

Twenty years of human rights - a call for reflection on the successes and challenges

The SAHRC and Faculty of Law collaborate in building a stronger law-abiding society

The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), the Faculty of Law, and the Free State Department of Education hosted a gala dinner on 19 February 2015 to celebrate the launching of the Free State Provincial Division of the SAHRC, reaffirming their collaborative partnership, and confirming the commitment of the Free State Department of Education to community engagement, constitutional rights awareness, and youth advocacy.

The number of human rights abuses reported to the Human Rights Commission in recent years points to the complex nature of the challenges faced by South African communities. What is most disturbing is that the overwhelming majority of these offences are perpetrated by the youth, said Adv Lawrence Moshwana, Chairperson of the South African Human Rights Commission. "The Human Rights Commission is in need of support from government in order to be able to reach all provinces of South Africa". The expansion of the commission's services in the Free State and its partnership with the Provincial Department of Education is a great step towards protecting the rights of the most vulnerable communities.

The Dean of the Faculty of Law, Prof Caroline Nicholson, said: "The Faculty of Law is in an exciting phase and has re-dedicated itself to a transformation agenda that is not only internal but that is also contributing to the transformation agenda of the country, both nationally and internationally." She elaborated on the intense training which law students undergo, and the commitment of the faculty to Community Service Learning (CSL), a new component in the law curriculum that will aid students in developing their ability to cooperate effectively with others in society, and to identify legal problems in the community through critical and creative thinking, among other things.

In the twenty years of democracy and human rights, there are still challenges and achievements, to be assessed and solutions to be implemented, said Judge President of the Free State, Justice Mahube Molemela. "Gender transformation in the judiciary has come a long way with 35% black female judges in the country. However, more needs to be done to improve the gender balance," she said. The challenge of corruption in the public sector and gratuitous violence in communities has come to overshadow the achievements of the past twenty years. The Judge President said taking action by instilling active citizenry, reporting crime, and protecting the rights of vulnerable and minority populations will go a long way in creating a better society for all who live in South Africa.

The SAHRC Commissioner for the Free State, Adv Mohamed Ameermia, awarded certificates to three Law students who were the outstanding achievers in the 2014 Kovsie First-year Moot Court competition, which was held in Bloemfontein. He acknowledged especially the support of Adv Fischer and Adv Boonzaaier, who presided over the competition and the judging process.