

You are cordially invited to the  
Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf)  
Humanities Annual Lecture on

**“The Role of the Humanities in a Time of Displacement”**

by

**Prof Loretta Feris**

**Vice-Principal: Academic, University of Pretoria**

The Humanities Lecture is a prestigious event of the Academy and seeks to promote the Humanities in South Africa and to draw attention to the importance of the Humanities amongst learners, university students, scholars, and the broader South African society.

- Date:** 8 November 2023
- Venue:** Lord Charles Hotel, Somerset West, Western Cape
- Time:** 16:00 – 18:30
- RSVP:** [Click here](#) by Monday, 30 October 2023

**ABOUT THE SPEAKER**



**Prof Loretta Feris** is the Vice-Principal: Academic, at the University of Pretoria (UP). She was previously the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) of Transformation, Student Affairs, and Social Responsiveness at the University of Cape Town (UCT), also law professor at the UP Law Faculty. She held numerous leadership roles at UCT, including Director of the Institute of Marine and Environmental Law as well as Director of Research: Faculty of Law. From 2004 to 2009, Prof Feris was Associate Prof of Law and the Programme Manager of the International Trade and Investment Law in Africa programme at the University of Pretoria. Prior to that, she was involved in several roles at the American University's Washington College of Law, in the United States of America. Prof Feris has 28 years of experience as an established scholar with international standing, including eight years at an executive management level. She has participated in multiple teaching and learning committees through her career, including the UCT Teaching and Learning as well as the Language and Social Responsiveness Committees.

**ABOUT THE LECTURE**

The Role of the Humanities in a Time of Displacement, driven by the separate, yet interconnected forces of history, war, and the climate crisis, has emerged as a pressing global issue, profoundly impacting the lives of millions of individuals in many communities. While the advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed an increase in the frequency and intensity of armed conflicts and environmental disruptions, over the last two years, conflicts in the Middle East, Sudan, and Ukraine and climate change-induced events such as extreme weather, sea-level rise, and resource scarcity have begun to displace populations on a scale previously unseen. Here in South Africa, we have not gone unscathed, as evidenced by the disastrous floods in 2022 in KwaZulu-Natal and more recently in the Western Cape. I have also previously made the argument that people are virtually displaced when the lived experience of their relationship with the environment is disrupted due to profound environmental distress, experiencing solastalgia, even though some may not have moved homes at all. This lecture focuses on the differential impacts of displacement on vulnerable groups, focusing on issues of human rights, social justice, and the challenges of managing and mitigating the consequences. It highlights the disproportionate burden borne by marginalised communities, who are often the most severely affected by displacement in these contexts. It argues that the Humanities are integral in addressing displacement, providing historical context, humanising the experiences of the displaced, encouraging ethical reflection, and offering a platform for creative expression. Yet, we now know that disciplinary knowledge is limited in finding solutions for complex challenges, and increasingly, we work not only in interdisciplinary modes but also transdisciplinary, integrating knowledge that sits outside of the academy, such as community knowledge and indigenous knowledge. It therefore argues that by engaging the humanities in conversation with diverse knowledge systems, we may gain a more profound understanding of displacement and may be better equipped to develop comprehensive and compassionate solutions, ultimately contributing to a more just response to a complex issue and, in so doing, address the yet-to-be-realised promise of freedom in our country, and across the globe.

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2023

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