

NEWS FROM:



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World Cup may stifle human rights, warns UCT researcher

New laws passed to meet the conditions for bringing the FIFA World Cup into South Africa could interfere with the country's obligation to protect human rights, according to research conducted at the University of Cape Town's Centre for Criminology.

Sophie Nakueira, a PhD researcher at the centre, was part of a panel addressing a UCT seminar on 20 May, titled: "The FIFA footprint: What will be the World Cup's governance legacy?"

Nakueira said that host countries must meet FIFA's conditions to host the event. These conditions include exempting FIFA from certain duties and taxes, and priority treatment of permits and visas for FIFA staff.

To meet these requirements, the government had to pass new legislation regarding safety and security, and amend some laws to guarantee FIFA's property rights and prevent ambush marketing.

Host cities also had to agree to pass bylaws in compliance with FIFA's city beautification requirements, as well as meeting FIFA's guidelines, which address moral behaviour in public spaces. These guidelines prohibit swimming, begging, camping or residing and even swearing in public spaces.

"South Africa has an obligation to adhere to human rights standards. However, these new laws can impact on South African civil liberties and human rights," said Nakueira, whose dissertation topic is "Changing the Rules of the Game? Explorations in the Governance of Mega Events".

She added: "Given the way FIFA governs and considering South Africa's obligation to FIFA, will the country be able to honour its obligation to its people during the World Cup? That's the legacy that remains to be seen."

Nakueira pointed out that FIFA events bring a financial cost to a country as well as governance issues. Mega-events like the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup are mainly funded using the host country's tax-payers' money, she said. "Costs are usually underestimated because bid committees want to present a winning bid that they can sell to a sometimes sceptical public."

At the same seminar, Professor Richard Calland, the director of UCT's Democratic Governance and Rights Unit (DGRU), stressed the enormity of the event, which will be watched by about two-thirds of the world's population. "The World Cup is one of the only things that stop people from fighting and fornicating for long enough to be peaceful for two hours – or two and a half if there's extra time," he said.

DGRU research associate Chris Oxtoby examined the legal status of FIFA, noting that it is neither a company nor a multinational organisation. Instead, it is a voluntary organisation, registered in terms of the Swiss civil code, which means that if its turnover exceeds a certain amount, it is liable to be audited – although this process will remain private.

FIFA operates, for this World Cup, through SAFA, the South African football governing body, and its Local Organising Committee (LOC). As the LOC is registered as a non-profit organisation, there are transparency and responsibility issues, said Oxtoby. "You could sue FIFA, but if you win, the money will come out of the host country's pockets, not FIFA's."

Professor Ian Glenn, director of UCT's Centre for Film and Media Studies, said that FIFA is a product of major global trends that are much bigger than FIFA itself.

"There are draconian regulations preventing negative publicity about the World Cup, but this is a well-known phenomenon in sports journalism," he said. "FIFA extends the notion that sports journalism is a lifestyle or sunshine journalism."

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