

WEBINAR: CONCEPT OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Tuesday, 30 March 2021 - 10h00 (English)

- Acting Public Protector of South Africa – Advocate Kholeka Gcaleka (*standing in for the Chairperson of the African Ombudsman Research Centre (AORC) Board; President of African Ombudsman and Mediators' Association (AOMA) and Public Protector of South Africa – Advocate Busisiwe Mkhwebane*)
- Dean and Head of the UKZN School of Law and member of the African Ombudsman Research Centre (AORC) board – Professor Managay Reddi

Our esteemed panel:

- Ombudsman of Kenya and General Secretary of AOMA - Honourable Florence Kajuju
- Ombudsman of Bermuda – Ms Victoria Pearman, JP
- Ombudsman of Ontario, Canada - Mr Paul Dubé
- Chief Commissioner (Ombudsman) of Nigeria - Honourable Chille Wagner Igbawua
- Excellencies and Honourable Ombudsman who are able to join us
- Distinguished participants/guests
- Members of the media

Greetings Senior Colleagues,

My name is Brian McArthur, and as Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Head of the College of Law and Management Studies, it is my absolute pleasure to present the welcome message.

It is my privilege, on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor and Council of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, to welcome you to the third webinar for 2021 of the AORC in which the concept of the Ombudsman will be discussed extensively by our esteemed panel.

One might be puzzled as to why we as the African Ombudsman Research Centre and as members of the African Ombudsman and Mediators' Association are deliberating on such an obvious topic. From time to time AORC, the research and training arm of the AOMA, conducts a needs assessment to ascertain the training and capacity development required by members in order to deliver on their mandate to support and strengthen constitutional democracy across the continent. This particular topic was identified as one of the training needs, hence, the theme of today's discussion.

It is important for institutions such as ours to pause from our daily routine and reflect on the relevance of our existence and what we can do to improve the way we deliver our mandate in order to prevent complacency.

In general, the common role of Ombudsmen in various jurisdictions is to conduct independent investigations on behalf of the complainants who feel aggrieved by government entities as well as private companies in some instances. Ombudsmen also provide oversight and ensure that the rights of citizens are protected and hold the public sector accountable for the delivery of services in a fair and transparent manner.

In South Africa, for example, the work of the Office of the Public Protector has culminated in significant investigations, including the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture chaired by our Deputy Chief Justice Zondo. Just a few weeks ago, Honourable Florence Kajuju intervened in a dispute between students at Moi University and the Higher Education Loans Board where she directed the Loans Board to urgently disburse loans to university students. In other member states, health ministries have been investigated for maladministration of the provision of healthcare services which has led to disabilities and even deaths of vulnerable citizens.

These few examples demonstrate the great strides achieved by the existence of Ombudsmen in our communities. However, it would be advantageous for the Ombudsman Institutions, in partnership with public and private entities, to devise proactive strategies aimed at reducing the volume of cases to be investigated so that focus could be directed to other important nation building projects. I am very interested to hear success cases where such strategies have been implemented so that we can all draw best practice from our counterparts. I look forward to hearing our esteemed panel share with us their perspectives and understanding of the Concept of the Ombudsman and how the Institution can be used as a tool to strengthen government institutions to be an efficient service that is responsible and responsive to the needs of the citizens.

With these few words, I welcome you to the third webinar of the AORC in 2021.

It is my pleasure to hand over to Advocate Gcaleka, who will now formally welcome you on behalf of the Chairperson of AORC.

Thank you.