Cambridge Centre for Palestine Studies

مركز كيمبريدج لدراسات فلسطين

60 Years 1965 2025

South Africa, Palestine and the ICJ

With Dr Oscar van Heerden

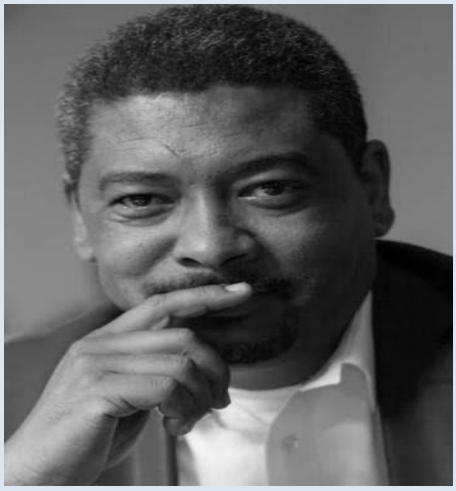
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

The Cambridge Centre for Palestine Studies

in collaboration with the

Centre of African Studies at POLIS (Cambridge)

invite you to attend a talk followed by a discussion with



Dr Oscar van Heerden

"South Africa, Palestine and the ICJ"

Date: 13th November 2026 Time: 5 pm (UK),

Venue: S1 (Alison Richard Building) Sidgwick Avenue

7 West Road Cambridge CB3 9DP

Open and free to all but subject to pre-registration via:

What's App: 078 459 87 459 or email to: theccps21.org@gmail.com

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About the esteemed Speaker and the Talk



Dr Oscar van Heerden is a scholar of International Relations (IR), where he focuses on International Political Economy, with an emphasis on Africa, and SADC in particular. He completed his PhD & Masters studies at the University of Cambridge (UK) from 2006–2010. He completed a post–doctoral fellowship at the University of Johannesburg under the NRF chair for International Relations and African Diplomacy (Prof Chris Landsberg). Currently he is a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Johannesburg, Centre for African Diplomacy and Leadership (CADL).

He entered active politics in 1985 as a student & youth activist, holding a number of leadership positions in anti–Apartheid organisations between 1986 – 1994. Due to his anti–apartheid activities which was deemed illegal by the Apartheid State and its security apparatus, Oscar was forced to be "on the run" from State authorities but was later detained (without trial) for his political activities in 1989. This was one of a number of arrests and interrogations by the Special Branch Security Police over that period. He is an avid writer and analyst of contemporary politics in South Africa today. He has served in numerous political capacities in the ANC and other Mass Democratic Movement organisations. A former trustee for the Kgalema Motlanthe Foundation and continues to speak truth to power through his ongoing Daily Maverick, News24 & Sunday World opinion pieces to this day.

His work experience over the last 2 decades has been in Strategic Support at the ANC Head Quarters in the late 1990's, the South African Qualifications Authority in 2000 and since then as an independent Management consultant in his own company, Kelello Consulting working mostly but not exclusively with various government departments, in particular the Security Cluster.

He was Director Operations: Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflections MISTRA and Deputy Vice Chancellor at Fort Hare University until August 2022.

Currently, he is doing management consulting on behalf of his own Company, Kelello Consulting. He holds a Senior Research Fellowship at the Centre for African Diplomacy and Leadership (CADL) for the past 5 years. He is the author of three books, his latest being "Is the Party over" all available on kindle.

Dr van Heerden speaks and contributes in his personal capacity.

Abstract

This paper analyzes South Africa's decision to institute proceedings against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) under the Genocide Convention, arguing that the case represents a critical juncture in international law and a calculated assertion of Global South agency with profound geo-political implications for South Africa. The necessity of the case is grounded in the principle of erga omnes partes obligations, compelling state parties to the Genocide Convention to act to prevent genocide. South Africa's application, predicated on Israel's military conduct in Gaza, transcends mere political condemnation; it seeks judicial determination on the existence of genocidal intent, thereby establishing a legal framework that challenges the historical impunity surrounding prolonged occupation and asymmetrical warfare. For South Africa, the geo-political implications are multifaceted. Domestically, the case re-centers the African National Congress's (ANC) foreign policy identity around its anti-apartheid legacy, leveraging the symbolic resonance of 'never again' to consolidate domestic political capital amid internal challenges. Regionally, it positions South Africa as a leader within the Global South and the Non-Aligned Movement, potentially straining relations with key Western trade partners like the United States and Germany, who face accusations of complicity. Internationally, while the ICJ's provisional measures have solidified South Africa's standing as a moral arbiter, they also expose the country to accusations of politicizing the court and risk diplomatic retaliation. Ultimately, this paper posits that the case is not merely a legal challenge to Israel's military operations, but a strategic gambit by South Africa to redefine the terms of global justice, testing the viability of international legal institutions to constrain powerful states and reasserting the primacy of anti-colonial solidarity in a multipolar world order.

Keywords: International Court of Justice; Genocide Convention; South Africa; Palestine; erga omnes partes; colonialism of a special type; global South; middle powers.



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