Speaker: Prof. André Odendaal

Topic: African Intellectuals and the Making of South Africa’s Constitution – A Commemoration of 200 years of Indigenous Writing

Date: Thursday, November 16th, 2023
Time: 12:00 – 1:30 PM (EST)
Place: 255 Old Horticulture

AND Zoom Webinar: Register Here
All Are Welcome!

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Prof. André Odendaal is the vice-chancellor’s writer-in-residence and honorary professor in history and heritage studies at the University of the Western Cape. His publications include The Founders: The Origins of the ANC and the Struggle for Democracy in South Africa (2012), Dear Comrade President: Oliver Tambo and the Foundations of South Africa’s Constitution (2022) and books on the writings of Alex la Guma and Lionel Forman. He has also written extensively on the social history and politics of sport, including, The Story of an African Game (2003), Cricket and Conquest (2016), Divided Country (2018) and Pitch Battles, Sport, Racism and Resistance (with Peter Hain, 2020). From 1996 to 2002, after the closure of the notorious Robben Island Maximum Security Prison, Odendaal served as the first (administrator and) founding director of the Robben Island Museum, democratic South Africa’s first national heritage institution and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

ABOUT THE TALK

Using rare archives, Prof. Odendaal draws on his recent book, Dear Comrade President: Oliver Tambo and the Foundations of South African Constitutionalism (2022), to provide an account of how South Africa’s transition from apartheid to democracy was engineered through African initiative and agency, and how the template for the 1996 Constitution was forged well before the negotiations of the 1990s. The talk demonstrates how Oliver Tambo and ANC’s Constitution Committee wove constitutionalism in as one of the distinct threads of an enormously complex, multi-faceted and sometimes contradictory liberation struggle from 1985 onwards. And how the ANC had already put in place the basic template for the Constitution – including multi-party democracy and a Bill of Rights—via draft constitutional guidelines as early as October 1986. This was 37 months before the fall of the Berlin Wall (which many believed forced the ANC onto a constitutional path) and 40 months before F.W. de Klerk’s made his much-heralded February 1990 speech (wrongly assumed in many quarters to have been the beginning point of the process of constitution-making). Dear Comrade President debunks influential narratives about the transition by Esterhuysse, Barnard, Harvey and other establishment figures and argues that decolonizing and properly periodizing the narrative of a (three, rather than two-phase) process of constitution-making in South Africa is long overdue.