

2021 Annual Conference of the Geneva Human Rights Platform

THE CONNECTIVITY BETWEEN NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS ACTORS AND GENEVA-BASED INTERNATIONAL MECHANISMS

Tuesday 12th October 2021

9:00 – 18:00 Maison de la Paix (Pétale 5), Geneva

9:00 – 18:00 CET, Online Event (Zoom)

Agenda

9:00 – 9:25

Welcome and Introduction

- **Marie-Laure Salles**, Director of the Graduate Institute
- **Ambassador Jürg Lauber**, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the UN Office and other International Organizations in Geneva
- **Gloria Gaggioli**, Director of the Geneva Academy
- **Felix Kirchmeier**, Executive Director of the Geneva Human Rights Platform

9:25 – 9:45

Keynote Address

- **Sima Samar**, Member of the United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement and former Chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC)

9:45 – 11:15

Plenary Panel 1: Coordination among national human rights actors as key to effective engagement with the UN Human Rights System

Speakers:

- **Mahamane Cissé-Gouro**, Director, Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division, OHCHR
- **Fiona McCluney**, Resident Coordinator, United Nations Albania Country Team
- **Asha Burrenchobay**, Senior Chief Executive, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Human Rights Division), Mauritius
- **Christoffer Badse**, Director, Monitoring Department, The Danish Institute for Human Rights
- **Roselyn Hanzi**, Executive Director, Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights or Human Rights Law Centre

Moderator:

- **Felix Kirchmeier**, Executive Director, Geneva Human Rights Platform

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Academy of International
Humanitarian Law and Human Rights

The Geneva Academy, a Joint Centre of



11:15 – 11:30 **Coffee Break**

11:30 – 13:00 **Plenary Panel 2: The digital shift and the role of new technologies towards comprehensive human rights monitoring and implementation at the national level**

Speakers:

- **Peggy Hicks**, Director, Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division, OHCHR
- **María Alejandra Costa Prieto**, Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Uruguay to the UN in Geneva, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uruguay
- **Salman Asif**, Senior Human Rights and Social Protection Expert, Decentralization, Human Rights and Local Governance - Democratic Governance Unit, UNDP Pakistan
- **Jonas Grimheden**, Head of Fundamental Rights, FRONTEX

Moderator:

- **Ashley Bowe**, Chief of Party, Human Rights and Social Development Division, Pacific Community (SPC) and Founding Trustee, Impact OSS Trust

13:00 – 14:00 **Lunch Break**

14:00 – 15:30 **Parallel thematic sessions will explore how national human rights actors address particular concrete policy areas and how they connect in their work with international human rights mechanisms**

Thematic Session 1: Systemic racism and national actors: How can national human rights actors be engaged in the fight against systemic racism?

Speakers:

- **Mehrdad Payandeh**, Chair for International Law, European Law and Public Law, Bucerius Law School and Member of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- **Sara Hamood**, Coordinator, Racial Justice Team, OHCHR

- **Sibongiseni Maxwell Dhlomo**, Member of Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (TBC)
- **Camille Tauveron-Lahouze**, Advisor, Sub-commission B on “racism, discrimination and intolerance” and **Michel Tabbal**, Advisor, Sub-commission D on “International and European Issues”, French National Consultative Commission on Human Rights.
- **Shane O’Curry**, Director, Irish Network Against Racism

Moderator:

- **Florence Simbiri-Jaoko**, Member of the GHRP Advisory Board

Thematic Session 2: Environment and human rights: How do national human rights actors address this link and how do they engage with Geneva-based international mechanisms?

Speakers:

- **Millie-Odhiambo-Mabona**, Member of the National Assembly of Kenya
- **Benyam Daswit Mezmur**, Professor of Law at the University of Western Cape and Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
- **Michael Windfuhr**, Deputy Director, German Institute for Human Rights, GANHRI
- **Adele Metheson Mestad**, Director, Norwegian National Human Rights Institution
- **Leon Dulce**, National Coordinator, Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment in the Philippines

Moderator:

- **Rodrigo Uprimny**, Member of the GHRP Advisory Board

Thematic Session 3: Cities as Critical Actors in the National and International Human Rights Systems

Opening Remarks:

- **Sami Kanaan**, Member of the Administrative Council, City of Geneva
- **Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea** (video message)

Speakers:

- **Silvana Pissano**, Mayor of Municipio B, Montevideo
- **Stephen Pittam**, Chair, York Human Rights City Network
- **Jackie Smith**, Co-coordinator, Pittsburgh Human Rights City Alliance and Professor of Sociology, University of Pittsburgh
- **Leilani Farha**, former Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing (2014 – 2020) and Global Director, The Shift
- **Barbara Oomen**, Board Member, Human Rights Cities Network

Co-Moderators:

- **Virginia Bras-Gomes**, Senior Social Policy Adviser and Former Chair of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and GHRP Advisory Board Member
- **Anh Thu Duong**, Executive Director, Geneva Cities Hub

Thematic Session 4: Building back better: How should national human rights actors address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 and response measures on persons with disabilities?

Speakers:

- **Amalia Gamio**, Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- **Bokankatla Malatji**, Commissioner on Disability and Older Persons, South African Human Rights Commission
- **Elham Youssefian**, Inclusive Humanitarian Action and Disaster Risk Reduction Advisor, International Disability Alliance Secretariat
- **Titty Matsinen**, Board Member, European Blind Union

Moderator:

- **Miloon Kothari**, Member of the GHRP Advisory Board

15:30 – 16:00

Coffee Break

16:00 – 17:30

Short feedback by Working Group Moderators

Concluding Plenary Panel: Small States in Big Roles: The Importance of Small Island Developing States' engagement within the United Nations Mechanisms

Speakers:

- **H.E. Minister Abdulla Shahid**, President of the 76th session of the General Assembly and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Maldives (video message)
- **H.E. Ambassador Asim Ahmed**, Permanent Representative of the Maldives to the UN in Geneva
- **H.E. Ambassador Nazhat Shameem Khan**, Permanent Representative of Fiji to the UN in Geneva and President of the Human Rights Council
- **H.E. Ambassador Rhonda King**, Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the UN in NY and President of the Security Council in November 2020

Moderator:

- **Felix Kirchmeier**, Executive Director, Geneva Human Rights Platform

17:30-18:00

Closing of the Conference

Background

The Geneva Human Rights Platform (GHRP) provides a neutral and dynamic forum of interaction in Geneva for all stakeholders in the field of human rights – experts, practitioners, diplomats and civil society – to debate topical issues and challenges related to the functioning of the Geneva-based human rights system. Relying on academic research and findings, it works to enable various actors to be better connected, break silos, and, hence, advance human rights. The GHRP is hosted at the Geneva Academy and supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

Its 2021 annual conference will discuss the connectivity between national human rights actors and Geneva-based international mechanisms, embedding this link within a number of specific policy areas. The conference shall bring together a large number of human rights actors from both Geneva and national human rights systems, offering a platform for exchange through seven co-organized panel discussions.

Today's human rights protection system is comprised of a complex network of UN and national mechanisms for human rights monitoring, implementation and follow-up. It is a growing ecology of interconnected actors, all contributing to both international and national mechanisms established to monitor states' commitments to human rights protection. The ensuing abundance of laws, actors, and procedures poses new challenges to the effectiveness of the whole human rights regime, as both the UN and its Member States strive to find innovative institutional solutions to the increasing requirements they face.

Within each country, we are witnessing the introduction of unique networks of actors with specific human rights mandates, including governmental human rights focal points, national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up (NMIRFs), parliamentary committees on human rights, SDG focal points, national statistical offices (NSOs), national human rights institutions (NHRIs), international and domestic civil society organizations, among other state and non-state entities. These actors are supposed to engage with one another but often lack the capacity or indeed the political willingness to do so. Adding to the complexity of this field, national institutionalization trends are in fact entrenched in domestic politics. After all, what is examined and reviewed in Geneva does not stay in Geneva. It has clear repercussions on domestic policy, influencing internal decision-making structures and prompting demands for implementation. As a result, implementation of international human rights standards has become a growingly pluralist affair, with the introduction new forms of collaborative human rights governance and distributive policies at the national level that deserve to be assessed, rationalized and ultimately systemized.

In response to this increasingly multifaceted environment, it is important to ask ourselves whether the current international human rights system may benefit by improving the coordination and leveraging of synergies at the domestic level. At the same time, it is also crucial to explore how improved coordination among UN human rights mechanisms - thus delivering in a more coherent and interconnected way - may also facilitate national-level uptake and engagement.

By focusing on connectivity between the Geneva-based and the (different) domestic human rights infrastructures, the panels of the conference will highlight different aspects of connectivity, focusing on how international and national human rights actors interact with each other, including how this interaction can further contribute to contemporary international debates.

The first panel will discuss the importance of coordination among national human rights actors as key to effective engagement with the UN Human Rights System. The second panel will focus on how new technologies may further strengthen such coordination towards more comprehensive human rights monitoring and implementation at the national level. These two plenary sessions set the scene for the debates of the day and will be followed by four parallel thematic sessions on the issues of systemic racism, environment, the role of cities and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities. Discussants will detail experiences from the various national systems represented and the UN human rights system, aiming to identify promising avenues for further connectivity. The concluding session of the conference will contextualize the discussions around connectivity between the international and national levels of human rights monitoring by focusing on the importance of Small Island Developing States' engagement within the UN Mechanisms. For more details on the individual panels, please see separate panel concept notes.