

## **Protecting women and children – top on the agenda for women in law**

Leading women in the judiciary discuss matters affecting society today

The Faculty of Law in collaboration with the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ) hosted a gala dinner with the theme: ‘Protect a woman, protect a child’ on 14 February 2015 at the UFS Centenary Complex.

In attendance were leading South African women judges and members of the IAWJ’s Justices: Halima Sulduker of the Supreme Court of Appeal, Connie Mocumi of the Free State High Court, and Soma Naidoo of the Free State High Court . The UFS was represented by the Dean of the Faculty of Law, Prof Caroline Nicholson and other senior faculty members. The keynote address was presented by Prof Beatri Kruger.

The title of the keynote speech, ‘Killing human trafficking in South Africa: chaos, challenges and celebrations’, was inspired by the extensive research which Prof Kruger has been doing over recent years on human trafficking. “Human trafficking is not just another crime; it is complex, multi-layered and extends over international borders and continents. It is often disguised and has many faces –from trafficking for labour to sexual exploitation; mutilation of body parts, forced marriages, drug couriership; the list is endless. New forms of human trafficking are revealed continuously,” she said.

Prof Kruger says that many challenges are encountered in combating human trafficking. One important obstacle is that South Africa still does not have comprehensive counter-trafficking legislation in place. Thus traffickers ply their trade with impunity. New research has also exposed new methods with which traffickers silence their victims, such as the use of ‘Juju’ or ‘black magic’. Consequently, expert knowledge and training is needed to identify victims.

Despite this rather dark picture, a number of prosecution successes can indeed be celebrated. Stringent punishment of up to life imprisonment was imposed on convicted traffickers. Recently, a landmark sentence was handed down where a 62-year-old trafficker was sentenced to eight life-terms for human trafficking and rape. Joining forces and working in partnerships is part of the success recipe for addressing human trafficking effectively. Every member of the community has a role to play in eradicating this crime.

Members of the IAWJ have worked tirelessly over the years on tackling the plight of women in South Africa. Some members are international leaders in the fight against parental international child abduction, while others are concerned with issues of race and gender or are members of the National Bar Examinations Board of South Africa.