

# CULTURES OF DEMOCRACY - SPEAKER BIOS

## GUEST SPEAKER

**Matthew Neuhaus** has been Honorary Professor (International Law) at the ANU College of Law since November 2022. He was Australian Ambassador to the Netherlands from August 2018 to October 2022, and Permanent Representative to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague. He represented Australia at the ICJ, ICC, PCA and other international legal bodies. Mr Neuhaus has previously served as Australian Ambassador to Zimbabwe (2011-15) - accredited also to DRC, Zambia and Malawi - and High Commissioner to Nigeria (1997-2000) - accredited also to Ghana, Sierra Leone, The Gambia and Senegal. He has also held senior positions in DFAT and PMC, covering Africa, the Middle East, the Pacific, UN and Multilateral Engagement, and international law. Mr Neuhaus was Director of the Political Affairs Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat in London 2002-2008. His previous postings with DFAT include Kenya (1983-1985), Papua New Guinea (1988- 1989), UN New York (1991-94) where he represented Australia on the First and Sixth Committees, and was Vice Chair of the Sixth Committee in 1993-94. Mr Neuhaus has a B.A. (Hons) LLB from the University of Sydney and a Master of Philosophy (International Relations) from the University of Cambridge. He attended Harvard University Kennedy School Leaders in Development Program in June 2006, and was a Visiting Fellow at the Lauterpacht Centre for International Law at Cambridge University in 2015.

## SPEAKERS

**Bright Chimedza** is a multi-award-winning human rights practitioner and a Doctoral Researcher at the University of Leicester. He has over 9 years of experience in human rights advocacy, election monitoring, and democratic governance. Over the years, he has coordinated projects supported by IOM, USAID, Christian Aid, FCDO, Trocaire, SIDA, and Pact, among others. Within the academic discourse, he has published peer-reviewed publications on governance, civil society idealism, politicization of bailable rights, and competitive authoritarianism in Zimbabwe. As a political consultant, he has provided advisory support to the Varieties for Democracy Institute (V-Dem), and the European Union. Within the development sector, he has developed civic engagement toolkits, led the development of funding proposals, and conducted organizational capacity assessments for organizations such as ActionAid Denmark, East West Management Institute, Small Media Foundation, Advocacy Assembly, and Global Campus for Human Rights. Over the next five years, he intends to focus on projects related to social contract monitoring, cost of politics, electoral volatility, and Neuropolitics.

**Dr James Chiriyankandath** has been a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, since 2009. He was previously Principal Lecturer and Director of Research, Department of Law, Governance and International Relations, London Metropolitan University, having previously taught in the Department of Politics and Modern History, London Guildhall University, and the Department of Politics, University of Hull, and, subsequently, at the City Literary Institute. He edited the journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics from 2006 to 2020, and has edited and co-edited several books as well as published many articles in peer reviewed politics and international relations journals.

**Dr Olakunle Michael Folami** is an Associate Professor at Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria. He earned a BSc and MSc in Sociology and Anthropology with a specialization in Criminology from Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria. He also holds a PhD in Transitional Justice from Ulster University, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom. Folami's research paper was awarded the Distinguished Paper Award at the 2nd Istanbul Conference on Democracy and Global Security. He has also completed a research fellowship on the acceptance of International criminal justice with the Nuremberg International Principles Academy, Germany.

He previously served as the Director of the Center for Entrepreneur Development, and he is currently the Head of Department of Criminology and Security Studies, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria.

**Dr Aliyu Ibrahim** is a legal scholar and academic with extensive experience in teaching, research, and university administration. He serves as Lecturer and Acting Dean at the Faculty of Law, Umaru Musa Yarádua University, where he has taught a wide range of courses across undergraduate and postgraduate levels since 2012. A former Magistrate and Legal Assistant in the Katsina State Judiciary, he also practiced law in reputable firms before joining academia. Dr. Ibrahim holds a PhD in Public Law from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and his research interests span Public International Law, Constitutional Law, Criminal Law, Law of Evidence, and Property Law. He serves as Editor-in-Chief of the UMYU Law Journal. His publications appear in leading national and international journals, and he actively contributes to conferences, training programmes, and community service. Dr. Ibrahim is a member of several professional bodies, including the Nigerian Bar Association and the Nigerian Society of International Law.

**David Jackson** is a Non-Resident Fellow at New York University's Center on International Cooperation (CIC). He is recognized as a thought leader in local government finance with over 30 years of experience as an economist and urbanist. He began his career as an urban planner in London during the 1980s and later founded a consulting company focused on policy development and financing local infrastructure in over 10 African and Asian countries. In 2006, he became a Decentralization Advisor to the Government of Indonesia and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and by 2009, he was Head of the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) Asia and Pacific office. From 2013 to 2024, he directed UNCDF's Local Development Finance Practice at a global level, initiating the Malaga Coalition for municipal finance, the International Municipal Investment Fund (now managed by Meridiam), and innovating city guarantee facilities and local capital market reforms for local government bonds.

**Professor Syed Kamall** teaches Politics and International Relations at St Mary's University. He has written and spoken on a range of political and economic issues including on the Commonwealth. He also writes on liberalism and is a Co-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Commonwealth.

**Ashonshok Kachui** is a doctoral scholar at the School of Liberal Arts (SoLA), IIT Jodhpur, where he specialises in digital platform studies. His research interests include platform labour, participatory culture, and everyday creativity in Northeast India. He has submitted his work on the impact of the TikTok ban in India and on the digital participatory cultures of indigenous Naga tribe for publication. His research combines ethnography, platform analysis, and critical social theory to explore how marginalised communities negotiate visibility, identity, and labour in contemporary media ecologies.

**Dr Kushboo Mangroo** successfully defended her PhD on "Survival Strategies in Exile: the case of the Chagossians from the Indian Ocean to the United Kingdom" at the University of Poitiers under the supervision of Professor Susan Finding and Professor André Magord. She is a member of the MIMMOC (Mémoires, Identités, Marginalités dans le Monde occidental contemporain) research group. Her publications feature a co-authored book chapter with Ritu Tyagi (Pondicherry University) "Food, Arts and Music as Instruments of Resistance in Post-Indenture Diaspora", in *L'engagement dans les colonies européennes: Résistances et mémoire (s) (XIXe-XXIe siècle)* (PUR, 2023) and "Collateral victims of global security, before, during and after the war in Iraq: the case of the Chagossians" in *OREMA (Observatoire des Relations Extérieures du Monde anglophone, 2023)*. She was a teaching assistant at the University of Poitier.

**Dr Meera Mathew** is the Head of the Department and Associate Professor at Mar Gregorios College of Law (MGCL), affiliated with the University of Kerala - India. She previously served as Academic Coordinator at the School of Law, CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Delhi NCR, where she played a pivotal role in institutional development, faculty mentoring, and curriculum innovation. She holds a Ph.D. from the Indian Law Institute, New Delhi, where she researched "Legal Contours of Expression in Social Media." Having done research in criminal law, cyber law, and media law, she has over a decade of teaching experience at leading institutions, including Symbiosis Law School and Lloyd Law College. She is also a recognized Ph.D. guide and co-guide, including at KU Leuven, Belgium. Dr. Meera's research contributions span 20+ SCOPUS-indexed publications, including forthcoming books with Springer and CRC Press. She has presented papers at international conferences in the UK, Sweden, Canada, Indonesia, and South Africa, and has been invited as a speaker by prestigious institutions like the CBI Academy, India and Linnaeus University, Sweden. She also served as a legal associate at Infosys and Paul & Associates, contributing to landmark pro bono PILs, including one that led to the enactment of the 2013 law banning manual scavenging. She has led international conferences, faculty exchange programmes, and was the convenor of the "Judges' Conversation Series" featuring eminent members of the Indian judiciary. More than an administrator, she is an academician and legal researcher dedicated to impactful scholarship, ethical leadership, and global academic collaboration.

**Dr Shireen Mushtaq** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of International Relations at Kinnaird College for Women in Lahore, Pakistan. Her research primarily focuses on international security, conflict management, nationalism, and climate change, with a particular expertise in the politics of South Asia. Her articles have been published in *International Affairs*, *Journal of International Peace and Stability*, *Malaysian Journal of International Relations*, *Journal of Indian Studies*, among others. She is also the author of several book chapters and opinion pieces. Shireen is a passionate advocate for women's empowerment through education. She also serves as an advisor to the International Relations Club at Kinnaird College, a dynamic society dedicated to promoting the active participation of students in diverse academic programs from various institutions.

**Dr Sumit Kumar Pathak** is a distinguished academic who serves as a faculty member in the Department of Political Studies, School of Social Sciences and Policy, at the Central University of South Bihar, located in Gaya, Bihar (India). His primary areas of interest include Political Theory, Political Philosophy, South Asia and Global Politics. With a focus on critically engaging with foundational ideas and contemporary debates, Dr. Pathak's work bridges theoretical perspectives with the complex realities of South Asia. He is particularly known for his contributions to understanding the interplay between indigenous knowledge systems and global political thought, and his teaching reflects a commitment to fostering critical and interdisciplinary approaches to political inquiry.

**Dr Bodhi Ramteke** is a lawyer, researcher, and Erasmus Mundus Scholar with expertise in constitutional law, caste justice, and tribal rights. His work critically engages with issues of social justice and the lived experiences of marginalized communities, particularly Dalit and Adivasi groups. He is the founder of Policy and Law Network, through which he has led grassroots initiatives focused on legal empowerment, education, and access to justice. Bodhi aims to bridge the gap between legal frameworks and ground realities by advocating for inclusive, rights-based approaches to governance.

**Gargi Sakpal** is a public health researcher and activist, trained as a dentist, from the rural region of central India. She recently completed her MSc in Public Health for Development at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine as a Chevening Scholar. She founded the Dava and Duva Prakalpa, a mental health initiative that operates at religious shrines to provide psychosocial support, treatment, and rehabilitation for marginalised communities. Her work

focuses on bridging faith-based practices with scientific care, particularly for individuals affected by mental health issues, caste-based oppression, gender-based violence, and social exclusion. She has worked on several community-based programmes addressing mental health, child marriage, and human rights in rural and tribal communities in central India. She is passionate about integrating dignity, emotional well-being, and justice into public health systems.

**Dr Andrea Sau** is Course Lead for Politics and International Relations programmes at St Mary's University, Twickenham. His research revolves around political and social theory as well as political economy and theories of ideology. His focus has been on the Marxist tradition, in particular the works of Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci.

**Lucy Slack** is Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, having worked for the organisation since 1999. Her specific areas of expertise are decentralisation, intergovernmental frameworks, local economic development, local government finance and inclusive local government. She is responsible for managing the work of CLGF's programme and relationship-building and advocacy work with members and partners across the Commonwealth. She directs the work of CLGF's regional offices in Fiji, South Africa, Ghana, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Trinidad and Tobago. She has also been pivotal in the design and management of CLGF's biennial Commonwealth Local Government conferences.

**Dr Christopher Wylde** is a Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Relations and Subject Lead (Research, School of Law and Society) at St Mary's University, Twickenham. He has written extensively on political economy and development trajectories, including on Latin America After Neoliberalism and Emerging Markets and the State.

## CHAIRS

**Professor Kingsley Abbott** is an experienced international criminal and human rights lawyer with more than 20 years experience in international non-governmental organisations, the United Nations and domestic legal practice. Previously, for nine years, he was based in Thailand where he served the International Commission of Jurists as the Director of Global Accountability and International Justice. During this time, he developed and led numerous human rights and rule of law initiatives in Asia and around the world. Prior to that, he worked as a Senior Legal Adviser at the Khmer Rouge Tribunal in Cambodia and as Trial Counsel in the Office of the Prosecutor at the Special Tribunal for Lebanon in the Hague. He started his career in his home country of Aotearoa New Zealand, where he mainly practised as a criminal barrister under a leading King's Counsel.

**Dr Cherisse Francis** is a Barbadian educator and researcher. Presently, she is a Senior Lecturer in Law at St. Mary's University, Twickenham. Cherisse holds a Bachelor of Laws from the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, a Master of Laws from the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, which she obtained as a Commonwealth Scholar and PhD from the University of Warwick, United Kingdom. Her research and publishing interests span trafficking in persons, human rights, criminal law and decolonisation. Prior to becoming an academic, Cherisse was a legal practitioner, called to the legal bar in Barbados and having worked in the High Court (formerly Supreme Court) of Belize. Reflecting this diverse background, Cherisse takes a socio-legal approach to her research integrating culture and history into legal and societal problems. She often undertakes consultancies and training of governmental and non-governmental actors to expand the impact of her work. Dr. Francis has worked with the Human Trafficking Institute and the United Nations Office for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean. Additionally, she is an Associate Research Fellow of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, a trustee for the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (London Office) and a Steering Committee Member of the Human Trafficking Research Network. Dr. Francis is also a founding member of the Caribbean Coalition Against Trafficking in Persons.

**Dr. Olivia Lwabukuna** is a legal scholar and practitioner with expertise in international human rights, development, and African legal systems. She currently serves as a Senior Lecturer in International Human Rights and Development at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies. She previously lectured at the SOAS School of Law and remains editor of the *Journal of African Law*. She is an Advocate of the High Court of Tanzania and has previously worked within legal services, policy research and academia in South Africa, Tanzania, Swaziland, Kenya, Nigeria and the United Kingdom. She has carried out field research in Tanzania, Kenya, Madagascar and Ghana and held fellowships and visiting lectureships in and on Africa, including being a Cadbury (African Studies) research fellow in the [Center for West African Studies \(now DASA\)](#), at the University of Birmingham and a long-term visiting faculty in the [School of Law, University of Pretoria](#). Olivia has been a research fellow at the [Center for Human Rights, University of the Free State in South Africa](#) where she has taught on the Intensive Block Week-based Master of Human Rights. Part of her role at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies is to support the Director of the Institute in managing the programmatic aspects of the Institute's work, including decision making on projects, partners, strategy and governance.

**Professor Sue Onslow** is a leading oral history practitioner and has published extensively on the contemporary history of Southern Africa in the Cold War era. She was the lead interviewer on the AHRC-funded '[Oral History of the Commonwealth since 1965](#)' at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, where she also worked as Deputy Director, then Director. She is currently Visiting Professor in the Department of Political Economy, King's College, London. Her recent publications include *Robert Mugabe* (with Martin Plaut) (Ohio University Press, 2018); 'Tanzania, non-alignment and the Non-Aligned Movement' in Dimitrijevic & Cavoski, *The 60th Anniversary of the Non-Aligned Movement* (Belgrade, 2021); editor, (with Lori Maguire) *Consuls in the Cold War* (Brill Publishers, 2023); and (co-editor) *Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence: National, Regional, International & Transnational Perspectives* (Bloomsbury, 2025). She is also Editor of *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs & Policy Studies*.

**Dr Virginie Roiron** is a senior lecturer in British and Commonwealth history at Sciences Po Strasbourg, University of Strasbourg. She holds a PhD from Paris-Sorbonne University (2004), in which she studied the impact of the Rhodesian crisis on the British conception of the Commonwealth. Since then, she has continued to study the process of institutionalisation of the "modern" Commonwealth over the long term, exploring the continuities and ruptures between the modern organisation and its imperial shadow, through topics such as the role of the monarchy, the rise of the informal Commonwealth, and relations between the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. She is also treasurer of CRECIB (Centre de Recherche en Civilisation Britannique), the French national network of researchers specialising in British studies.

**Professor Mélanie Torrent** is professor of British and Commonwealth history at the Université de Picardie Jules Verne in Amiens. An honorary fellow of the Institut universitaire de France, she is senior research fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London. Her research focuses on the connected ends of the British and French empires, and their impact on state and society in the (former) metropolises and on diplomatic cultures. Her most recent book is *Algerian Independence and the British Left: Resistance and Solidarities in a Decolonizing World* (Bloomsbury, 2024). She was a member of the scientific committee of the exhibition, "Paris-Londres: music connections (1962-1989)" at the Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration (Paris, 2019-2020), and the historical adviser for the documentary "La décolonisation britannique: l'art de filer à l'anglaise" by Deborah Ford (ARTE & CinéTV, 2020-21). She currently serves on the editorial boards of *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs and Policy Studies* and the *Journal of Global Security Studies*.