



urban forum



The Role of NGOs in the Course of Human Civilization

Transcript of the Online Forum

In cooperation with

SINOPRESS



Egon Matzner-Institut
für Stadtforschung



Speakers

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Transcript

Moderator: Ladies and gentlemen, let me welcome you from wherever you are located at the moment – to the forum on "The Role of NGOs in the Course of Human Civilization", jointly initiated and organized by URBAN FORUM and SINOPRESS. My name is Alice Schmatzberger, founder of the platform ChinaCultureDesk based in Vienna. I'm glad to be your moderator today!

In relation to today's main topic "The Role of NGOs in the Course of Human Civilization", we are looking forward to discussing the following issues: Problems in protecting human rights under international humanitarian law; Definition and realization of human rights; Role of cultural differences in interpreting human rights; Dualism vs. universalism; Hegemonial power and double moral standard; Security and human rights; Role of NGOs in the protection of human rights and better serving the course of humanity.

We are honoured to have the following distinguished panelists with us today:

- Prof. Dr. Mehmet Şükrü Güzel, President of "The Center for Peace and Reconciliation Studies" in Switzerland. He is also our honoured key-note speaker today.
- Dr. László Flamm from „Europahaus Budapest“ in Hungary
- Dr. Anat Hochberg-Marom, Strategic consultant in Israel
- Mag. David Kainrath from „Österreichisch-Weißrussische Gesellschaft“ in Austria
- Mag. Otto Kölbl, Ph.D. scholar in Switzerland
- Dr. Ernst Löschner, President of "Alpine Peace Crossing" in Austria
- Mr. Hermann Kroiher, Secretary-General of "the United Nations Correspondents Association Vienna" in Austria

and the organizing representatives:

- Mag. Bernhard Müller from "URBAN FORUM" in Austria
- Mag. Helena Chang from "SINOPRESS" in Austria

Allow me to briefly introduce our keynote speaker, Prof. Dr. Mehmet Şükrü Güzel. He is founder and president of "The Center for Peace and Reconciliation Studies" in Switzerland. An experienced expert on finding legal solutions to regional conflicts from Iraq to Myanmar, from Cyprus to West Papua, he was twice nominated

for Nobel Peace Prize.

Professor Güzel is going to share with us his reflections on the question "What are the most important human rights for war-torn countries such as Iraq or Syria, as well as the people of developing countries in Asia and Africa? How is it comparing to the needs of people in the developed countries". Please, Professor Güzel, the floor is yours!

Mehmet Şükrü Güzel: Thank you very much! I would like to mention that I was also awarded to the honorable degree of doctor and professor by the Rector of International Science Academy of Science in Azerbaijan. So let me begin with the question (Editor: his answers in written forms are prepared with the references).

When we talk about the most important human rights in a war-torn country of a non-international armed conflict, we are talking about a place that has been badly damaged by a war that involves different groups from the same country. Today, Iraq and Syria are under the definition of war-torn countries in which armed conflicts are still going on between various groups.

If we ask the question which are the most important human rights in Iraq and Syria for the people, the answer does not depend on the will of the people. The answer is subject to not only the States but as well the will of the warrior parties that is the will of the Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) designated as terrorist or not, to carry out the basic human rights and obligations of the NSAGs arising from the customary international law.

In an ongoing armed conflict, people are the passive element, their will for human rights are only subject to what are to be given to them. In this sense, the international obligations of the NSAGs on human rights during an ongoing armed conflict is the key factor.

The applicability of human rights law to armed conflict has been the subject of extensive discussion over the past few decades both for international and non-international armed conflicts. Much of this debate centres upon the question of whether human rights law continues to apply once we enter the realm of armed conflict. While the International Court of Justice (ICJ), in its Nuclear Weapons Advisory Opinion, did state the applicability of human rights law,



the use of the term *lex specialis* might have been construed as support for a claim that whereas human rights law then does not disappear, it nevertheless is in effect displaced by international humanitarian law (IHL).¹

First, human rights law remains applicable even during armed conflict. Second, it is applicable in situations of conflict, subject only to derogation. Third, when both IHL and human rights law are applicable, IHL is the *lex specialis*. It might be thought that these pronouncements resolve the question of the relationship between the two bodies of international law rules.²

The ICJ has stated that in situations of conflict, human rights law remains applicable, subject only to derogation. The ICJ observes that the protection of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), does not cease in times of war, except by operation of Article 4 of the Covenant whereby certain provisions may be derogated from in a time of national emergency.³ The ICCPR, clearly specifies that certain rights are non-derogable, which means they cannot be suspended, even in times of emergency. For example, Article 4(2) specifies that there can be no derogations for right to life, freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment; and freedom from medical or scientific experimentation without consent freedom from slavery and servitude, freedom from imprisonment for inability to fulfil a contractual obligation, prohibition against the retrospective operation of criminal laws, right to recognition before the law, freedom of thought, conscience and religion

We need to note that even if the UN Security Council from 1948 mentioned human rights responsibilities of not only States but as well the NSAGs, before the UN General Assembly's resolution 49/60, namely "the UN Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism" in 1994, the killing of civilians by the NSAGs was not criminalized by the UN for the so-called self-defined national liberation movements.

Today, it is widely admitted that NSAGs are bound by certain obligations under IHL in situations of internal disturbances or armed conflicts. The joint statement by the independent UN human rights experts on the human rights responsibilities of the NSAGs represents one of the important steps toward for the realization of some of the most fundamental human rights during a civil war. The UN human rights experts consider it imperative that existing international legal protections be effectively implemented to safeguard the human rights of individuals and groups, irrespective of the status or character of the perpetrator(s). In accordance with the idea that human rights protection devolves with territory (inalienability of human rights), victims must be in a position to seek redress for violations or abuses of their rights regardless of the actor at the origin of their grievance. At a minimum, NSAGs exercising either government-like functions or de facto control over territory and population must respect and protect the human rights of individuals and groups.⁴

The Preamble of Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions establishes the principle that every human being must be protected in times of war. For example. Article 6 of the Additional Protocol II stipulates that civilian populations may not be the object of attacks. Article 13 sets out the principle of distinction, specifying that attacks on groups of the population and individual citizens are prohibited in all circumstances, as are threats of violence. The enforced movement of civilian populations is also forbidden, unless their safety is at risk or urgent military interests require them to be moved.

According to article 4.1 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on child involvement in armed conflict, „armed groups distinct from the armed forces of a state shouldn't, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18 years." The African Union Convention on the Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, adopted in 2009 also is

a good example of the responsibilities of the NSAGs under the principle of elementary considerations of humanity. "Members of armed groups shall be prohibited from:⁵

1. Carrying out arbitrary displacement;
2. Hampering the provision of protection and assistance to internally displaced persons under any circumstances;
3. Denying internally displaced persons the right to live in satisfactory conditions of dignity, security, sanitation, food, water, health and shelter; and separating members of the same family;
4. Restricting the freedom of movement of internally displaced persons within and outside their areas of residence;
5. Recruiting children or requiring or permitting them to take part in hostilities under any circumstances;
6. Forcibly recruiting persons, kidnapping, abduction or hostage taking, engaging in sexual slavery and trafficking in persons especially women and children;
7. Impeding humanitarian assistance and passage of all relief consignments, equipment and personnel to internally displaced persons;
8. Attacking or otherwise harming humanitarian personnel and resources or other materials deployed for the assistance or benefit of internally displaced persons and shall not destroy, confiscate or divert such materials; and
9. Violating the civilian and humanitarian character of the places where internally displaced persons are sheltered and shall not infiltrate such places."

Developing countries for a long period of time argued that the most important human rights in the developing countries are the economic rights to „basic needs" which are more important than civil and political rights. According to the developing countries, civil and political rights can wait until basic economic needs are secured.

1 Noam Lubell, "Challenges in applying human rights law to armed conflict", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol.87, Number 80, pp.736-754, p.736.

2 Françoise J. Hampson, "The relationship between international humanitarian law and human rights law from the perspective of a human rights treaty body", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol.90, Number 871, 2008, pp.549-572, p.550.

3 ICJ, *Nuclear Weapons Advisory Opinion*, <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/icj-nuclear-weapons-advisory-opinion>. (Access 13.06.2021).

4 OHCHR, *Joint Statement by independent United Nations human rights experts* on human rights responsibilities of armed non-State actors*, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26797&LangID=E#_ftn2. (Access 13.06.2021).

5 *Medecins sans Frontiers, Nonstate armed groups*, <https://guide-humanitarian-law.org/content/article/3/non-state-armed-groups/>. (Access 13.06.2021).



The developed countries have been more interested in the protection and advancement of civil and political rights, as opposed to the developing countries, which have insisted on the greater importance of economic and social rights, compared with civil and political rights. The latter believed that the provision of the basic necessities and material needs of their population could best be achieved through economic rights. This division led to the adoption of separate covenants on ICCPR (first generation rights), and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (second generation rights) in 1966 by the UN.⁶

Solidarity rights (third generation rights such as right to development, right to peace, right to a healthy environment, to humanitarian assistance as collective rights). The relationship between human rights and development is essential as indicated in the third generation rights. Development is a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process, which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom.⁷

The first, the consensus between the ICCPR and the ICESCR, between the developing countries and the developed countries is the Declaration on the Right to Development adopted by the UN General Assembly resolution 41/128 of 4 December 1986. In Article 1.1 of the resolution defines the right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized. Article 1.2 is the first attempt to create a consensus between the first generation and second generation rights in the collective manner indicating the inalienable right to full sovereignty over all their natural wealth and resources of the peoples in the concept of solidarity rights, third generation rights.

The final consensus between the ICCPR and the ICESCR is the "Millennium Development Goals" (MDGs). At the UN Millennium Summit in 2000, world leaders agreed upon a set of time-bound and measurable goals and targets for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women. These goals aim at achieving measurable progress in a number of specific fields which are considered essential for human development and several lead to increased enjoyment of human rights, such as primary education. The goals provide a framework for development co-operation institutions to work coherently together towards a common end. The MDGs have led to increased emphasis on human rights-based approaches to development and poverty reduction. A human rights-based approach deals with the substance of the development support initiatives but focuses on the way in which development is being approached. The human rights-based approach, in essence, requires that policies and institutions working on development and reduction of poverty base themselves on the obligations that emanate from the core international human rights conventions.⁸

If we are to look from the perspective of the people's, preventing corruption in the government can be the basic, corruption most of the times is not the choice of the corrupt people, the reason is the fear of the bureaucrats for their future, in this sense strengthening the civil and political rights is the key factor for preventing the corruption. Preventing corruption can only be achieved by the realization of the open society.

If we are to speak about the human rights needs of the people in the developed countries, we need to indicate that there is no end on the advancement of the human rights. We should remember one important thing that is to remember how the developed countries were developed in their past. Till the UN Charter, the human beings were never accepted as equal by today's developed countries, for economic power, having a colony was a legal right for the most of today's developed countries. Develop-

ment was a result of preventing the development of the others.

On the other hand, realization of human rights means the need of the economic power especially on social security system. The advancement of the human rights is subject to the sustainability of the economic powers of the developed states. In this sense the growing economies of the developing countries is a threat for the continuity of not only the life standards of the peoples in the developed countries but as well the future of the social security for the developed countries.

There is also the issue of corruption. Western people are not different from those in Asia or Africa or in my country Turkey. But they believe that their future is granted. Corruption is most of the times not the choice of the corrupted people. The reason is the fear of bureaucrats for their future and this is how corruption comes. And then its realization, of course. We can say that the realization of human rights means the need of economic power, especially on social security system. The advancement of human rights is subject to the sustainability of the economic powers of the developed states. In this sense, the growing economy of the developing countries is a threat for the continuity of not only the life standards of the peoples in the developed countries but also threatening the future of the social security for the developed countries.

This is also a reality for the European Union. Maybe in the coming 20 years, the European Union's economic power and political power in the world will decrease. And when there is a decrease on the economic power and especially for the social security, related problems will create enemies and beat social equality. The fear of future will then affect the political cycle.

Too often, we see the hatred of immigration today.

Immigration, refugees and racism are some of the most serious challenges to human rights in the developed countries. You can see very well from the speech of the ex-president of the

6 Mazhar Siraj, "Protection and Advancement of Human Rights in Developing Countries: Luxuries or Necessities?" *Human Affairs*, Vol.21, pp.304-315, p.305.

7 General Assembly resolution 41/128 of 4 December 1986.

8 Icelandic Human Rights Centre, *Human Rights and Development*, <https://www.humanrights.is/en/human-rights-education-project/human-rights-concepts-ideas-and-fora/human-rights-in-relation-to-other-topics/human-rights-and-development>, (Access 13.06.2021).



United States Trump. He created a kind of hate speech for the immigrants. Rising of racist and neo-Nazi political parties will be a future threat subject to the decline of the economic power of the developed countries. I mean, the rising of racists and neo-Nazi political parties will be threats for the developed countries, causing the decline of the economic power.

Thank you!

Moderator: Thank you very much, Prof. Dr. Güzel! Let me sum up a bit. You talked about the human rights applicable in times of conflict and war. There is first, second or third generation in the developing course of human rights. You also talked about the difference between developed countries and developing countries concerning human rights. The most important human rights for developing countries are the economic rights, to fulfill the basic needs of people. This is priority versus developed countries, the latter focus more on civil and political rights. In addition, you talked about the importance of preventing corruption, about the millennial development goals and the colonial power.

Thank you again, Prof. Dr. Güzel, for your well-researched and reflected, sophisticated and valuable insight!

Mr. Flamm, Prof. Güzel pointed out something probably worth talking more about in his speech, that is, “development was a result of preventing the development of the others”. How do you see the hegemonial power and the double moral standard in the post-colonial era influencing the reality of human rights?

Laszlo Benedek Flamm: Thank you for the question! Indeed, a close interaction can be observed between the use of hegemonial power and the rise of double moral standards regarding the state of democratic values and human rights in the developing countries. Moreover, this interaction takes place in a new dimension which revitalizes the theory of Samuel P. Huntington on the Clash of Civilizations. As he stated, it shall be recognized that making an intervention in the affairs of other civilizations is likely to be the greatest threat that exists and leads to uncertainties and potential global conflicts in the multi-civilization world.

After 25 years of his statement, we are witnessing on developments that have increased civilizational conflicts in the relations between the Western world and countries that arose from the ancient civilizations outside Europe. Diverging historical and cultural paths of countries led to adopting different perceptions of democracy and civil liberties through history.

Incitement to civilizational conflicts became a tool of power politics. This trend has continued in the past years which is explained by the fact that China has returned to the global arena and paves the way to be the largest economic power in the 21st century. As a response to this challenge, the Western world chose to confront. And besides the use of political and economic measures, an ideological struggle has been also launched in order to put a halt to the growing influence of the Asian power.

However, China is not only a country but also a 5,000 years-old civilization, sharing its own concept of values that still permeate the mindset of its people and actions taken by their political leaders. Therefore, in case of countries outside the Western world, it is a complex task today to measure the state of democracy, rule of law, fundamental rights and freedoms in terms of standards which had been incorporated in the Western political thinking and governance models over the past three hundred years.

The comprehensive picture depicted above has created a very challenging context the human rights movements nowadays face with. Power politics, especially in times of crisis, insist to give quick and simplified answers to citizens and the international community about complex problems and challenges seen as a threat to their national interests. For this aim, power politics involve a number of international NGOs in deploying tools that have been set in different, even conflicting directions. Good examples for this are provided by recent reports targeting China about the violation of human rights and democratic principles.

As a counter reaction to this, reports were issued to broadcast on damages for breach of fundamental rights by countries of the Western world. Those reports have often been subject to a biased communication and resulted in conflicts such as global trade wars. In this tense environment NGOs should launch innovative actions in order to find peaceful solutions.

For this aim, it might be worth considering that NGOs should apply new approaches to value categories attached to promoting democratic values and international human rights. Fulfillment of this demanding task raises many questions e.g. what is the purpose of developing new approaches to the existing value categories? Is it possible to produce a new set of objective indicators for measuring democracy, freedom, rule of law and the political, economic and social rights by NGOs when many of them are funded by governments that are engaged in global conflicts? No room left here for answers but one thing is definite: NGOs should foster dialogue and partnerships among others with think tanks and international organizations with the aim of strengthening the mutual acceptance of different values and norms which were created along diverging historical and cultural paths of countries shaping the world politics of today.

Moderator: Thank you so much, Dr. Flamm, for the deep look into the hegemonial power in the post-colonial era as well as the functions of NGOs with the aim of strengthening the mutual acceptance of different values and norms along the diverging historical and cultural paths of countries shaping the world politics of today! Thank you for your clear considerations on the role of NGOs, on the biased reporting, and also on the challenges which NGOs are facing by wanting to play a positive role in the future. Some of the aspects you have mentioned, I think, are probably going to be also addressed by other panelists later.

I would like to raise a question now for our next panelist, Dr. Anat Hochberg-Marom from Israel on the security issues. Dr. Hochberg-Marom, how do you view today's conflicts between security and human rights?

Anat Hochberg-Marom: Thank you for the important question! The connection between security of individuals and protection of human rights is an actual theme that has significantly intensified during the last decade.

The conflict between security and human rights we meet today, poses serious protection challenges to the peace and security of the international community. In general, security of the person is a basic entitlement guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, and asso-



ciated with the right to life and liberty. In other words, every person has the right without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world, from birth until death without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin. These standards allow all people to live with dignity, freedom, equality, justice, and peace

The significance and ever-evolving interaction between security and human rights is reinforced, therefore, if we consider that human rights consist of human security, social security and stability as well as social resilience. And thus, individual, national and international development requires the protection of human rights. Moreover, we cannot have security without the protection of human rights, and we cannot have human rights without the protection of security. Development requires respect for human rights, and respect for human rights to prevent conflicts and violence.

Security is part of the human rights. Therefore, from a practical point of view, peacemaking must be built on human rights foundations and peacekeeping. Peacebuilding must likewise give a central place to human-rights considerations, incorporating human-rights strategies.

Moderator: Thank you very much for that valuable insight. Following your remarks, allow me to pose another question to you: In the United States, citizens are allowed to use guns for self-defense. However, there have been dozens of mass shootings this year alone in the US, including terrorist attacks. Is the issue of human rights facing a double-edged sword coming to the gun ownership?

Anat Hochberg-Marom: There are ongoing debates in the United States. Yes, while citizens are allowed to use guns for self-defense, gun violence has reached crisis proportion. Nearly 40,000 people are killed yearly by guns and another 175,000 are wounded in the United States in the recent years. And women and individuals of color are disproportionately affected. Mass shooting occur with alarming frequency in school, in office, at churches and concerts & in theatres. And an average of one school shooting occurs every week.

Although Americans constitute only 4.4% of the world's population, 42% of civilian-owned guns in the world are found in the US.

Research shows that among others, licensing for gun possession and firearm dealers, safe-storage laws, restrictions on the sale and possession of high-capacity and semi-automatic firearms, can dramatically reduce firearm homicides, suicides and accidental deaths.

And thus, although many countries have implemented strict firearm regulations in response to mass shootings and public safety concerns, and they have uniformly seen reductions in gun violence the crisis continues to spiral out of control, the rates of gun deaths (both homicide and suicide), greatly exceed those of other industrialized nations.

The failure of many states and the federal government to adopt gun-safety legislation to prevent gun violence violates a legal obligation to protect the human rights of Americans.

Responding to the crisis requires getting the political authorities to take human rights seriously and to adopt public-health measures addressing the problem. It also requires a cultural shift (that is already underway) to focus less on gun ownership and more on human rights, and to find the appropriate balance between the right of the individual to own a gun and the right of the individual to be safe.

Fundamentally, security has to do with the presence of peace and safety, the protection of human and physical resources or absence of crisis, or threats of violence. However, the coronavirus pandemic has dramatically changed the traditional frame of reference for what constitutes a security issue, by thrusting a public health challenge center stage as the world's most pressing non-military threat to human security.

In Israel, rights restrictions and securitization of health during COVID-19 shows that Israel adopted a series of legal measures that have restricted various human rights including limitations, not only on the right to freedom of movement itself, but also on family life, freedom of assembly and freedom of religion. In addition to the various rights restricted because of the lockdown, the Israel Security Agency (ISA) was given extensive powers to obtain and monitor the location data provided by the mobile

phones of each and every citizen in order to prevent or limit the spread of the contagion

However, utilizing the technology to combat the pandemic raises significant questions concerning the debate over privacy with regard to the monitoring of sensitive personal information. Since the right to privacy was severely limited, the emergency regulations create a dangerous precedent that could remain with us long after COVID-19 is gone...

There is a greater risk that the roll-out of contact tracing or disease-tracking technologies will set a dangerous precedent that in the long term will infringe on people's rights. The concern is that major historical events can be a springboard for attempts at the wide scale collection of information and mass surveillance.

To sum-up, it is imperative that countries not only officially declare their intentions to balance between the right of security and the basic human rights, but reaffirm their commitment human rights and take concrete steps to effectively implement conflict prevention and response, particularly due to the dynamic and ever-changing nature & threats to human security which has to be balanced with other human rights.

Moderator: Thank you, Dr. Hochberg-Marom, for your valuable insight! You talked about how security and human rights are deeply intertwined. That one is not available without the other. You mentioned USA as a recent example, and how it is necessary, with the impact of the corona pandemic, as well as all the legal obligations set at the time, to find a new balance between security and human rights. I hope I got you right.

Considering the issue of security, I'd like to also raise a question to Mag. David Kainrath from Österreichisch-Weißrussische Gesellschaft. Mr. Kainrath, we know that the Snowden leaks exposed the US 'Prism' program which for years monitors the leaders and people of many countries, including the European countries. What thoughts should be given to such a surveillance program?

David Kainrath: Well, you are asking a very important question. And before starting off, I would like to caution that I'm not a lawyer. I'm a political scientist and in this esteemed panel,



I think there are some lawyers so I have to tread very carefully when I make statements about human rights.

Your question is very important. On the surface, it appears to be a very American question, because this 'Prism' program that you refer to is probably still in force. It is a program developed by American intelligence agencies for the mass surveillance of entire populations, of every aspect, of their electronic WIFIs. This ties very much into what Dr. Hochberg-Marom said. It's a qualitative change in how our societies work. It's not so much of a political question of choice, whether we want to live in a free and democratic society. But it's more about how we govern our societies in the face of completely new technological possibilities.

So when we talk about Snowden and "Prism", I would like to compare the new facts which Snowden helped make known to the broader public. I would like to compare that to the start of the atomic age. We simply have means at our disposal. Some governments in our world have means at our disposal to run, and to super surveillance entire societies which were simply not available before. At the click of a button, you can find out in-depth information about every citizen, for which you in old times would have needed armies of researchers, agents and so on to find out the exact same information. I would like to give the Americans a pass here in the sense that it's not surprising that this kind of program started in the United States, since it's the leading technological power in the world. And it's also not a surprise that similar developments are taking place in China because it's very close in leading so many sectors of the IT industry infrastructure and artificial intelligence and so on.

It is, therefore, only logical that these countries, who have these technological possibilities, have the potential to also utilize it in such a way like a trial or error process. It ties into human rights in the sense that we need to reinterpret what our traditional interpretation of human rights means in the digital age.

Let me please refer to what Dr. Flamm said before. I really like the provocative saying of NGOs being the tools of power politics. And I would like to tie in because this has been part of my reading and of my research as well. I think it's something that should be considered.

First of all, in many cases, I agree to the thesis of Dr. Flamm. In this context, we should keep in mind that most of the NGOs that we see today, which are active internationally, have a very small mandate. You'll have to ask yourself what democratic legitimacy they have, how large their members' space is, how many people are actually actively working for them. The truth is that most of these organizations have a very small professional paid staff. They're not master organizations and they receive their funding from different government agencies, as well as from private individuals who are usually large donors. With this structure behind them, they receive large grants in different organizations and private individuals. They then go into other countries to promote human rights there. One might ask in whose interests they are acting. It's not always clear. Of course, they don't state it openly. They always refer to the universal values which in some cases might be true or might not. But it's very skewed. I mean, let's be honest. They don't treat every country equally or human rights violations equally. Some countries seem to get a pass, some not to get so much attention. In some other countries, there are media coverage 24/7. Thank you!

Moderator: Thank you very much! One important point you mentioned was what human rights means in the digital age. If I understood you rightly, we need new discussions and need to look for new definition, or rather, interpretation, of human rights, I would say.

I would like to pose another question to you, Mr. Kainrath, if you don't mind. We all know that amid the campaign against Covid-19, the Floyd incident and the Anti-discrimination Asian movement in the United States have been also hot topics this year. What are the human rights issues emerged behind them?

David Kainrath: It's interesting that you ask that question because it is actually connected both to human rights and to NGOs which we are discussing here today.

First of all, Covid-19 is a global topic that concerns almost all countries in the world and it has several human rights issues tied to it. And again, I'm looking at this from a political science perspective, at broader social dynamics. The Floyd incident in the United States which spawned the Black Lives Matter movement, as well as the anti-Asian violence, which has been

surfacing in the United States, I would qualify those as more specific North American or even US problems. I will get to them later. I start with Covid-19.

Covid-19 is primarily a health crisis. But the human rights issues that surface are to fault, right? So on the one hand, you have the government restrictions, which have been posed on the populations in response to the pandemic. There were lockdowns. There were limitations on the freedom of movement of people. Those lockdowns also had a whole like series of other consequences. For example, the right of education, since in many countries schools were closed and children couldn't follow education in the way they have a right to. There were limitations on how you dress. Now that the scenes become more readily available, there is also a question about the right to decide about your own body. There is a contradiction or a dilemma between the right of the individual to choose what medicine is administered and the safety of the society as a whole, to say please vaccinate in order to not recreate this pandemic, right? Also the human rights should be of course the right of access to treatment. And this is one of the more economic human rights question especially concerning poorer countries, where there are not enough resources available for all citizens to be covered with a good medical treatment, including vaccines. But it is also a question of distribution and fairness. In the richer countries where enough resources are available there is still the situation that not everybody is covered by the same insurance programs.

So, in my opinion, these are the main human rights challenges connected to Covid-19. When we talk about the restrictions, we always have to ask ourselves, is it all right? It's clear. Nobody will doubt about the restrictions the government puts on us. There are limitations of our civil rights, of our human rights. They tell us the restrictions are temporary and they're proportional to the deadly threat. But somebody please tell me how long is temporary, 5 months, 10 months, 1 year, 2 years and what is proportional, how many people do you lock up to prevent one preventable death, is it okay to lock up 10,000 people to prevent the death of one? Is it okay to lock up 1 million people for a month to prevent the death of one? Is it okay to lock up the entire country to prevent the death of one? And for how long? I mean, these are

questions that every society needs to ask itself and then to make a choice based on the values in that society. I can imagine that the answer will be different from country to country.

Now I'll talk about the Black Lives Matters and the anti-Asian violence. Would you like me to make two short points about them? The Black Lives Matters is a very interesting phenomenon from the point of view of an European observer, because it highlights problems that have been existing in US society for a long time. Inequality between races in United States has been a factor of public life for a long time. Discrimination and even the structural violence of the police, it's not something that came overnight. It's been known for a long time. To me, it is surprising that it is now boiled up exactly at this moment because of one incident which has been heavily reported upon, with which it is in any case good to put the spotlight on such a big fundamental problem in the United States society. But what surprises me even more is that even in countries where there is nowhere near the same problematic between different sectors of the population like here in Austria, there have been very large protest marches on the street in solidarity with the Black Lives Matters movement, even though it had no connection to our country whatsoever, which points towards like this global media reality that people live in nowadays.

The anti-Asian violence is a very important, and sometimes overlooked phenomenon. It seems to be like the polar opposite of the BLM movement. Both of these problems in the United States are problems of discrimination, racism, inequality, based on race. But whereas the people of color in the United States have a history of being disadvantaged and discriminated against and underachieving, especially in the socio-economic way. Their access to higher education, their access to higher paying jobs is lower than the general population. The story of Asian Americans, especially Northeast Asian Americans, has been quite the opposite. They have been overachieving. The college admission rates of young Asian Americans are higher than the average of the American average. Their average incomes are higher than the American average and they have risen very fast. So they have actually had a success story to point towards. It seems me that rather than the structural oppression to push people down, it may have something to do with the jealousy of the economic success that this group in the American society has achieved.

These are my two short comments. I'm sure there are many more comments to make but I would leave it at that. Thank you!

Moderator: Thank you very much for your clear and precise input, especially on what we can and cannot see when looking at those cases. Thank you again for your analysis!

Now let me welcome Mag. Otto Kölbl from Switzerland. Mr. Kölbl is a Ph.D researcher at the University of Lausanne and founder of "Rainbowbuilders". He is also an experienced traveler, in Tibet, for example. Mr. Kölbl, as is known, the international community has long been concerned about the human rights situation of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet. How do you see the situation there? According to your observation, what is the Chinese government's policy towards ethnic minorities?

Otto Kölbl: Difficult to explain the situation of national minorities in China in a few minutes. I will focus on two topics which are relevant to both Tibet and Xinjiang, namely the preservation of the minority language and the problem of armed insurgencies. We will see that a comparative approach with other countries in Asia and on other continents provides another perspective than what we can find in either Western or Chinese media.

What do you find when you travel to Tibet? My experience is mostly from Eastern Tibet, i.e. the Tibetan areas in Gansu and Sichuan province. These regions are mainly rural, and in rural regions, you find Tibetan communities which live according to Tibetan traditions, where most people strongly believe in Tibetan Buddhism, where religious, cultural, social and to some extent economic life is structured by the monasteries. Unlike what most Western „Tibet experts“ and media claim, the people speak Tibetan, many can write and read Tibetan, only some speak Chinese, even fewer can write it.

Those with the highest rate of Tibetan literacy are the monks. Most enter a monastery at age 6-8 and get their whole education in the monastery; they don't go to public schools. According to Andreas Gruschke, a German Tibetologist, the percentage of Tibetans entering monasteries might now be even higher than in past centuries, with 10% of boys or more entering a monastery at a young age and becoming a monk. Most of them will not learn Chinese. Some monasteries also have got schools for lay children, where monks teach the children in Tibetan; the curriculum is the standard Chinese primary school curriculum.

In China's minority areas, public schools are available in two variants. In minority language schools, most of the teaching is done in the minority language, Chinese is only used for Chinese language courses. In so-called bilingual

schools, most teaching is done in Chinese, only the compulsory national minority courses use the local language. In Eastern Tibet, these two variants are generally available from elementary school to high school, to a limited extent also for higher education.

You can get this information in various texts about the Chinese educational system. Only living and working with Tibetans can tell you how this system works in reality and what the challenges are for the future. Tibetans are strongly attached to their language, culture and religion. However, if a good spoken and written mastery of the Tibetan language is not seen as a plus for the own career, Chinese might take over as the lingua franca in professional communication. This might become a threat for the survival of the Tibetan language in the long term.

Generally, things look good. Both in Lhasa and in Eastern Tibet, Tibetan entrepreneurs started to emerge in great numbers some ten years after a place is connected to the rest of the world through modern infrastructures. Consequently, these places then became less attractive for Han and Hui entrepreneurs who were the initial drivers of economic development. However, challenges remain.

In general, China has got a favorable climate for small businesses. This is crucial for entrepreneurs to emerge in a community which originally had no tradition in certain important sectors like tourism. The lack of such a tradition is precisely the reason why Han and Hui were generally the first to drive economic development. However, the first generation of Tibetan entrepreneurs often has got little formal education. Many are even illiterate. For small businesses, this is not necessarily a problem, especially if they can get some help for the tasks which require literacy from (younger) family members with a higher level of education. Unfortunately, this is often the problem. Tibetan society holds formal education in high esteem, but only in religion and culture, not in the field of business and even less in technical fields. I have witnessed cases where extended family members with a college degree in Tibetan culture were not willing to help an entrepreneur to register his hotel on the various online platforms, despite this being an easy task for them. Generally speaking, entrepreneurs are not highly estimated within Tibetan society. When the time will come when even small businesses in trade and tourism must switch to written transaction contracts, many Tibetan entrepreneurs will face difficulties which might endanger both the emergence of a Tibetan entrepreneurship and the use of Tibetan as lin-

qua franca among Tibetan businesses. Regional dialects are another problem; they can make it difficult for Tibetans who grew up less than one hundred kilometers apart to communicate using Tibetan; some switch to Chinese in this case because it is the only way of understanding each other.

This is a pity, since the Chinese institutions provide good conditions for minority languages, besides many other preferential treatments for minorities. Not many countries provide public education in minority languages through all levels. For example, France, despite having four minority languages (Breton, Basque, Corse and Alsacien), provides public education exclusively in French. It goes without saying that all four languages are disappearing fast. In the 1970s, children in Alsace were still punished if they spoke their native language on the schoolyard with other children. Only since the 1990s, private schools can offer education in minority languages. It goes without saying that French „China experts“ love to accuse China of having an „assimilationist policy“.

In Bolivia, still in the 1960s, many parents from indigenous communities did not dare to speak their native language in front of their children. They feared that if at school, the teachers realize that the children can speak an indigenous language, the family would get into trouble. Before Evo Morales came to power in 2006, Bolivia was an apartheid state. Western media never cared. In Turkey in the 1990s, a lawmaker was sentenced to a prison term among others for speaking Kurdish in parliament. This event illustrates how minority languages are treated in Turkey, despite the country being a member of the Council of Europe. In Taiwan, for decades after 1949, under the Guomindang government which until 1949 had also been in power in mainland China, people were punished for speaking the languages of the national minorities living in the south of the island.

If China treats its national minorities better than most other countries in the world, why are there tensions between authorities and certain minorities? In the 1950s, a Tibetan armed insurgency led to massive destructions, many deaths and mistrust between Tibetans and the CPC which would have repercussions for decades. It should be noted that this insurgency started in the Kham region in Eastern Tibet, which had been under direct Chinese administration since 1728.

This contrasts with the historical evolution in Central Tibet, which has been part of China at least since 1720 and recognized by all foreign powers as such, but where actual control by the Chinese central government has been weak or at times virtually absent. In recent decades, several terrorist attacks in Xinjiang led to worries about an increasing radicalization. There is no doubt that surveillance is extremely strict and that many students of the vocational training camps are not there out of their free will.

What is missing in Western media reporting on these issues is clearly the background information and regional context. If we take these into account, the question could also be why there are actually fewer tensions in China with national minorities than in virtually all other Asian countries with national minorities.

China has got a total minority population of roughly 100 million. Except for the isolated terrorist attacks in Xinjiang and riots in Lhasa and Urumqi, China has seen no significant minority-related violence since the 1980s. On the other hand, almost all Asian countries (no matter whether East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia or Middle East) with significant national minorities saw armed insurgencies in the last 3 decades, generally with tens of thousands of deaths, or in some cases even civil war. Why? What are the reasons for these numerous conflicts? What could be the solutions? Most of these conflicts only get occasional media coverage. Even when a conflict reaches the point where entire cities are reduced to rubble with heavy artillery, no pressure is put on the government to put an end to the conflict.

Every small-scaled protest in China gets ten times more media attention than decades of heavy fighting in other Asian countries. And of course, the methods used by Western countries to eradicate the languages, cultures and identities of their own minorities have become a convenient taboo. This attitude will not help us to preserve the minorities which still contribute to the diversity of this world.

But why armed insurrections in Asia are well-documented yet not getting a spread in the media? There are armed insurgencies virtually in every single country where there are minorities. So we must ask ourselves why? China tries out a new approach with the vocational training, the training camps with massive surveillance. And the alternative is simply violence.

What do we want? An armed insurrection with tens of thousands of deaths over many decades? They try something new, so we should try to see what reasons are behind instead of simply blanking condemning. Thank you!

Moderator: Thank you very much, Mr. Kölbl, for your reflections and your insight! You pointed out the role played by the biased reporting in the Western world about the situations in China. An important observance! Thank you very much for the input!

Now I'd like to offer the floor again to our keynote speaker, Prof. Dr. Güzel. In order to further broadening our topic today, he is now going to share with us his reflections upon the following question: In the course of protecting human rights, double standard issues by some NGOs have been observed. How do you see the role of NGOs in better serving the future of human civilization, Mr. Güzel?

Mehmet Şükrü Güzel: Thank you! The Secretary General of the UN, António Guterres in his remark during the 34th session of the Human Rights Council asked for human rights in an impartial way without double standards and recognize human rights as values and goals unto themselves – not allowing them to be instrumentalized as a political tool.⁹

Alfred de Zayas, the first UN Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order stated that the weaponization of human rights has transformed the individual and collective entitlement to assistance, protection, respect and solidarity — based on our common human dignity and equality — into a hostile arsenal to target competitors and political adversaries. In the stockpile of weaponized human rights, the technique of “naming and shaming” has become a sort of ubiquitous Kalashnikov. According to Alfred de Zayas, naming and shaming fails to alleviate the suffering of victims and only satisfies the strategic aims of certain governments, politicized non-governmental organizations and of a burgeoning human rights industry that instrumentalize human rights for the purpose of destabilizing others and often enough to facilitate “regime change”, regardless how undemocratic that may sound and notwithstanding the customary international law principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign States.¹⁰

⁹ UN, UN Secretary-General Remarks to the Human Rights Council, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2017-02-27/secretary-generals-human-rights-council-remarks>, (Access 13.06.2021).

¹⁰ Alfred de Zayas' Human Rights Corner, UN Special: The weaponization of human rights, <https://dezayasalfred.wordpress.com/2018/10/15/un-special-the-weaponization-of-human-rights/>,

In the quest for power and influence of States after the establishment of the UN, human rights discourse has become a valuable resource. And today, as mentioned by Alfred de Zayas, human rights become an industry. Human rights industry is based on so-called non-governmental organizations (NGO) which are financed by the States. These so-called NGOs, (also defined to make fun as GONGOs, governmental non-governmental organizations), are established for the fabrication human rights approaches to achieve the political goals of the States including the regime change.

NGO definition includes a variety of organizations such as "private voluntary organizations," "civil society organizations," and "non-profit organization" but at the end they are the members of the civil society. Civil society consists of humans and weakness of humans effects the civil society as well the NGOs. Most of the times, prejudices controls not only humans also the societies. The civil society members most of the times effected by the political and psychological prejudices of the societies in which they are living which constitutes a dilemma to achieve a better common future for the human civilization. The values to be achieved or protection of the values on human rights for all equally is hard to be achieved because of prejudices.

One of the most important obstacles to achieve a better future for humanity is orientalism. Many Western civil society members happy to believe that human rights are a problem only in non-Western countries, oriented from the concept of colonization, originated from the legitimization of bringing civilization to uncivilized World. These are happy to believe in only non-Western governments can be the norm-violators. And when one non-Western civil society member mentions any human rights violations of the Western governments such as Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo Bay etc., for the Western civil society members, this is only a kind of be norm-enforcement based on necessity but they never give this tolerance to a non-Western country.

For example, are there a really fight of the States and civil society against impunity for the gross violation of human rights abuses? Thucydides, the father of the school of political realism, wrote, the questions of right and justice apply only to relations among equals in power. For others, "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."¹¹ Let's remember the practice of the International Cri-

minal Court (ICC) till today The ICC was designed as a court of last resort for ending impunity.

But there is a growing perception that an initiative of international criminal justice, meant to protect vulnerable people from brutal national rulers, has been subverted into an instrument of powerful against vulnerable countries. Africans are being held to international accountability for domestic criminal acts, but Westerners — and those reliant on them for protection from the reach of international criminal justice — escape accountability for international acts of possible war crimes.¹² Quietness of most of the Western societies and their NGO representative on the continuous impunity for the Western countries constitutes a gap in the belief of the common human rights responsibility of the States. And this orientalist approach of the civil society members of the Western societies is giving birth to its own opposite which creates an endless circle between two different societies.

Once, legitimization is being used for wrongful actions of the States on Regional Centralization, this legitimization goes on micro level to far-right nationalism when the regional arena begins to become smaller.

In fact, all the wrongs show how important NGOs are to humanity.

To achieve a better future of human civilization, in fact we only have the NGOs.

The main reason behind this is that the history of mankind changes in the name of humanity in the last century, proving that only after great human tragedies do the States take actions.

The World War II was originated from the Lebensraum (living space for Germans) ideology of Germany, not because of Nazi Party of one man, namely Adolf Hitler. Main reason of Germany for making the war is to realize new colony in today's Ukraine mainly, like the Europeans did in Africa, Asia. Conquest was a legal right for all the States before the World War I and prohibited for only between the European States. The League of the Nations had rejected the equality of the humans when proposed by Japan. After the establishment of the UN and with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for the first time, equality of the human-kind was accepted by the Western countries and decolonization made peoples free in Asia and Africa. Responsibility of protect and humanitarian intervention came to life after the

Rwandan Genocide.

A better future of human civilization can only be achieved without great human tragedies by the soft power of the NGOs, by which States can leave a side the so-called rule of law fetishism that are against the nature of humanity.

Slavery once happen a time was the rule of law, and we had the first real NGO at the 19th century, the Anti-Slavery Society. The Red Cross is an NGO, today we have IHL because of Red Cross. Most of the other NGO movements were founded after the two world wars and, hence, were primarily humanitarian in nature. For example, Save the Children was formed after World War I, and CARE was formed after World War II (The decolonization of Africa in the 1960s led to a new way of thinking—one that aimed at causes of poverty rather than its consequences. The armed conflicts of the 1970s and 1980s (Vietnam, Angola, Palestine) led the European NGOs to take on the task of mediators for informal diplomacy. Their support for locals had an impact on the demise of the apartheid regime in South Africa and the dictatorships of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines and Augusto Pinochet in Chile. In addition, in the mid 1980s, the World Bank realized that NGOs were more effective and less corrupt than the typical government channels. The food crisis in Ethiopia in 1984 spurred a new market for "humanitarian aid".

In the history of the NGO movement's growth, there have been several milestones. One of the first milestones was the role of the solidarity movement in the political transformation in Poland in the 1980s. The next was the impact of environmental activists on the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Another milestone was the Fifty Years Is Enough campaign in 1994. This was organized by the South Council and was aimed at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) on the belief that these two institutions had been promoting and financing unsustainable development overseas that created poverty and destroyed the environment. The most recent milestone was the organization of the labor, anti-globalization, and environmental groups that protested and disturbed the Seattle World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in 1999.

The past achievements of the NGOs for humanity gives assurance and hope for a better future of human civilization as a continuous soft power for humanity.

11 Ramesh Thakur, *Ethics, International Affairs and Western Double Standards, Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, 2016, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 370-377, p.370

12 Ramesh Thakur, *Ethics, International Affairs and Western Double Standards, Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, 2016, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 370-377, p.372.

Moderator: Thank you so much, Prof. Güzel, for the elaborated points on the question! Thank you! Just to sum it up, there is a human rights industry already, and there are some problematic aspects of NGOs as they are often trapped in the prejudice. And there is a difference between the Western society today and the old Western society. But nevertheless, NGOs are very necessary, more effective and less corrupt, actually key to the human civilization because of their soft power. I hope I got you correctly, dear Prof. Güzel.

Dr. Löschner, we believe the most challenging goal of NGOs is to promote the progress of human rights worldwide. The question is: Should human rights achieve its goal by being bound to unilateral economic, social and political norms rather than by taking into consideration of the historical and culture contexts in different regions or countries? If latter, how? How to avoid prejudice, orientalist and colonial mentality?

Ernst Löschner: Thank you for the question! To me, this is not an either/or question. Whereas the promotion of human rights is of existential importance, the biggest goal for NGOs, in my view, is to make a contribution towards a better understanding of important humanitarian and social issues. This contribution may be at the local and regional level, perhaps also internationally, thus ultimately towards the road to world peace.

No matter how small the contribution may be, it is vital, as it may be heard and seen by others who can also make a small contribution. All these contributions, taken together, may have a collective effect on those stakeholders and decision takers whose voice and actions do shape the fate of humanity and mankind.

The US-American cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead once said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

We from Alpine Peace Crossing (APC) are fully aware of our smallness. We shall always remain modest in our aspirations and beliefs that we may be influential. Thus, we have no illusions regarding our reach. But we shall always have and stand by our own beliefs and opinions. We will continue to organize fora for dialogues, to make small symbolic gestures and to create object installations with signals of empathy and hope.

Allow me to introduce APC a bit more to you. I have founded APC in 2007 to make sure that the 1947 "Krimml Exodus" should not be for-

gotten when 8.000 Jewish men, women and children crossed the Austrian Alps from Krimml to Italy. I have dedicated this memory and our message of peace to all refugees in the world today. Four years later - after experiencing in person the plight of present day refugees - I have decided in 2011 to engage APC also in project work and financial assistance for refugees and people in need, not only in Austria but also internationally. I could raise, with the help of friends, about € 1 million in the past 10 years for this purpose. This effort is continuing, now with the charity "APC-HELP".

Of perhaps more unique importance are our installations of seven APC Peace Pyramids along the flight path of 1947, most recently augmented - by my successors in the board of APC - with a further Peace Pyramid at the former DP camp "Givat Avoda" in Saalfelden, Austria.

Furthermore, we have organized "Palestinian Film Days" in Vienna in 2011, promoting a dialogue between prominent Jews and Palestinians in Austria. In 2016 we organized dozens of "Music Connects"- concerts and workshops between refugee musicians and local groups in many villages and towns of Salzburg. The inter-religious installation of the Grove of Flight in the Krimml Valley in 2017 - with 49 trees, a prism and two natural stones dedicated to survivors of Givat Avoda, their descendants and those who helped shape the development of APC - was designed as a message of hope to all refugees worldwide and all civilians suffering from the acts of war.

If I could venture one wish only: it would be my wish for peace in the Middle East, encompassing at the core a peace agreement - at last - between Israel and Palestinians, and including ideally a lasting agreement - perhaps even a federal union with corresponding political, social and economic benefits - with ALL neighboring countries of Israel. All this may sound terribly naïve, but who would have foreseen that the "Iron Curtain" between Western and Eastern Europe would fall in 1989 and that there would be a unified Germany again?

I am convinced that this goal can be achieved only if all stakeholders are sincere in principle to achieve progress on the road to peace. Furthermore, it will be essential to adopt a monitoring process through a supervision by a mutually accepted, empathetic and learned individual. Even though the book "Children the Challenge" of Austrian-born Rudolf Dreikurs was written for a different audience, its messages are in my view also applicable to all unresolved political and humanistic controversies. In particular, I remember: "Listen, do the unex-

pected, don't shoot flies with elephants".

Returning now to the earlier either/or question: yes, there is a need for norms to establish a level playing field, but these norms cannot be unilateral they must be multilateral, and they should encompass rules such as: be even-handed, respect and listen to the other, reject "disinformation" and adopt "value categories" as proposed earlier in this internet forum by Dr. Laszlo Flamm.

But any application of norms without due regard and respect for the history and the cultural context of controversial situations is bound to fail. It is of vital importance to recognize and understand and to discuss the emotional stance of the various stakeholders. The biggest problem which very often stands in the way of progress is the ego of stakeholders whose "honor" is at stake. This can be overcome only by a mutual realization that there are ulterior motives and goals which are of much "higher" order than the insistence on "ego"-positions.

About 18 months ago I have handed over the responsibility to run and develop APC to a group of young people, historians and teachers, who are now forming the board of APC under the leadership of Robert Obermair. They are continuing the path which I have begun. For instance, regarding the installation of Peace Pyramids in other cities and countries - especially Poland, Lithuania, Hungary, Italy, Cyprus and Israel - which were fateful to the survivors from Givat Avoda. I am therefor happy to support them in any way I can as Honorary Chairman.

At the same time the new team is creative with new ideas, especially towards young people from Austria and Eastern Europe, inviting them to participate in the APC Peace Crossings, preceded by inter-cultural dialogues. Furthermore, they are planning additional student exchanges between Austria and Israel which will hopefully include also Palestinian schools and/or Arab schools in Israel and perhaps also students from Eastern Europe. APC's mission is to initiate debates and dialogues, to intervene in historical and current social issues with an active remembrance policy, and to promote inter-disciplinary research into these areas.

Any form of peace or a better understanding starts with a dialogue which addresses all relevant issues, also prejudice: this is a key belief of APC, also in the future.

Moderator: Thank you very much for your contribution, your initiative and your insight, Dr. Löschner! With this very interesting historical background of APC, also mentioning Israel

quite a couple of times, let me get back to our expert from Israel, but with a question about the USA.

Dr. Hochberg-Marom, in the USA, four Blackwater employees who committed war crimes in Iraq have been pardoned. How do you interpret this in terms of human rights? Does it mean that power and double standards can define the connotation of human rights?

Anat Hochberg-Marom: Well, clearly, the four Blackwater employees who committed war crimes in Iraq and pardoned by the former US president Donald Trump violated the human rights of the Iraqi people.

As an act against persons and property, war crime constitutes a serious violation of the laws of war that gives rise to individual criminal responsibility. This includes a long list of acts such as intentionally killing civilians or prisoners, destroying civilian property, torturing, taking hostages, and the like.

The concept of war crimes developed particularly at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, when international humanitarian law, also known as the law of armed conflict, was codified. However, following the end of World War 2, the international community was united under common efforts to regulate laws of war and determine rules to protect citizens and non-involved people. For example, the Geneva Conventions in 1949 defined new war crimes and established that states could exercise universal jurisdiction over such crimes.

Evidently, many of these rules are prominent elements in, and derived from human rights, and as such, are binding on all states.

The Black Water action manifests Trump's dis-respect toward Iraqi's people human rights. As such, it is a prominent instance for the blatant hypocrisy behavior and double standards attitude of the U.S and Trump administration.

Generally speaking, the gap between professed values and actual American policy is especially evident outside of the Western world. U.S. officials routinely criticized Iraq, Syria and Iran, not only for their external behavior, but for manifestations of domestic abuse and repression.

Some of those criticisms are valid. But the credibility of Washington's expressions of outrage is vitiated when those same officials remain silent, or even excuse, equally serious — and in some cases, more egregious abuses that the United States and its allies commit.

The Trump administration came to office signaling a desire to shake up diplomatic norms. In his inaugural address, Trump assured listeners that no longer would the United States “seek to impose its way of life on anyone.” Moreover, he has not only avoided to proactively promote human rights, but rather ignored the human rights violations.

Ironically, some foreign observers praised the new administration's nationalistic approach as more honest than its predecessors, especially when contrasted with the uneven — and often counterproductive — record of American democracy promotion.

But in practice, this “liberal” attitude has meant a worrisome gravitation toward autocrats. Trump has praised leaders from Russia, Saudi Arabia, the Philippines, and even North Korea, while disdaining traditional allies.

Unfortunately, this cynical use of human rights is likely to cause further damage to norms elsewhere, at a moment when authoritarianism is rising. It suggests that the Trump administration sees human rights primarily as an instrumental tool to be exploited in certain circumstances. Worse, the message to America's authoritarian allies is clear: So long as you say nice things about Donald Trump, feel free to be as repressive as you like with your own populations.

Trump has praised North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un as “very honorable,” despite of the fact that he rules over a terrible/gulag state. And in respect to Egypt and Saudi Arabia, two of Trump's closest Arab partners.

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi (who has “done a fantastic job,” according to Trump) has presided over the arrest of thousands of prisoners without trial, and the shuttering of hundreds of nongovernmental organizations and websites. In 2017, the State Department suspended \$195 million worth of U.S. security assistance, pointing to rising levels of repression and human rights abuses.

In Saudi Arabia, the royal family does not tolerate even a hint of domestic opposition: People have been imprisoned or beheaded merely for daring to criticize the regime. Saudi Arabia's overall human rights record is easily one of the worst in the world, as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have documented. It is a measure of just how stifling the system is that the government finally allowing women to drive is considered a radical reform. But the move coincided with the arrest of a dozen prominent Saudi activists, most of them women's rights campaigners.

Yet, President Trump and other U.S. officials express little criticism of those brutal, autocratic allies. Moreover, Washington has continued to provide military assistance for the Saudi and Emirati campaign in Yemen, despite their legendary human-rights abuses, and the increased concerns by United Nations officials that coalition attacks against civilians might amount to war crimes.

The above-mentioned examples reflect the double standards and hypocrisy of Trump administration in respect to violation of human rights. Indeed, this double standards policy demonstrates to abuse of power by a superpower.

Unlike the pardoning of the American citizens who committed war crimes in Iraq, citizens of former Yugoslavia, Cambodia and African states were tried and convicted by the International Court. Ironically, the leading democracy in the world is internationally defying/mocking its liberal ideology, which is at the same time being applied on the American public.

Therefore, the international community should not only prosecute criminals from non-powerful countries, but also put pressure on the powerful US to stop/avoid the double standards policy and be in-tolerant towards human-rights violation worldwide.

Moderator: Thank you so much for the input, Dr. Hochberg-Marom! It's yet another example of what we have been discussing today. The bias charging against a human right by a Western society in a non-Western society. Importantly, you mentioned that by promoting the human rights, there are cases of human rights violations because of it. Thank you again!

Now I'd like to invite Mr. Hermann Kroihel from UNCAV to the floor for the following question: United Nations Correspondents Association Vienna (UNCAV) sees itself as an independent and internationally networked organization, not obliged to any political, religious or economic institutions, acting as a unifying element in the interests of the UN. What is exactly the roll of your organization played in the context of UN in serving the course of humanity in the future? Do you see problems in protecting human rights under the International Humanitarian Law? Are there double standard situations faced by NGOs these days?

Hermann Kroihel: Thank you! Yes, we see ourselves as an independent organization, not bound to any political, religious or economic institutions, which acts in the spirit of the UN in a way that brings people together and is internationally networked.

The Association of UN Correspondents in Vienna was founded on 27 February 1985 in Vienna, with its current headquarters in the UNO-City Vienna International Center. At that time, UNCAV consisted mainly of accredited representatives of international media at the UN as well as Austrian media representatives. Today we have over 250 members from different countries and continents.

The relationship between UNCAV and the United Nations is based on the Statutes of the Association of United Nations Correspondents, which UNCAV embodies in its principles.

Due to the crucial role and growing influence of the United Nations in the world, the number of correspondents also grew. Staff journalists of the print media, editors, part-time media representatives, press photographers, staff of embassies and missions based in Austria, writers, publicists, interpreters, translators and other supporters have worked closely together from the very beginning, pursuing and promoting their professional interests of reporting on the UN authorities in Vienna.

UNCAV, whose activities are non-profit-making, aims to safeguard and promote the professional interests of newspaper, magazine, radio, television and internet journalists reporting on UN agencies in Vienna, UN-related NGOs and public institutions, etc. In particular, the Association shall ensure that its members are not subjected to discrimination of any kind.

We offer international networking with organizations and institutions, an intercultural environment, the opportunity to attend lectures and meetings, to participate in press tours, press trips, press conferences, discussion evenings, social gatherings, joint hikes and the publication of a newsletter or e-mail service as well as the further development of a homepage. Among other things, it is our task to collect and process information of interest to you that we receive from other institutions and to pass it on to you. Furthermore, we take care of the planning of visits and guided tours to media houses, cultural institutions, companies and various organizations that have a special affinity with our work. Every member receives a press card in cheque card format from us, which instructs all organs and offices of the executive to lend their assistance to the holder of this legitimization card in carrying out his work and not to hinder him in his freedom of movement, as far as an official act permits. The possibility of issuing a press car plate is also given. In addition to the active commitment to the journalistic profession, exclusive services and attractive offers in a wide range of areas are available to our members.

We also support journalists in their activities to create the conditions for everyone to participate in the process of opinion-forming by providing a comprehensive range of information and by critically accompanying social and political life. We want to combine solidarity-based action with the representation of professional interests. We want freedom of the press for all those working in the media and are committed to the Code of Honour for the Austrian Press (Principles for Journalistic Work). We are a grassroots organization that implements the concerns of its members quickly and competently. UNCAV sees itself as a service provider, a community of solidarity and a social meeting point as well as a hub for journalists and the UN. The association lives from the activity of its members, especially from the voluntary work of its members.

UNCAV will continue to develop and improve, and we are looking for input from members and experts. We will do our best to accommodate your concerns. With the inclusion of the UN - i.e. the United Nations - in our name, we have also taken on a special responsibility and obligation with regard to our work and seriousness in our dealings with partners and the public. In this spirit, we offer meetings with representatives of international organizations, domestic and foreign institutions, press, information and cultural events.

Sure, in the course of human civilization, there are different phases of human rights development. Also NGOs have been through a lot of changes, facing challenges politically, socially and culturally. But we believe in dialogues and open-heartedness and unitedness. Together we are strong.

Moderator: Thank you very much for the introduction of UNCAV and the good wishes, Mr. Kroiher! Time flies. We are now coming to the end of this forum. For summing up this online forum on "The Role of NGOs in the Course of Human Civilization", I have the honor to invite one of the organizers Mag. Bernhard Müller from URBAN FORUM to hold the closing words.

Mag. Müller, as one of the organizers for today's forum, do you have any constructive suggestions to the challenges? Prof. Güzel pointed out that to achieve a better future of human civilization, we only have NGOs with its soft powers, in fact. The question is: How shall we better unite with each other and strengthen mutual assistance in the future for the sake of human civilization?

Bernhard Müller: Thank you for your moderation, Ms Schmatzberger! I agree with Prof. Gü-

zel that NGOs will be even more important in the future. He already referred to the historical merits of NGOs in the preparation for today's forum, thankfully mentioning the anti-slavery movement and the Red Cross.

The range of NGOs is much wider than it would seem at first glance. It seems important to me to emphasize that NGOs are, as the name suggests, non-governmental organizations. Therefore, in my opinion, the commitment to civil society and to key points such as human rights must be in the foreground. NGOs must not allow themselves to be instrumentalized. They have to remember their origins, why they were founded. If they follow these basic rules, they are indispensable in civil society. Then soft power becomes hard power.

But I also see another problem: NGOs need money and attention. Repressive states can deny them both. NGOs are therefore easily blackmailed and quickly fall into dangerous dependencies. Because NGOs can easily be pressured regarding their funding, they sometimes tend to attract attention with flashy actions. Let's think of Greenpeace. But such marketing gags are often bad for respectability. We therefore need not only serious NGOs, but also an informed population that supports and appreciates their actions.

As the co-organizer of this event, I'd like to take this chance to thank you all for the participation and contribution! We all still have a lot of educational work ahead of us. And, yes, together we are strong!

Moderator: Thank you very much, Mag. Müller, for your closing words! Together we are strong, so let's all unite to pave a better way for NGOs in serving the human civilization!

I myself would like to thank the organizers URBAN FORUM and SINOPRESS, for providing us with the opportunity to discuss such an important topic. For your information: The transcript of today's discussion will be available in near future and be delivered to you. The organizers will keep you updated on further events, too.

Thank you again very much for all your contributions and have a good day! Auf Wiedersehen!

30th June 2021

Perspektiven 2030

17 Ziele für den Weg in eine lebenswerte Zukunft

Herausgegeben von: René Hartinger (Ökosoziales Forum Wien) & Florian Leregger (Institut für Umwelt, Friede und Entwicklung)
ISBN: 978-3-200-07090-5
EUR 22,- (zzgl. Versandkosten)

Der Sammelband bietet umfangreiches Grundlagenwissen zur Agenda 2030 und ihren 17 Zielen für nachhaltige Entwicklung (SDGs). Entstehungsgeschichte, Struktur, inhaltliche Fundamente, Hintergründe und Relevanz, besondere Merkmale sowie Chancen und Herausforderun-

gen ihrer Umsetzung werden umfassend erläutert. Fachkundige AutorInnen beleuchten in 18 Beiträgen vielseitige praxisbezogene Facetten der Agenda 2030 in unterschiedlichen Gesellschaftsbereichen und zeigen Perspektiven ihrer Umsetzung auf: Städte und Gemeinden, Wirtschaft und Unternehmertum, Arbeit, Wissenschaft, Bildung, Kunst, Digitalisierung, Ernährung, Abfallwirtschaft, Inklusion, Klima- und Umweltschutz sowie privates Engagement und Handeln.



Wege zur Wohlfahrtsstadt

Wirtschafts- und sozialpolitische Überlegungen für eine moderne Kommunalpolitik

Herausgegeben von: Renate Brauner & Bernhard Müller
ISBN: 978-3-200-07300-5
EUR 25,- (zzgl. Versandkosten)

Dieser Sammelband will einen kompakten Überblick zur Rolle der öffentlichen Hand und vor allem der Kommunen und ihrer Leistungen der Daseinsvorsorge, aber auch der wirtschaftspolitischen Rolle, die Staat und Kommunen, gerade in Krisenzeiten haben können und müssen, geben. Die aktuellen Diskussionen und Erfahrungen stehen dabei ebenso im Fokus wie der Versuch eines Blicks in die mögliche Zukunft

einer progressiven, kommunalen Wirtschaftspolitik. Der Begriff der Wohlfahrtsstadt ist im Gegenzug zu jenem des Wohlfahrtsstaates jung und wenig etabliert – zu Unrecht, wie die HerausgeberInnen meinen. Nach Jahrzehnten an Privatisierung, Deregulierung, Outsourcing und reiner Austeritätspolitik hat in den letzten Jahren ein gewisses Umdenken stattgefunden. Nicht zuletzt durch die COVID-19-Pandemie und ihre mannigfaltigen verheerenden Folgen wurden die Vorzüge einer öffentlichen Daseinsvorsorge inklusive stabilem Sozial- und Gesundheitssystem öffentlich wahrgenommen, thematisiert, geschätzt und dadurch mancherorts gestärkt.



50 Jahre österreichisch-chinesische Beziehungen

Urbane Überlegungen

Herausgegeben von: Bernhard Müller
ISBN: 9 783200 077928
EUR 25,- (zzgl. Versandkosten)

Im Mai 2021 feierte Österreich 50 Jahre diplomatische Beziehungen mit der Volksrepublik China. Als diese 1971 begannen, konnte keines der beiden Länder erahnen, wie sich die bilaterale Zusammenarbeit in den nächsten 50 Jahren entwickeln würde. Wiewohl im Laufe der Jahrzehnte einige Festschriften bzw. Monografien erschienen sind, hat es noch keine Publikation gegeben, die urbane Überlegungen in das Zen-

trum ihrer Betrachtungen stellt. Der Sammelband setzt nach einer einleitenden Chronik bewusst auf die Mischung aus wissenschaftlichen Texten, Interviews und persönlichen Erlebnisberichten, um ein möglichst breites Spektrum der Beziehungen zwischen der Alpen- und der Volksrepublik abzudecken, ohne den Fokus auf Urbanität und damit zusammenhängende Politikfelder (wie Bildung, Digitalisierung, Kultur, Mobilität, Wirtschaft etc.) zu verlieren.

