

From the VC's Desk

Highlights | Thought Leadership

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NEWS



University of Johannesburg VC and Principal Prof Letlhokwa Mpedi delivered a captivating lecture at SMU

Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) hosted a Public Lecture delivered by the University of Johannesburg Vice Chancellor and Principal, Prof. Letlhokwa Mpedi, on 12 October 2023 with the topic: *Exploring the ethics and legalities of artificial reproductive technology through an African lens.*

This is part of a series of lectures that are hosted by SMU Vice-Chancellor Prof Peter Mbati with the understanding that a university has a critical role to play in the creation of a platform for dialogue and should get involved in public discourse, particularly, as it relates to pertinent issues in society.

In his welcoming address, SMU Vice Chancellor, Prof. Mbati underlined the significance of the lecture in the context of accelerated technological developments on the continent, further stating that this lecture is, indeed, timely. Mbati described Prof Mpedi as a distinguished NRF rated scholar with a B rating who enjoys immense international recognition by his peers and further explained that he has published widely on social security and labour law.

Speaking during the lecture, Prof Mpedi mentioned that the issue of Artificial Reproductive Technology (ART), is something he has been writing and researching about for a number of years and that he is excited by the legalities and ethical considerations behind the technology.

"In recent years, there has been remarkable progress in the field of reproductive technologies. These technologies include medical

procedures used to address infertility", Mpedi explained. He added that in the African context, research suggested that the constantly and rapidly changing lifestyle is fundamentally impacting fertility.

"The African continent has a higher prevalence of STIs and post-partum and post-abortion infections which contributes to both male and female infertility", Mpedi said.

Mpedi used the opportunity to speak about three key areas impacted by technology in the artificial reproductive space such as artificial wombs, genes editing and embryo donation/adoption adding that the use of these technologies will require laws to be reformed. "Medical technologies advance at a rapid pace while the laws take forever to catch up", he emphasized. Mpedi also called for sound ethical frameworks that will serve as a basis for regulation and challenged the legal fraternity to keep up with developments in the space and respond accordingly.

What became apparent from the lecture is the fact that technological developments are critical to the overall development of society. Mpedi, however, cautioned that whilst it is important to embrace technology, we should, equally, be mindful that it also ushers us into the world of the unknown, leaving us with many questions than answers, particularly with regard to the adoption of artificial reproductive technology (ATR).

The lecture provided a platform for participants to engage on ATR, weaving together, amongst others, religious, economic, ethical and cultural considerations. What clearly emerged from the deliberations is the need for collaborative efforts among institutions to consider the challenges and opportunities presented by Artificial Reproductive Technology.

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