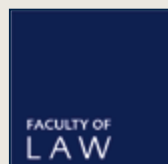


**High  
lights**

# Research Visitors

2021-2022

**PART OF OUR ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS**





**Ruwadzano Makumbe**  
**Zimbabwean human rights lawyer**

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**Trinity Term 2022**

The Bonavero Institute of Human Rights provided a conducive environment to engage in interesting research and rigorous academic activities. As I was working under the Civil Liability for Human Rights Violations Project, the rich research environment allowed me to engage with other scholars and share ideas. I had the opportunity to engage with researchers and discuss ongoing research work that is breaking new ground in legal studies. I am grateful for the efforts made by the Institute to make me feel welcome and the opportunities to engage with students from different backgrounds. I will always remember the beauty of Oxford and the warmth of its people which made it feel like a second home. So many lessons from the Institute and for me, this is only the beginning of my engagements in Oxford.



**Tom Cross**  
**Leading human rights barrister**

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**Michaelmas Term 2021**

It is always a pleasure for human rights practitioners to be able to share the study of their subject with their academic counterparts. To visit the Bonavero was, for me, a real privilege. My research project, during Michaelmas 2021, concerned freedom of expression, particularly in the setting of education. There can have been no better educational context in which to explore it.

It is the atmosphere of the Bonavero which makes it stand out. It is a peaceful place for a serious subject. A friendly and invariably stimulating conversation is rarely far away. I was particularly grateful to a host of colleagues, a number of whom I had not previously met, for taking significant time to consider and comment on a draft paper. Human rights needs the Bonavero as its flagship institution. I know it will continue to flourish.



## **Dr Saif Mahmood** **Advocate, Supreme Court of India**

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**Hilary and Trinity Terms 2022**

### **My stint at the Bonavero Institute of Human Rights**

I came to the Bonavero Institute of Human Rights with a rather peculiar research project – one that stood at the intersection of law, literature, culture and history. I was sceptical about the reception such a project would get at a centre that fosters research in pure law. But the scholarly feedback, and immense warmth, that I received at Bonavero not only allayed my initial scepticism but also changed my entire course of thinking. Every scholar and every staff member I interacted with had a deep-seated need to add value to this world: the kind of value that may provoke equality or justice, however small be its measure. Bonavero not only gives such persons a chance to create that value but also helps them amplify the desire that lives so passionately in their hearts.

At the core of my project lay the matter of free speech – increasingly endangered the world over, not least in my own country. After spending two terms at Bonavero, I can do no better than to borrow lyrics of the song Guerrilla Radio to answer the question ‘what appeals to you about Bonavero’: “what better place than here, what better time than now?”.



## **Harold Hongju Koh** **George Eastman Visiting Professor**

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**Confirm Term 2021**

### **Letter from Oxford, June 1 2022**

I write from Balliol College, where I am finishing a memorable year as George Eastman Visiting Professor, nearly 50 years after I first crossed the Atlantic as a Marshall Scholar to read PPE (Philosophy, Politics, and Economics) at Magdalen. I first left Oxford in 1977, having just taken Schools, gone to an all-night Summer Ball, and packed up my worldly possessions in wooden tea chests to ship home to start law school. Back then, I knew nothing about what life held for me, but I did realize that my two years at Oxford would have outsized meaning. A transformational chapter in my life had just transpired, from which I would be mining

lessons for decades to come. At the Marshall Scholars' farewell dinner, I praised tea with McVities Chocolate Homewheat biscuits, and recalled what someone had told me: "Great Britain remains perhaps the only place left on earth where someone can stroll a path for an hour, or sit on a bench thinking, and no one would think he's wasting his time."

After I left Oxford, I did not return to either England or Europe for more than a decade, caught up in the frenzy of early work life. I graduated from law school, got married, started a family and a law-teaching career in my hometown of New Haven, Connecticut, and buried my father. During those years, when Oxford felt far away, the carefree days of punting on May Morning seemed quaint, even a bit frivolous. At my dad's funeral, I recalled having taken my parents punting during their only visit to Oxford. Floating downstream, my dad observed wistfully, "We've never had time for such relaxation."

But in the '90s, I made the effort to get back to Oxford, and found that effort endlessly rewarded. When our children Emily and Will were 10 and 6, my wife Christy and I decided to spend our sabbatical year at All Souls, and we all made dear friends who have stayed close ever since. In the years following, I accepted every invitation I got to speak at Oxford, even if it only brought me back for 24 hours, still enough time for a restorative stroll around Addison's Walk or a visit to Ben's Cookies in the Covered Market. Then someone told me about the Eastman Professorship, reserved for a senior American academic fellow of Balliol who would live in Eastman House, spectacularly close in. One summer, during a quick Oxford flyby, I was shattered to walk by Eastman House and see it being demolished. But two years later, on another quick visit, I saw that Balliol was building a Masters' Field complex of eight new buildings, including—the sign said—"Eastman Professor's Flat." My dream revived, many emails later, my wife and I arrived in October 2021 to a modern penthouse flat in the Aldous Huxley Building, overlooking my old college Magdalen and Jowett Walk, named after Balliol's greatest Master.

My Eastman year has been a fascinating blend of the old and the new, inflected by three challenges: COVID-19, Brexit, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The classic buildings and landmarks look much the same, now ingeniously refreshed for the modern era of PowerPoint and internet. Because of COVID-lockdown, my predecessor had never even dined at Balliol. And previously simple travel across the Chunnel or home for a quick visit became vastly complicated by COVID-testing requirements and Britain's re-separation from the Continent. My first day at Balliol was spent attending the College Meeting on Zoom, wearing my Eastman Gown while sitting at my own breakfast table. Christy and I spent the first week reading *These Ruins Are Inhabited*, the charmingly titled memoir by Muriel Beadle of her husband George's Eastman year. I resolved to follow Beadle's example of beginning all lectures by mysteriously announcing, "I intend to lecture American-style," reasoning that it would ensure that every subsequent faux pas would be forgiven.

As I first learned decades earlier, Oxford remains that rare place where one has enough peace of mind to have new thoughts. My main intellectual activity has been the renovation for the 21st Century of *The National Security Constitution*, a book I wrote three decades ago about the constitutional allocation of powers in U.S. foreign affairs. Every morning over coffee I try to make sense of America's last thirty years from the perspective of constitutional and international law, while planning trips to London and the Continent, answering emails from future Yale law students now studying at Oxford, and after High Table dinner, streaming Red Sox games or remotely attending Yale law faculty meetings.

Academic life at Oxford seems more vibrant than ever: seminars and workshops are more in vogue than in the old days, and I spent much of my year at institutions that did not previously exist: the Bonavero Human Rights Institute at Mansfield College and the Blavatnik School of Government, housed in a futuristic building across from Oxford University Press on Walton Street. Most classes are hybrid live-Zoom, and building cranes dot the landscape, as countless new structures arise atop longtime carparks.

What has changed? As you walk down Broad Street, dons and students wearing gowns whiz by on e-bikes and electric scooters, rushing to tutorial. Happily, the student body is visibly more diverse. And the food is much, much better.

Admirably, Oxford still believes deeply in fellowship. So each week at Balliol's Consilium dinner, I find myself seated next to a scholar from a different generation and academic field, and within moments find myself sharing in their intellectual life's journey. Once a month, I am invited to a roving black-tie dinner called the Ashmolean Club, made up of Heads of House and Science Departments who gather to hear distinguished speakers over lovely meals. There I have been thrilled to meet some of the many talented women now leading Oxford, including Vice-Chancellor Louise Richardson (who I discovered is married to an American college classmate of mine), Dame Helen Ghosh, who welcomed me to Balliol, and Dinah Rose Q.C., a brilliant London barrister who has become President of Magdalen.

But even if one's sabbatical life revolves around Oxford, the world still has its way of intruding. The defining global moment of my year came in February 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine, which I had visited just before the pandemic. I had argued for Ukraine against Russia before the International Court of Justice in 2017, and was asked to do so again in early March. In a way that felt almost preordained, making the argument forced me to marshal all I had learned to defend a liberal international order that suddenly seemed so fragile. If the Court did not rule against such a brazen campaign of aggression and atrocity, I asked the judges, summoning all my Oxford passion and idealism, wouldn't we have to concede that the entire postwar international legal project had failed? The Court seemed to agree and quickly ruled in our favor. But the atrocities continued. Ukraine's valiant struggle literally colored my remaining months, as Ukrainian flags flew over colleges bathed in blue and yellow light. Oxford choirs at Evensong sang Ukrainian folk songs as tributes to a culture under siege, fighting fiercely to save its national identity.

What has struck me most is that Oxford has helped make me who I am. Talking to old visiting friends from Oxford days has helped me understand better what I had learned in the intervening years. And every morning I have exchanged emails – about yesterday, today, and tomorrow – with three beloved Rhodes Scholar friends, now living in Cape Cod, New Orleans, and Toronto. To paraphrase Dylan (Bob, not Thomas): “[We were] so much older then, [we’re] younger than that now.”

When people ask me what I've enjoyed most about being back at Oxford, I say that it's returning to an inspiring, familiar spot, with the luxury of worrying less, because I know so much more about who I am and was destined to be. When I first came to Oxford, I felt terrified by the simple act of eating dinner or talking to a shopkeeper. I was certain I would humiliate myself by breaking one of Oxford's countless unwritten rules. But at a college dinner the other night, I used the wrong utensil during the opening course; the butler kindly

slipped me a second fork for the main course. I thanked him, but did not feel embarrassed: I now enjoy telling Oxford newcomers that there's really nothing to worry about after all.

As I walked down a dark Oxford street afterwards, the butler's kindness sparked a memory that I had mostly repressed. When I applied for my scholarship (with six carbon copies, on a manual typewriter), my subway to the British Consulate in Boston stalled underground. I arrived breathless with my application, five minutes after closing time. I banged on the locked door, cursing myself for my procrastination. Suddenly the door opened, and a kindly British woman stuck her head out; she asked, "Are you one of The Scholars?" "I had hoped to be," I said, blurting my excuse. "Well, we're closed, you know," she said. Then she looked around furtively, smiled broadly, and reached out her hand: "Well, give it here! Hope you win!" And the rest, as they say, is history. From that day forward, I have never erred by counting on the generosity of the British people.

So we punted yesterday, down the serenely peaceful Cherwell, for the first time in 25 years. How long, I wondered, before we find such peace again? And oh yes, I just now finished off my morning coffee with a McVities Dark Chocolate Homewheat biscuit. Plus ça change....

Happily from Oxford.

## Contact us

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Aastho Prasad FEB 2022