



The Right to Benefit from Scientific Progress

Visiting Professor Fons Coomans, Centre for Human Rights, Maastricht University

Date: 4 March 2014

Time: 12h00 to 14h00 (a light lunch will be served)

Venue: Seminar Room 1, Falmouth building, UCT Health Sciences Faculty

The Learning Network for Health and Human Rights will be hosting Professor Fons Coomans in the first week of March on a research visit. Professor Coomans is a leading academic in the field of human rights (see abbreviated CV attached).

He will be leading a discussion on how to operationalise the right to benefit from scientific progress, which is one of the rights contained in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Right, but which is also one of the least explored in the rights field. For higher education institutions, whose business is about creating new knowledge and training a new generation of teachers and researchers who will use and explore new knowledge, the relevance of this right looms large. Furthermore, for healthcare, the benefits of scientific advancement are critical for improving health but are often unattainable for those with the least power in society. New drugs, desperately needed for neglected diseases, may take decades to develop, and even when developed, may take further decades before they come on to the market in ways that enable those most in need to access these drugs and technologies. And for populations of many developing countries, whose traditional knowledge is under threat from private bioprospecting seeking to patent traditional knowledge and resources, ensuring that scientific progress benefits rather than disempowers marginal populations is a key challenge. For this reason, the right to benefit from scientific progress is a critical one for the health system.

The Learning Network for Health and Human Rights¹ in the School of Public Health and Family Medicine at the University of Cape Town will host an open discussion, which will be led by Professor Fons Coomans. The purpose is to brainstorm how this right can be operationalised to achieve the objectives implied in a rights-based approach, and will build on a previous discussion hosted by the Learning Network in March 2013.

Please RSVP to Kanya Mdaka: 021 406 6978 or kanya.mdaka@uct.ac.za

¹ The Learning Network for Health and Human Rights is a collaboration of 5 Civil Society Organisations and three University research groups working to identify best practice for realising the Right to Health. The participants are the Cape Metropolitan Healthcare Forum, Epilepsy South Africa (W Cape branch), Ikamva Labantu, The Women's Circle (TWC) and Women on Farms Project (WFP). The participating universities involve the University of Cape Town, the University of the Western Cape, Maastricht University and Warwick University.

Abbreviated CV: Professor Fons Coomans

Professor Coomans (1956) studied political science, especially international relations and international law at the University of Amsterdam. In 1992 he received a PhD degree from Maastricht University. He has been employed by Maastricht University since 1985. Currently he holds the UNESCO Chair in Human Rights and Peace at the Department of International and European Law at Maastricht University. He teaches international human rights law at the School of Law. He is the coordinator of the Maastricht Centre for Human Rights, and Senior Researcher at the Netherlands School of Human Rights Research. His fields of research include the international protection of economic, social and cultural rights in general and the right to education, health and food in particular, as well as international monitoring mechanisms in the field of human rights. He is the coordinator of the courses on economic, social and cultural rights of the European Masters Degree in Human Rights and Democratisation in Venice (Italy). He has also taught at the universities of Utrecht, Sarajevo, Pretoria, Lund, Galway, Denpasar (Bali), Cape Town and Venda. He has worked as a consultant for UNESCO and an adviser for FIAN (Food First Information and Action Network). He is a member of the Netherlands section of the International Commission of Jurists (NJCM). He has a special interest in the extraterritorial application of human rights treaties providing for social, economic and cultural rights. He was a member of the Steering Committee of the Consortium on Extraterritorial Obligations (ETO's) which is a network of academia, national human rights institutes, NGO's and CSO's that has been working on this subject since 2007. This consortium has prepared the development of the Maastricht Principles on the Extraterritorial Obligations in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. These were adopted as the outcome of an expert meeting which took place from 26-28 September 2011 at Maastricht University. Since 2008 he has been involved in research cooperation between Maastricht University and the University of Cape Town as part of the Learning Network for Health and Human Rights funded by the South African – Netherlands Projects on Alternative Development (SANPAD). This collaboration is focused on, *inter alia*, researching health issues by using an interdisciplinary human rights based approach.

For an overview of his publications please visit:

http://um-web2085.unimaas.nl:7777/metis/pk_apa_n.results?p_url_id=4075&p_onderzoekernummer=1013344