Wits U)

Session 1: Human Rights Rising under Distress

09:30 Panel 1: Intersectionality and plurality

- President Tchikaya (African Court)
- Commissioner Salla-Njie (African Commission)
- Prof. Nkhata Murungi (U Pretoria)
- Prof. Emanuel Towfigh (MPIL and EBS University)

11:00 Coffee and tea

11:30 Panel 2: Places and displacement

- Prof. Marius Pieterse (Wits U)
- Felipe Mesel (ESCR-Net)
- Ruth Ogbewekon (PALU)
- Prof. Helmut Aust (MPIL)

13:00 Lunch

Session 2: Human Rights Institutions Rising under Distress

14:00 Panel 3: The African Court and other regional institutions

- Dr. Mwiza Nkhata (African Court)
- Prof. Manisuli Ssenyonjo (U Hertfordshire)
- Prof. Hélène Tigroudja (U Aix, Human Rights Committee)
- Prof. Frans Viljoen (U Pretoria)

15:30 Coffee and tea

16:00 Panel 4: The African Court and domestic institutions

- Prof. Lilian Chenwi (Wits U)
- Prof. Trésor Muhindo Makunya (U Goma)
- Prof. Christopher Gevers (Wits U)
- Judge Prof. Vasilika Sancin (European Court of Human Rights)

17:30 End of workshop at MPIL, transfer to DAI

19:00 Public Panel at DAI (German American Institute): Courts at a Crossroads

- Welcome: Prof. Helmut Aust (MPIL)
- President Prof. Blaise Tchikaya (African Court)
- Vice-President Prof. Ann-Kathrin Kaufhold (German Constitutional Court)
- Judge Prof. Anja Seibert-Fohr (European Court of Human Rights)
- Moderation: Prof. Matthias Goldmann (MPIL and EBS University)