

SLSJ

Annual National Seminar Report 2014



Globalised (In)justice

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Figure 0.1 Discussing the role of the law today at the fireside

Institutional Background and Objectives

SLSJ was launched by students in 2007 as a seminar-based forum for engaging law students on central issues of legal and socio-economic concern. In 2008, SLSJ became a national organization, fostering networking, dialogue and activism between the Universities of Cape Town, Western Cape, Fort Hare, KwaZulu-Natal and the North West. Since 2010, our membership has increased to include the Universities of Stellenbosch, Witwatersrand, Free State NWU-Potchefstroom and Walter Sisulu. SLSJ acts as an interface between students, legal activists, public interest law practitioners, and civil society Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). The highlight of our calendar is the annual weekend seminar, which brings together legal activists, academics and leaders of the bench and civil society to share their ideas, concerns and experiences on current and relevant matters with between 200-300 students from across the country.

Through the facilitation of discussion and debate, these seminars have stimulated the growth of young lawyers and leaders in South Africa who are committed to furthering human rights, social justice and social transformation. The objective is to explore the manner in which law, politics and society interact, as well as the law's potential as a mechanism for social change. The seminar has also traditionally been the recruitment ground for new members and has provided the impetus for the development of new branches across the country. . We hope to continue these trends in the years to come.

Seminar 2014

Background

The annual SLSJ seminar is used as a platform to give delegates a more holistic conception of the law than is generally achieved at law school, through discussion of current issues in the legal, political and social spheres. The objective is to explore the way in which law, politics and society interact, as well as the law's potential as a mechanism for social change. It is also intended to encourage a sense of social responsibility amongst the delegates and to catalyse participation as active members of civil society; and perhaps most importantly, to go back to their respective universities and impart the skills and knowledge gained to fellow students.

This year's seminar was held on the weekend of the 15-17 August in Onrus near Hermanus. Because of the success of previous seminars, and the increase in number of branches, we hosted 250 students over two nights. The main aims of the seminar included learning about the challenges facing our world, continent and country, and about how a progressive rule of law can underpin development and social

transformation and to lead students across South Africa to engage in legal and organising work to build social justice. The main outcome of the seminar was to help fulfil in a small way our vision of building a national students' social movement, based on the promotion of human rights and the use of law to create a more equal society.

Participants



SLSJ has eleven University branches across the country. Invitations were extended to all branches. Universities from outside the Western Cape were allotted 20 available spaces, and those from within the Western Cape, 30. This means that there were 250 students present in total. This was done to minimise costs while maximising representation. With our drive to get people involved as much as was possible, we attracted students from outside of our branches too. Participants who attended this year's Seminar were aged 18 – 30 years and came from the following Universities:

- University of Cape Town
- University of the Western Cape
- University of Stellenbosch
- North West University – Mafikeng
- North West University - Potchefstroom
- University of Fort Hare

- Walter Sisulu University
- University of the Witwatersrand
- University of Kwa-Zulu Natal- Howard College
- University of Kwa-Zulu Natal- Pietermaritzburg
- University of The Free State
- Varsity College Pretoria, Rhodes University and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University sent representatives with the intention of starting their own branch on their return to their University.

There were 25 speakers who attended the seminar. Some of our distinguished speakers included Prof Karl Klare, Justice Yacoob, Commissioner Ameerma and Deputy Minister of Justice John Jeffery amongst others. They came from practice, academics, politics and activism and specialised in such diverse fields as environmental law, human rights, competition law, intellectual property, civil society, politics and economics.



Figure 3 Answering questions during a breakaway session

Seminar Theme and programme

The primary focus of the SLSJ national seminar for 2014 was to place the topical issues which we have been discussing at seminars over the years within a global context, and looking at similar problems and possible solutions implemented abroad, as well as issues that touch us specifically because we live in a globalised world. We also looked at the conciliation process after twenty years of democracy and the progress made here, as well as hard conciliation processes in other parts of the world. We developed a programme for 2014 which is relevant, provocative and challenging. In an attempt to keep the seminar relevant and topical within a continuously more globalised world, while keeping the subject matter in line with the activities and campaigns of the broader organisation, the theme of this year's seminar was 'Globalised (In)justice'. Some of the topics that were addressed include the legal profession and legal education in a global context, privacy in a digital age, the ongoing crisis in Israel, environmental issues and the role of patent law in the debate around genetic modification of food and generic medicines.

Figure 0.3 The seminar logo



Seminar committee

The Seminar Organising Committee for this year's seminar was composed of seven students who volunteered from the three Western Cape Universities. The Western Cape was chosen in December 2013 to host the seminar. Students from the Universities of Stellenbosch, Cape Town and Western Cape constituted the seminar committee. There was a mix of skills and

experiences on the committee which enabled us to achieve what would not have been possible without the contribution of each of these people. We also involved the SLSJ employee and national treasurer who have both previously been involved in organising seminars. Their experience, advice and prompt replies to queries were invaluable. Finally, one of the SLSJ fellows at Section27 also helped with researching and identifying interesting topics for the seminar. The following people composed the Seminar committee for 2014:

Name	Position	Email
Elsabé Boshoff	Seminar Chair	elsabe.us@gmail.com
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Tawana Nharingo	SLSJ-Section27 Fellow	nharingo@section27.org.za

Successes and lessons learnt

This seminar's committee started with a bit of a disadvantage, in that I was only voted in as seminar chair in December, and thus could only get a committee together from the three Western Cape branches by the end of February. This meant that everything happened a bit later than originally anticipated and we had limited time to contact sponsors and to work out the content of the programme before starting to contact speakers. It also meant that funds were only paid out to us very close to the seminar itself, which meant that our caterers, sound technicians, venue and travel agent had to wait some time before being paid. We are very grateful for their patience and help in this regard.

At the outset, we knew we were being ambitious, and the idea of having to raise close to R1million was daunting. Although we had one member on the committee who had previously been part of the committee, we had only six months to get everything done. To do this, we approached 45 potential funding partners. In the end we were lucky in that we were able to cover most of our expenses with four big sponsorships. One of the biggest successes is thus that we were able to raise enough financial support to make the event possible.

Ensuring communication with the branches is vital. This year, because of structural problems relating to changes in the National Executive Committee, we did not have continuous

communication with the branches and some of the branches did not receive some of the important information until very late. However, because of my great team we were able to ensure that issues with flights and other transport arrangements were sorted out in time.

Something that we found particularly frustrating is the fact that you simply cannot please everyone. The organisation is diverse in its membership, and has an alumni base spread thorough the country in almost all walks of life. In the planning stages, and even during the event, lots of people are very excited to get involved, but often having to please too many opinions and suggestions proves complicated. We also were not able to host the seminar on a long weekend as in previous years because of university schedules, and thus were only able to fit in a limited number of topics.



Figure 0.5 Madiba commemoration on the beach

A highlight of the weekend was the Madiba commemoration ceremony which was held on the beach on the Friday night. There was a great vibe of unity amongst all the students and we were able to come together and remember a man who fought for the same values and changes that we as an organisation continue to strive towards.

To the hundreds of students and speakers who joined us for the Seminar, in whichever capacity, I thank you for your participation which enabled us to make a great success of yet another seminar. The material covered was topical, relevant and made for very healthy and spirited debate. Reviews the committee has received after the fact have all been incredibly positive. Students left the weekend inspired to continue striving to uphold the ethos of the organisation. They left appreciating that the law is a tool for change and that they are entitled to wield it.

Feedback from attendees

Some feedback from the speakers and students who attended the seminar:

Justice Zak Yacoob

"It was an absolute pleasure to be there. It was particularly rewarding to see the young enthusiasm for real justice."

Human Rights Commissioner Ameerma

"It was indeed a great pleasure and privilege to be invited to your seminar. I am glad that I have added value to the success of your efforts in fostering and promoting an important platform for discourses of this nature. Keep up the good work and congratulations to you and your team for a wonderful event."

An anonymous speaker on the feedback survey:

"The topics were very good and thought provoking. I also liked the fact that the students who attended are from diverse backgrounds and represent the reality of what South Africa looks like."

Figure 6 Speakers addressing the students during the fireside discussion



Isabeau Steytler – Stellenbosch Branch Chairperson

“It’s always incredible to see such a diverse group of students brought together by their shared interest in social justice. We also held a very special commemorative service on Onrus beach, lighting lanterns in honour of Nelson Mandela.”

Moving forward

Because of the little time available to our committee, it was suggested that the new seminar chairperson be elected earlier in the year, with the result that the current seminar chairperson for 2015 was voted in during October 2014. The next seminar will be held in the Eastern Cape. For the next seminar we would like to have our sponsors more involved in the seminar itself, possibly sending representatives to enjoy this great event with us.

After the conference we sent out a survey to the delegates as well as the speakers to get some feedback on what they enjoyed, what they think could be improved and any suggestions for following seminars. Some of the important suggestions included that students be given a chance to present papers, rather than just speakers from the outside. It was also suggested that more time be given to debate after each session, as there was always more questions and comments than we had time for. The general feeling from the feedback was that students and speakers had a positive experience of the seminar, and that many of them look forward to attending the seminar in 2015.

Special thanks

We would like to thank all our sponsors:

- **Open Society Foundation South Africa**
- **Claud Leon Foundation**
- **Section27**
- **Juta Law Publishers**

This seminar would not have been possible without your contribution. Without the financial and other support offered by the funders and partners, the Seminar would not have been the resounding success it was! I would also like to thank all of those who sacrificed their time to assist the committee in putting together the Seminar, from its conception through to execution, there are too many to name. Lastly and definitely not least importantly, I would like to thank the entire committee for the tireless dedication displayed throughout the whole process. Working with a team so dedicated really makes any event a success!