

NEWS RELEASE

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Laurier welcomes human rights expert Rhoda Howard-Hassmann *\$1.4 million Canada Research Chair will fund research into reparation issues in Africa*

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WATERLOO – Wilfrid Laurier University is welcoming a world-renowned expert on human rights and holder of a \$1.4 million Canada Research Chair (CRC). Rhoda Howard-Hassmann will examine issues related to the broad topic of ‘what the West owes Africa.’

The author of numerous books and articles on international and Canadian human rights, Howard-Hassmann will examine reparations with specific references to the slave trade, Western colonialism and post-colonial relations. Her research will explore a variety of issues, from reparations as a social movement and the possibility of a truth commission for Africa, to the idea of apology and its moral meaning, and Canada’s responsibility to Africa.

“We are delighted to add such a distinguished, hard-working and authoritative academic to the ranks of our faculty,” said Adele Reinhartz, dean of graduate studies and research. “Dr. Howard-Hassmann will strengthen the rapidly growing interdisciplinary cluster of Laurier faculty doing collaborative work in the global area while adding a sense of moral urgency to our mission in the international area.”

Howard-Hassmann's research will be interdisciplinary, drawing on literature from academic fields that include political sociology, international relations, history, international law and philosophy. She'll also interview African human rights activists, academics, judges and diplomats.

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The international movement towards reparations – the means of making amends – started in the 1980s. Reparations can involve a range of instruments, including apologies, financial compensation, monuments, educational materials and media campaigns. The Canadian government, for example, in 1988 apologized to Japanese-Canadians interned during World War II.

“Respect for the moral integrity of Africans needs to be an integral part of any international discussions about reparations,” explained Howard-Hassmann. “The West needs to acknowledge its own history of racism and pay attention to the consequences for Africa.” She expects the debate surrounding reparations to intensify.

Howard-Hassmann officially joined Laurier’s global studies and political science departments on July 1. She holds a tier 1 CRC awarded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The award provides \$200,000 annually for the next seven years.

The Canadian Foundation for Innovation has provided Howard-Hassmann with \$75,000 to create a central online database on political apologies and reparations. Laurier will store the database on its university server and offer free access. Anticipated users may include academics, government officials, members of non-governmental organizations, the press and the general public.