



***Researching International Human Rights Law:
Current Challenges and Opportunities***

TRAINING PROPOSAL

Training Content

The International Justice Resource Center (IJRC), together with the Institute for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (IHRDA) and the Initiative for Strategic Litigation in Africa (ISLA), propose providing a 90-minute presentation on the sidelines of the November 2017 session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, to share updated tools and strategies for conducting research in international human rights law. The presentation will take place on 30 October 2017 at the Kairaba Beach Hotel in Banjul, The Gambia.

This joint training would principally focus on conducting research on multiple sources of law in the regional (African, European, and Inter-American) and universal (United Nations) human rights systems. For each system, the presenters will provide brief explanations of the general structure of the system and demonstrate how to find official versions of treaties and the up-to-date ratification status of treaties, declarations and resolutions, specific decisions and judgments in the relevant body of jurisprudence, other opinions and sources of soft law, and documents on State implementation if available. One of the principal tools in this regard is IHRDA's Case Law Analyser, which will be discussed in detail.

The training will also cover legal databases on particular issue areas, such as freedom of expression and children's rights, and additional select databases of national law and jurisprudence.

Because there is no one centralized database of human rights law, conducting research in international human rights law is a labor-intensive exercise that requires using multiple databases, each with its own limitations. The presenters will explain the utility and limitations of each of the major databases that are best for researching treaties, case law, and other sources of law.

The final portion of the training will use a case study to take participants through the steps of an effective research strategy, illustrating the considerations, challenges, and outcomes of using online databases.

Purpose and Goals

The purpose of the training is to build the capacity of the lawyers, advocates, and other stakeholders present to be able to productively and efficiently conduct the research necessary to identify, understand, and marshal the legal norms and interpretations that might protect the human rights of the individuals and communities they represent.

By the end of the training, each attendee will have the foundational knowledge necessary to efficiently find accurate information on treaties, case law, and other sources of law in each of the major human rights systems. Each attendee will not only learn about databases or research tips relevant to the human rights systems in which they already work - most likely in the African and Universal systems - but also learn the best databases for research in other jurisdictions, such as the Inter-American and European Systems, for a more holistic approach to using international human rights law.

In light of the gaps and inconsistencies in many of the available databases, it is particularly important that human rights lawyers and advocates take a strategic approach to their legal research. This training will flag the potential pitfalls of online research and help ensure that their research methods yield complete and up-to-date information.

Agenda

1. Review of Online Research Tools (40 minutes)
 - a. Treaty Texts
 - b. Soft law, Resolutions, and Declarations
 - c. Judgments and Decisions
 - i. Mixed and Thematic Databases
 - ii. United Nations
 - iii. Regional Systems
 - d. Implementation
2. Case Law Analyser in Depth (20 minutes)
3. Case Study Demonstration (20 minutes)
4. Questions and Answers (10 minutes)

Presenters

Lisa Reinsberg, Executive Director of the International Justice Resource Center, will introduce and explain the various databases for conducting comparative and international legal research.

Gaye Sowe, Executive Director of the Institute for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa, will explain in closer detail the contents and functionality of the Case Law Analyser.

Sibongile Ndashe, Executive Director of the Initiative for Strategic Litigation in Africa will lead participants through a case study to demonstrate the practical considerations in conducting online legal research.

Brittany West, Staff Attorney with the International Justice Resource Center, will moderate the panel and discussion.

Materials

The sponsoring organizations will prepare and provide copies of materials including IJRC's [*Researching International Human Rights Law*](#) for the attendees of the session. *Researching International Human Rights Law* is a guide for advocates and victims on available databases with links and notes on the challenges of each database. IJRC staff will also demonstrate how to locate comprehensive research guidance on IJRC's website and how to contact IJRC with requests for assistance.

Other IJRC resources will also be available for the attendees both through IJRC’s website and on USB drives. These resources will include IJRC’s [Advocacy before the African Human Rights System: Manual for Attorneys and Advocates \(2016\)](#) and a “Human Rights 101” packet with brief explanations of the different human rights systems and factsheets on applicable international human rights standards for each country that is a Member of the African Union.

Sponsoring Organizations

IJRC is uniquely positioned to be able to share resources and knowledge on conducting effective research in international human rights law. IJRC’s mission is to empower victims and advocates through the availability of necessary information, tools, and trainings so that they may approach and use international human rights bodies and law in their own advocacy. To this end, IJRC has developed comprehensive [resources](#) to guide advocates and victims in their research. Additionally, IJRC has experience providing trainings on [conducting research](#) in international human rights law and on [substantive areas](#) of international law.

IHRDA is dedicated to defending victims of human rights violations, providing education on human rights standards, and disseminating information about the African human rights system. Its work includes managing the African Human Rights Case Law Analyser, a uniquely valuable database of decisions from the African human rights bodies and sub-regional courts. Through its capacity building work, IHRDA is an active and visible promoter of effective engagement with the African human rights protections.

ISLA is building a community of social justice lawyers equipped to use the rule of law and national and regional courts to protect human rights, with a particular focus on women’s rights and sexual rights. Through strategic litigation and intensive knowledge sharing with partners, ISLA aims to build local capacity to use the law for social change.