

CONCEPT NOTE

2025 Joint Symposium

BETWEEN LEGACY AND LODESTONE

NAMIBIA'S CONSTITUTION AMIDST REFLECTION, REFORM AND RENEWAL

Navigating Constitutional Evolution in an Era of Transformation

14-15 August 2025

1. Conference overview

As Namibia traverses the profound threshold of its 35th year of constitutional democracy, we find ourselves at an extraordinary historical confluence that demands both crystallizing reflection and forward-looking introspection. The passing of Founding President Dr. Sam Shafiishuna Nujoma on February 8th this year—occurring, with pregnant symbolic resonance, mere hours before Constitution Day—engenders a watershed moment for reimagining constitutional discourse and reform. This meaningful convergence invites us to thoroughly examine Namibia's constitutional journey and its future trajectory.

The School of Law at the University of Namibia (UNAM), in collaboration with the African Network of Constitutional Lawyers (ANCL) and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, announces a landmark international conference to be held on **August 14-15, 2025**, at the Casa Blanca Boutique Hotel in Windhoek, Namibia.

2. Background and rationale

The timing of this Conference embodies crystalline historical significance. Empirical research has established that the life expectancy of a national constitution averages 19 years globally, extends to 32 years in Europe, yet diminishes to merely 10 years in Africa.¹ That Namibia's Constitution has not only endured but evolved through 35 years of implementation represents a rare milestone worthy of scholarly contemplation, cross-country parallels, and critical analysis.

This milestone arrives at a crucial moment in global constitutional discourse. The rise of authoritarianism in much of the world and populism in Western democracies, exemplified by political developments in various nations, has sparked renewed debate about constitutional resilience and democratic safeguards. At the same time, Namibia faces its own constellation of crises that test its constitutional paradigm:

- Economic crises: The recession (2016-2021), the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (2019-2021), and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis;

¹ Zachary Elkins, Tom Ginsburg, and James Melton *The Endurance of National Constitutions* (Cambridge University Press 2009).

- Socio-economic tensions: Namibia's rank as the world's second most unequal society in terms of income disparities, and severe unemployment;
- Social issues: the plight of approximately 900,000 people (about one-third of Namibia's population) who reside in informal settlements, and debates over the rights of members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ+) community; and
- Governance abuses: High-profile corruption cases, including the SME bank and Fishrot scandals.

These adversities, coupled with the symbolic transition marked by the passing of both Founding President Nujoma in February this year and President Dr. Hage Geingob the same month the year prior, create the urgent necessity of constitutional soul-searching and reform discourse.

3. Conference aims and objectives

This Conference pursues a dual aim:

1. to propose concrete constitutional reforms to key stakeholders (particularly policy- and law-makers) for strengthening constitutionalism in Namibia specifically and Africa generally, and
2. to reflect on and celebrate the constitutional legacies of Founding President Dr. Sam S. Nujoma, whom we may justifiably call "the Father of Namibian Constitutionalism", and President Dr. Hage G. Geingob, Namibia's longest-serving Prime Minister and Chairman of the Constituent Assembly that drafted the Namibian Constitution at a pivotal moment in Namibia's transition to democracy.

Specific objectives include:

- to synthesize knowledge: Integrate insights from diverse disciplines to put forth comprehensive reforms;
- to impact policy: Formulate useful and actionable recommendations for reforming the Namibian Constitution or constitutions in Africa;
- to document history: Chronicle and draw lessons from Namibia's constitutional evolution;
- to innovate methodology: Showcase novel methodologies for analyzing and reforming constitutions; and
- to engage stakeholders: Foster dialogue between academics, practitioners, and policymakers.

4. Themes and key questions

The Conference explores six core themes that interrogate key dimensions of constitutionalism and constitutional law:

1) *Constitutionalism and state power*

- How can constitutional frameworks better balance state authority and individual rights?
- What mechanisms might fortify the separation of powers while ensuring effective governance?
- How should constitutional reforms address emerging threats to state sovereignty?

2) *Human rights*

- What constitutional innovations could bolster human rights protection?
- How can socio-economic rights be better realized through the constitution?
- What mechanisms might bridge the gap between rights proclamation and implementation?

3) *Constitutional institutions*

- How can institutional independence be reinforced while promoting accountability?
- What reforms might increase or revitalize the effectiveness of oversight bodies?
- How should constitutional institutions adapt to meet contemporary challenges?

4) *Economic policies*

- What aspects of the constitution guarantee sustainable economic development?
- How can constitutions better tackle income inequality?
- What role should constitutions play in regulating the economy?

5) *Development*

- Which constitutional provisions best support sustainable development goals?
- What mechanisms might distribute resources equitably?
- How should constitutions balance the imperatives of development with the protection of the environment?

6) Constitutional literacy, education, and scholarship

- What strategies might enhance public understanding of constitutional principles?
- How can constitutional education catalyze or galvanize democratic participation?
- What role should educational institutions play in constitutional awareness?

5. Methodological approaches

The Conference welcomes diverse methodologies, including:

- empirical research examining constitutional implementation;
- theoretical analyses of constitutional principles;
- historical investigations of constitutions;
- comparative studies of constitutional reforms; and
- interdisciplinary methodologies combining legal, political, and social analysis.

6. Target audience and benefits

This Conference will bring together:

- constitutional scholars and researchers,
- legal practitioners and judges,
- policymakers and legislators,
- civil society organizations,
- international experts in constitutional law, and
- (post)graduate students in relevant fields.

Participants will benefit from:

- engagement with leading constitutional scholars,
- networking opportunities with global experts,
- potential publication in a high-quality edited volume,
- access to cutting-edge constitutional research, and
- platform for influencing policies.

7. Publication plans

We will compile selected papers into an edited volume published by Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and UNAM Press, continuing the tradition of impactful publications on Namibian constitutionalism, including notably:

1. Hinz et al. (2002) *The Constitution at Work: 10 Years of Namibian Nationhood*,
2. Bösl et al. (2010) *Constitutional Democracy in Namibia: A Critical Analysis After Two Decades*, and
3. Horn & Hinz (2017) *Beyond a Quarter Century of Constitutional Democracy*.

The rigorously peer-reviewed volume will serve as a definitive resource for constitutional scholars, policymakers, and students, offering concrete reforms to anchor or re-orient Namibia's lodestone – the Constitution – and its underlying constitutionalism – into its next phase of evolution.

8. Selection process and timeline

Abstract submission:

Length: 200-300 words

Deadline: **30 April 2025**

Submit to: kkariseb@unam.na (cc: Dennis.Zaire@kas.de and udzaire@gmail.com)

Key dates:

Call release: **14 March 2025**

Abstract submission deadline: **30 April 2025**

Peer review and abstract acceptance notification: **30 May 2025**

Full paper submission: **1 August 2025**

Conference dates: **14-15 August 2025**

Peer review and paper acceptance notification: **30 October 2025**

Paper submission for publication in edited volume: **12 December 2025**

Anticipated publication: **April 2026**

All submissions will undergo rigorous double-blind peer review, thus securing top-quality contributions. Selection criteria include originality, research depth, scientific impact, and relevance to the conference themes.

9. Conference organization

Organizing Committee:

Prof. Dr. Dunia P. Zongwe (Associate Professor, UNAM School of Law)

Dr. Kennedy Kariseb (Scientific Coordinator, UNAM School of Law/ANCL)

Mr. Dennis U. Zaire (Senior Programme Manager, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung)

Dr. Christian Harris (Lecturer, UNAM School of Law)

The organizing committee brings together expertise in constitutional law, democratic governance, and African legal systems, ensuring a rich intellectual environment for scholarly exchange.

10. Venue and Logistics

The two-day Conference will take place at the Casa Blanca Boutique Hotel, Windhoek, conveniently located near the University of Namibia and the Baines Shopping Centre. Limited funding for accommodation is available through the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung for selected international participants.

The venue offers state-of-the-art conference facilities, accommodations, and amenities to enable both formal dialogue and informal networking opportunities essential to scholarly collaboration.

11. Contact Information

For submissions and inquiries:

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