

LAC and EU launch Access to Justice Project

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PEOPLE living with HIV are still being discriminated against when applying for jobs as civil servants, particularly within the Namibian Defence Force and Namibian police, the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) said during the launch of its Access to Justice Project last week.

LAC director Toni Hancox said they collaborated with the European Union (EU) to come up with the Access to Justice Project, with the aim to research, advocate and litigate on behalf of disadvantaged people's basic rights.

"Despite technological and medical improvements having raised the standard of living for people living with HIV, it remains a battle to ensure equal treatment and enjoyment of rights. Huricon, the department for litigation at the LAC, will take on this battle," said Hancox.

Hancox explained that apart from defending the cases of those being discriminated against, the project will also look into protecting the dignity of those who are not empowered to assert themselves by addressing the most basic of issues affecting their daily lives such as access to clean drinking water, education and health facilities. She said the LAC receives complaints of alleged medical negligence suffered by patients attending State hospitals across the country daily.

"Positive progress does not seem to be readily ascertainable. Huricon will act in a limited number of cases that will raise further awareness of these concerns as well as hold the State liable for incompetent facilities," she said.

As part of fueling the Access to Justice Project, which will run under the motto: 'Promoting the Rule of Law and Defending Human Rights', the EU has pledged N\$2,9 million to Huricon for the next two years.

"This support will assist Huricon to research, advocate and litigate on matters of strategic importance such as the right to water, the right to education, and the right to adequate medical care," she said.

"By litigating and advocating on behalf of the powerless, the Access to Justice Project hopes to contribute towards overcoming some of the effects of poverty," said Hancox.

Head of the Delegation of the EU, Raul Fuentes, said one of the objectives the project seeks to achieve is compensation either in monetary form or through change in circumstances, for individuals and groups whose rights have been violated, and who, otherwise, don't have access to legal assistance and advice.

"In the longer term, this should result in jurisprudence that defines and interprets human rights, which will create a binding precedent for further reference," he said.

The vice president of the Law Society of Namibia, Dee Sauls, said the project will go a long way in addressing some of the violated basic human rights the country's most vulnerable people face.

“I want to urge every legal practitioner in the country to devote one day to offer their services pro-bono to those that can otherwise not afford legal aid to defend their basic human rights,” she said.