

**Workshop: Peace through institutions? Constitutional choices for divided societies
(14th to 15th of November 2014 in Stellenbosch, South Africa)**

Convenors:

PD Dr Andreas Mehler (GIGA Hamburg)

Prof Christof Hartmann (University Duisburg-Essen)

Prof Pierre du Toit

Dr Nicola de Jager (both from the University of Stellenbosch)

Brief description

Addressing the design of formal state institutions in constitutions is important to regulate conflict potentials, particularly in societies characterized by divisions along lines of ethnic or religious identity or social disparity (e.g. in divided societies). The scholarly debate on institutional design offers options relevant both for the prevention of violence in these societies and for post-conflict situations where a relapse into violence is especially likely, but where also windows of opportunity for institutional reform exist.

Ethnic and other violent conflict is not inevitable. The related hazards have stimulated a debate among scientists and practitioners on which “institutional” or “constitutional” design can resolve, alleviate or prevent such conflict. Constitutional design may a) help prevent violent conflict and b) adjust institutions after the termination of an armed conflict in order to escape the conflict trap.

To discuss and assess the potential of African constitutions to promote peace and reduce conflict risks, researchers and practitioners from different African countries and Germany will come together for a joint workshop. It will take place from 13 - 15 November in Stellenbosch. Among the contributing institutions are the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa, the Institute for African Affairs at the GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies – particularly the “Institutions for Sustainable Peace” network – as well as the University of Duisburg-Essen and the University of Hamburg

Two main focuses are leading for papers and the workshop debates: First, which constitutional choices influence the duration of peace or the risk of conflict and how? Second, what are factors inherent in peace processes that determine constitutional choices? While sub-Saharan Africa features prominently in the broader cross-country comparative literature, we still know relatively little about how these broader options actually work in various African contexts and why some countries have adopted them or not. For both focuses, we will assess and discuss empirical evidence and experiences from participants of several sub-Saharan African countries – Ethiopia, Malawi, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. German researchers will contribute with their knowledge on constitutional processes and effects of constitutional choices in other African countries. The overall aim is to contribute to the debate about the ability of African constitutions to promote peace and reduce conflict risks in a long term.