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English Edition

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Criminalising Sexuality: *Zina* Laws as Violence Against Women in Muslim Contexts

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Corporations and Human Rights: The Debate Between Voluntarists and Obligationists and the Undermining Effect of Sanctions

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Former Ford Foundation's Human Rights Officer in Brazil (2000-2011)

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● **SPECIAL ISSUE: CONECTAS HUMAN RIGHTS - 10 YEARS**

● The Making of an International Organization from/in the South



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SPECIAL ISSUE

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PRESENTATION



SUR issue number 15 is a very special one. For the first time, it encompasses three different sections. One comprises a thematic dossier on the national implementation of regional and international human rights systems. Additionally, this issue brings two non-thematic articles involving relevant contemporary human rights topics (business and human rights and women's rights in Islam), as well as an interview with Denise Dora, from the Ford Foundation (2000-2011).

Finally, celebrating the 10th anniversary of Conectas Human Rights, issue No. 15 is published with the same cover color as No. 1, and brings a dossier by Conectas's current and former staff members, who share their experience and lessons learned. This last section is presented in more detail in the letter to the readers, later in this issue.

Thematic dossier: Implementation at the National Level of the Decisions of the Regional and International Human Rights Systems

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the international and regional human rights systems have been fundamental in the definition and protection of human rights, and have contributed substantially to the improvement of the Rule of Law in various different regions. These mechanisms, in many cases, have been the final remedy available to victims when local institutions failed or were unwilling to protect their rights. Accordingly, in addition to a protection mechanism, they represent a source of hope in adverse local political contexts.

Many human rights defenders and experts, however, claim that decisions and recommendations issued by these mechanisms are not currently being implemented satisfactorily at the national level. The lack of implementation is a serious threat to the very mechanisms themselves, which lose credibility in the eyes of the victims and the States, and fail to provide remedies to those who need them. *Sur – International Human Rights Journal* issue number 15 brings a thematic dossier to tackle this problem, i.e. to promote a critical debate on the national imple-

mentation of decisions and recommendations derived from regional and international human rights systems. This section encompasses four articles, three on the Inter-American, and one on the European system.

The first article highlights the interplay between the European human rights system and Russia. *Enforcement of the Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in Russia: Recent Developments and Current Challenges*, by Maria Issaeva, Irina Sergeeva, and Maria Suchkova, examines the interaction between the Russian legal system and the Strasbourg Court, exposing the European human rights available mechanisms to enforce its decisions as well as criticizing the obstacles in Russia for the implementation of measures adopted by the European Court, particularly those of a general nature.

The dossier's second article, *The Damião Ximenes Lopes Case: Changes and Challenges Following First Ruling Against Brazil in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights*, written by Cássia Maria Rosato and Ludmila Cerqueira Correia, presents a general overview of the implementation of the recommendations expressed in the first ruling of the Inter-American Court against Brazil, in 2006, dealing with mental health institutions. The authors expose how, by developing international jurisprudence and strengthening the actions of Brazil's *Anti-Asylum Movement*, the Court had a positive impact on the country's public mental health policy and the rights of persons with mental disabilities, although further policy changes are still required.

Thirdly, SUR presents another article discussing implementation in the Inter-American system, this time exploring the Argentinean case. In *The Implementation of Decisions from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in Argentina: An Analysis of the Jurisprudential Swings of the Supreme Court*, Damián A. González-Salzberg reviews a series of legal cases involving Argentina before the Inter-American Human Rights system and analyzes the lack of compliance of the State regarding Inter-American Court decisions. Through his case-by-case analysis, the author shows how the Argentinean Supreme Court has been inconsistent

in its recognition of the binding nature of Inter-American Court decisions, despite international and national legal imperatives requiring the Supreme Court to fulfill its obligation to prosecute those responsible for human rights violations.

The final article of this dossier presents a theoretical discussion on how regional human rights systems can contribute to build a transnational public sphere. In *Inter-American Human Rights System as a Transnational Public Sphere: Legal and Political Aspects of the Implementation of International Decisions*, Marcia Nina Bernardes argues that the Inter-American system contributes to Brazilian democracy by providing a transnational litigation forum for discussing issues often underrepresented in the domestic public sphere. The author also states that Inter-American system loses its credibility particularly in cases where national authorities and the legal community fails to take into account international human rights norms at the national level. In this case, implementing regional decisions and recommendations is a key element, not only to strengthen the system itself, but also to improve Brazilian democracy.

Non-Thematic Articles: Violence against Muslim Women and Corporations and Human Rights

Apart from the thematic dossier, this issue brings two other articles that present a critical debate on pressing topics. The Journal's opening article, *Criminalising Sexuality: Zina Laws as Violence Against Women in Muslim Contexts*, was written by Ziba Mir-Hosseini and discusses how political Islam has rehabilitated *zina* laws and its impact on women's rights. This normative body exists in many Muslim countries and forbids sexual relations outside marriage, sanctioning it with cruel punishments that violate international human rights. It criminalizes consensual sexual activity and authorises violence against women, involving, inter alia, death by stoning. The author argues that this issue should and can be solved within Islamic tradition. She also presents a critical analysis on how activists can be effective in challenging those practices

by engaging their governments through "naming and shaming" strategies as well as a process of dialogue and debate.

Our second non-thematic article features a discussion on business and human rights. Leandro Martins Zanitelli's *Corporations and Human Rights: The Debate between Voluntarists and Obligationists and the Undermining Effect of Sanctions* discusses the contemporary debate on corporate behavior responsive to human rights. The author analyses two sets of competing arguments: the voluntarists and obligationists, the former pushing for voluntary commitments by States to promote corporate social responsibility, while the latter affirm the need of legal sanctions against corporations, as a necessary step to adapt their behavior to norms of social responsibility. The author defends a voluntarist approach, arguing that, despite the fact that the imposition of sanctions on companies can indeed lead to progress in the protection of human rights, it might pose an obstacle to the development of more genuine practices in social corporate responsibility.

Interview with Denise Dora

We have included an *Interview with Denise Dora*, Human Rights Program Officer of the Ford Foundation in Brazil from 2000 to 2011. She analyzes the human rights organizations in Brazil, particularly focusing on the challenges faced by Brazilian society to build a strong civil society needed to guarantee human rights in the country and abroad, arguing that there still is room for capacity building in Southern organizations and for the reduction of global asymmetries.

This is the fourth issue released with the collaboration of the Carlos Chagas Foundation (FCC). We thank FCC for their support to the Sur Journal since 2010.

Finally, we would like to remind our readership that our next issue, edited in partnership with the *Latin American Regional Coalition on Citizen Security and Human Rights*, will discuss citizen security from a human rights perspective.

The editors.



CONECTAS 10 YEARS

HUMAN RIGHTS

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LETTER TO OUR READERS

It is with great joy that we present the special dossier “Conectas Human Rights - 10 years”, in this 15th edition of SUR.

This commemorative dossier contains articles written by individuals involved in the founding of Conectas, to reminisce and take stock of the first decade. We saw in this initiative an opportunity to share lessons learned, and even if briefly, to examine some of our mistakes and successes. Thus, the articles have the tone of a personal statement and convey the institutional history from the experiences of each of the authors.

In making this assessment, it is certain that the support and partnerships with a wide range of persons and institutions were instrumental in this journey. None of the initiatives discussed in the articles would have been possible without the participants who come annually to the International Colloquium on Human Rights, the authors of the articles in SUR, the exchange students in the Fellowship Program for Lusophone Africa, and the staff of the Foreign Policy Project and Justice Program. Nothing would have been accomplished without the support of various donors who, since 2001, have believed in and supported the work of an organization with ambitious and innovative causes. To all, our most heartfelt gratitude.

By publishing this dossier, another certainty is re-affirmed: it was the strength and conviction of a seasoned group of activists and academics that brought Conectas into existence. By revisiting the assumptions that led to its creation, the vision of its founders - Malak Poppovic and Oscar Vilhena Vieira – is underscored and presently reflected in each of the organization’s projects. Their attitudes questioning the status quo and their ability to develop strategies for effective action are - and always will be - the DNA of the organization. To the two of them, we offer all our gratitude, affection and admiration.

As Conectas’s directors since April 2011, we feel deeply grateful and honored to continue building the dream that we share as much with those who are mentioned in the articles of this dossier as with our readers: a fairer world, with respect for human rights.

Happy reading!

Lucia Nader, Juana Kweitel and Marcos Fuchs*

*These individuals are, respectively, the Executive Director, Program Director and Associate Director of Conectas Human Rights.



MALAK EL-CHICHINI POPPOVIC

Malak El-Chichini Poppovic, presently Pro Bono Senior Advisor for Special Projects at Conectas Human Rights, was Conectas's Executive Director from 2005 to April 2011. She was Senior Advisor for the Peace, Security and Human Rights portfolio of the United Nations Foundation from 2001 to 2004. She worked previously for *Comunidade Solidária* Partnership Program Against Poverty and Social Exclusion (1995-2001) in Brasilia, as Senior Researcher for the Center for the Study of Violence of the University of São Paulo (1989-1994), and for the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees - UNHCR (from 1975-1988). She holds a post-graduate degree in international economics and relations from the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva and a B.A. in economics from Cairo University. She has written various articles on refugees, human rights and humanitarian affairs.

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LUCIA NADER

Lucia Nader is currently, and has been since April 2011, Executive Director of Conectas Human Rights. She has worked for the organization since 2003, having served as network coordinator (2003-2005) and international relations coordinator (2006-2011). Before joining Conectas, Lucia was coordinator of communication and institutional relations at the Sou da Paz Institute. She holds a postgraduate degree in Development and International Organizations from the Paris Institute of Political Studies (Sciences-Po) and a bachelor's degree in international relations from the Catholic University of São Paulo. Lucia was named Social Entrepreneur by Ashoka in 2009 and she is the author of several articles on foreign policy, human rights and the United Nations human rights system.

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ABSTRACT

This article aims at recalling the making-of of Conectas Human Rights, a human rights international organization in/from the Global South, created by a group of practitioners and academics in São Paulo, Brazil. Based on the authors' experience as former and current executive directors of Conectas, this article covers the main aspects of Conectas's Global South Program, concentrating its analysis on the International Human Rights Colloquium and the Foreign Policy Project, as part of Conectas's efforts to reach out to organizations and networks outside Brazil, to bridge the gap between human rights and other disciplines and to facilitate their access to the United Nations.

Original in English.

KEYWORDS

Conectas Human Rights – International Human Rights Colloquium – Global South – Foreign policy project



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CONECTAS HUMAN RIGHTS: THE MAKING OF AN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FROM/IN THE SOUTH

Malak El-Chichini Poppovic and Lucia Nader*

1 Introduction

This article aims at recalling the making of a human rights international organization in/from the South, Conectas Human Rights, created by a group of practitioners and academics based in São Paulo, Brazil.

For its 10th anniversary, the purpose is to share our experiences, lessons learned and common achievements with friends and partners. This is particularly important because Conectas was from the start a collective endeavor that involved not only a dedicated team but also members of a network that has been built throughout the years.

The task of telling the story is complex, as it has to reflect the personal involvement and the daily work of staff who fought for their ideals, as well as concerted efforts of collaborators, donors and partners who have helped make this dream come true with their knowledge and support.

Another important challenge for the authors, who have been an active part in the conception of the organization's mission and objectives and its day-to-day work, is to revive the spirit that has moved the team. Unfortunately, reports and institutional documents often limit themselves to facts, figures, objectives and outcomes. This is not a fully documented case study but an attempt to reconstruct the memory of an experience and share what we learned with those who may be interested in strengthening Southern human rights infrastructures.

Conectas Human Rights is an international non-governmental, not-for-profit organization, founded in Sao Paulo/Brazil in October 2001. Its mission is to promote the realization of human rights and consolidation of the Rule of Law, especially in the Global South (Africa, Asia and Latin America) (...) Conectas develops its activities through two programs that interact and encompass national, regional and international activities (...)

*The authors would like to thank Oscar Vilhena Vieira for his contribution to the last section of this article.

THE GLOBAL SOUTH PROGRAM aims to increase the impact of the work of human rights defenders, academics and organizations from the Global South (Africa, Asia and Latin America). It therefore develops education, research, networking and advocacy activities. The program also aims to facilitate access by Global South activists to the mechanisms of the United Nations (UN) and regional human rights systems.

THE JUSTICE PROGRAM works nationally, regionally and internationally to protect human rights and to promote access to justice for vulnerable groups who are victims of human rights violations in Brazil. It therefore develops strategic litigation and participates in the constitutional debate, particularly in the Supreme Federal Court. In doing so, it aims to destabilize human rights violations and hold the perpetrators accountable, in addition to causing political embarrassment and fostering public debate.

(CONECTAS, 2011, p. 1).

This article covers the main aspects of the Global South Program. It concentrates its analysis on its central project, the International Human Rights Colloquium, considered the point of departure for other activities – the most important of which is the development of collaborative activities and experiences among Southern activists and scholars. Special emphasis is also given to Conectas’s efforts to reach out to organizations and networks outside Brazil, to bridge the gap between human rights and other disciplines and to build bridges with the UN. Moreover, the story would be incomplete without taking into consideration the creation of Conectas’s Foreign Policy and Human Rights project, in 2005, that has reshaped the outcome and impact of our collaborative work with the regional and international human rights systems.

To complement the description of Conectas’s Global South Program, there is an article by the editors of the *Sur- International Journal on Human Rights* describing its functioning and goals: “A Journal From the South with a Global Reach” (KWEITEL; POPPOVIC, 2011). Also in this same number, you will find an article entitled “Strategic Advocacy in Human Rights: Conectas’ Experience”, which shows the main achievements and challenges of Conectas’s Justice Program in Brazil by the former Director of the Justice Program, Oscar Vilhena Vieira and the former Coordinator of its main project, Artigo 1º (MACHADO; VIEIRA, 2011).

2 Democratization Process and the Human Rights Movement

A quick look at the situation of Brazil and of many other Latin American countries at the time of the creation of Conectas shows a relatively successful democratization process taking place, accompanied with a burgeoning of civil society organizations (CSOs) dealing with multiple aspects of human and social development –women, children, landless peasants, prisoners, etc. The expansion of the “Third Sector” composed of vibrant and diversified organizations and actors was seen as a source of hope and social progress to consolidate the democratic process.

However, despite the adoption of new normative frameworks and the signing of international human rights instruments, most new democracies were still

confronting various forms of institutional violence, disrespect of minority rights and unequal access to justice. Violations were no longer the consequence of arbitrary rule but in most cases occurred as a result of the ill-functioning of law-enforcing institutions; persistent social inequity and lack of accountability of public policies.

Human rights organizations that had gained momentum and visibility in the struggle against authoritarian regimes had to change their tactics to fight endemic violence against a more diffuse enemy. In this new conjuncture, practitioners had to go beyond denunciation of abuses to engage public authorities in translating rights into realities. Although apparently less heroic, the new battles for rights protection of vulnerable groups required long-term strategies and joint action to create pressure for social changes.

The multiplication of rights groups working on a variety of themes and causes has undoubtedly enriched the human rights framework of new democracies. However, factors that represent the main NGO strengths –diversity, flexibility and outreach– are also some of its main weaknesses. The fragmentation of the movement created competition for scarce resources, space and visibility at the cost of shared strategies in the fight for common causes (VIEIRA; DUPREE, 2004, p. 60). The main challenge posed to Southern organizations was to overcome their isolation and create alliances to become stronger proponents not only at home, but also on the international scene.

The new political conjuncture was also the opportunity to revisit relations between Northern and Southern NGOs. In most of the emerging democracies, large international organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, played a vital role in supporting local activities and in advocating their causes in the international forums during authoritarian rule. The challenge ahead was to bridge the divide between NGOs in the North –with international visibility and sustainability– and those in the South –acting locally and with difficult access to resources. In other words, how is it possible to give voice and visibility to those organizations that are striving to sustain the democratization process and build a truly global human rights movement?

Unfortunately, the relatively successful democratization process was accompanied by diminishing international support for human rights causes. This was especially true in emerging economies, as funding for rights protection migrated to poorer countries. At the same time, national philanthropy was still incipient; and unlike other more consensual topics like children's education, human rights groups were less successful in their attempts to create a constituency of local donors for their causes.

3 Conectas Human Rights: South-South cooperation in a globalized world

Created in the globalized world of the beginning of 21st century, Conectas Human Rights was conceived at a moment when civil society organizations were rethinking their goals in the face of the changing political and social realities. In the human rights field, there was an urgent need to consolidate the infrastructures of Southern organizations, to replace competitive fragmentation by cooperation, and to foster constructive engagement with regional and international systems.

Conectas's name was chosen to transmit the idea of creating links, of getting together people and organizations; and as a logo, a compass pointing to the South was selected. The decision taken by the founders to foster South-South cooperation in its programs was a political option that shaped all future actions.¹ It did at no point exclude the North, and especially not the close collaboration with allies fighting for the same ideals of rights protection and equity. It did however point to the need 'to democratize globalization,' the main challenge of the 21st century, according to former U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (BOUTROS-GHALI, 2004, p. 3).

We were aware that there are many 'Souths' and many roads to democracy. We also knew that we had no readymade answers or model to impose in a multi-polar world. We were trying to bring new voices to the international debate, while respecting cultural and language diversities. This meant working together to explore our mutual potentials, getting to know neighbors and distant partners, exchanging knowledge and experiences and building new 'horizontal' alliances.

Conectas's Global South Program aimed to create an enabling environment to strengthen a **new generation of human rights defenders**. The rationale for Conectas was that people and groups could transcend their limitations and increase their impact by joining efforts. For this reason, **scholars, thinkers and social leaders** were included in this dialogue from the outset.

Likewise, Conectas felt that it was vital to bring Southern organizations to **the UN and other international forums** to make their voices heard and influence decision-makers. This was particularly important at a time when the post-September 11th environment had given rise to security-driven policies that overlooked rights issues and de-legitimized multilateral mechanisms for the resolution of conflicts, thus dismissing the role of the United Nations.

Strengthen the individual and collective impact of human rights activists and scholars working throughout Latin America, Africa and Asia by forging connections among them and increasing their interactions with the UN's international human rights system [and other multilateral human rights systems] (CONECTAS, 2006, p.1).

To develop strategies adapted to Southern realities, Conectas has put education, research, networking and advocacy activities at the center of the Program.²

In order to achieve our goals, we had to find answers to a number of important questions:

- How can we create a new type of international organization based in the South, with a Southern agenda of partnerships and networking?
- How can we foster experience sharing and develop a cross-regional dialogue on values and culture?
- How can we generate innovative critical thinking focused on a human rights agenda for the Global South?
- How can we give voice and visibility to Southern protagonists in the international human rights system?

4 Building partnerships: Education, Networking and Advocacy

4.1 *The International Human Rights Colloquium*

The International Human Rights Colloquium has been, since its creation, the point of departure and the central project of the Global South Program. The Colloquium is a capacity-building and peer-learning conference for activists from countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America that takes place annually over the period of a week in São Paulo and is conducted in three languages: English, Portuguese and Spanish.

By bringing together a wide range of activists, scholars, lawyers and other interested parties, the Colloquium offers ‘a one-of-a-kind forum’ to help them: transcend their isolation and fragmentation; infuse their activities with information about the latest developments in the field; take away vital lessons from each other’s experiences; extend their reach and increase their influence within the UN system; and develop alliances to move forward shared advocacy agendas (CONECTAS, 2006, p. 2-3).

From 2001 to 2010, close to 600 activists from countries in the Global South have participated in it; in addition, some 300 scholars, panelists, observers and monitors took part in the process in different capacities. With the annual colloquium and other related projects, Conectas has gradually built a network of Southern-based human rights activists. It is noteworthy that a large number of former participants continue their dialogue and joint activities through an informal alumni network, **HR Dialogue**. They shared until recently a common portal coordinated by Conectas that has been replaced by new devices (Facebook, Twitter, etc).

An important development linked to the II Colloquium in 2002 was the formation by the lecturers and resource persons of a group that called itself “**Sur –Human Rights University Network**.” The founders were 27 multi-disciplinary scholars and two UN officials from 14 countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Ivory Coast, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, UK, US, Uruguay and Zimbabwe) who chose the name Sur (South in Spanish) and adopted the same logo as Conectas. At the end of this first meeting, participants decided to form a network whose main goals would be to strengthen human rights education, research and advocacy in Southern universities, and seek to develop strategies to bring them closer to the UN system on subjects of common interest.

4.1.1 Evolution and main features

The first International Human Rights Colloquium that took place in May 2001, actually pre-dated the formal launch of Conectas.³ The participants were young human rights practitioners from countries in Latin America and Portuguese-speaking Africa. All lectures and working groups were done in Spanish and Portuguese with no simultaneous translation.

In subsequent years, Conectas took full responsibility for the organization of the event, the features of which evolved over time. The themes and contents are chosen in collaboration with partners and former participants. With the

voluntary contribution of panelists from around the world, an extensive program of lectures, workshops, working groups and peer-learning activities is designed for each of its editions.

The above description of the colloquium does not give a full picture of the “participatory, democratic and inclusive” process that built over the years a unique space for Southern human rights defenders to learn, share and work together (COLUMBIA, 2002, p. 4). The organization of the colloquium requires a year-round program that involves the whole Conectas team, starting with a meticulously planned preparatory phase followed by networking and advocacy activities. As in capacity building programs, the process is often as important as outcomes; its main features are described below.

The profile of selected participants and the **size of the group** changed over time. For the first couple of years, the original idea was to offer junior practitioners (18-25 years), with little travel experience outside their country or region, the opportunity to get in touch with other cultures and values. Activists working in different rights fields – women, children, prisons, sexual rights, etc. – were brought together to share experiences and help overcome the fragmentation of the human rights movement; members of minority groups were included in all selection processes, and a balance between genders was respected. For the first two editions in 2001 and 2002, participants came from 10 to 13 countries in Latin America and Portuguese-speaking Africa; working languages were Portuguese and Spanish (without translation). The size of the encounter was much larger than subsequent ones, and the duration was two weeks.

Starting from the 3rd edition of the Colloquium, English was introduced as a third language, and English-speakers from Africa and Asia were included. The selection continued to follow former criteria; however the requirements for applications were more rigorous with a series of new specifications –such as a minimum of two-years of previous experience, solid recommendations from reliable partners or institutions, submission of a dissertation. This meant that chosen candidates were more qualified to be pro-active participants: learning and exchanging experiences and making good use of knowledge acquired to benefit their organizations upon return. The duration of the encounter has been gradually reduced both temporally, to one week, as well as with regard to the size of the group. This was due partly to budget constraints, but mainly to respond to demands made by participants in their evaluation process.

One of the most complicated exercises is to arrive at the ‘**ideal**’ **number with and composition of the group** for each event. The selection has to take into account gender, geographical distribution and languages, and to be accommodated within a given budget, while at the same time not overlooking logistic considerations, such as ticket prices, Brazilian Consulates in the country to issue entry visas, and transit visas in western countries for those arriving from Africa or Asia. In other words, a complex process of selection involving multiple factors and variables is undertaken several months before the colloquium.

The selection process for the 2011 Colloquium that took place from 5 to 12 November was particularly complicated as for the first year a fourth language,

French, was introduced. Conectas received 314 applications from 85 countries in response to the call for candidates sent to partners and advertised on its site and in its newsletter. A first selection was made in-house, and valid applications fulfilling all requirements were submitted to an independent Selection Committee composed of partners, donors and experts. The Committee selected 50 participants from 30 countries (29 women to 21 men) with the following geographical distribution: 23 Latin America (12 Brazil and 11 other countries), 21 Africa (8 English-speaking; 5 French-speaking and 8 Portuguese-speaking), 4 Asia and 2 Eastern Europe.

4.1.2 Lectures, working groups and other activities:

The curriculum of the Colloquium includes, every year, lectures on the main regional and international human rights instruments, as well as panels on current issues of the international agenda. The teaching of skills useful to their every day work – such as fund-raising or documentation of violations – is also part of the program. Scholars and experts from all continents, as well as officials from the UN and regional human rights systems, contribute voluntarily to the capacity building program.

The colloquium is an event in constant transformation. Every year the results of the evaluation allow us to rethink many of its features. From the topics chosen to the format of the debates, every activity is planned taking into consideration, among other factors, how to facilitate the dialogue between participants who speak three different languages. This has led to the adoption of a balance between formal lectures in plenary with simultaneous translation and activities divided in groups by languages. The whole process is accompanied by multi-lingual staff members and volunteers.

In this respect, it should be mentioned that every year about 15 university students offer their voluntary services as **monitors** to the event. A month before, they receive training on the main topics of the colloquium, as well as on their duties upon the arrival of the participants. They help with the logistics and translation during their whole stay. Thanks to them, the Colloquium offers a welcoming and warm environment for all.

Several activities were introduced to facilitate exchanges over the years. An example of successful innovation was the introduction in 2005 of the **Open Space Forum**,⁴ a self-managed activity by participants who have the opportunity to choose issues of their interest for discussion. A year later, **preparatory readings** on topics of the Program were sent to participants on a weekly basis one month before, so as to stimulate them to research the subject and send questions to the lecturers. This latest innovation has greatly improved the quality of student's participation and allowed panelists to adapt their talk to the interests of the audience. Introduced in 2007, **the simulation of a UN Human Rights Council Session** was the most popular new item among participants, as it is a concrete way to understand the working dynamic of the UN. Besides, some features were included in all programs because of their appeal, such as visits to other NGOs or social movements as a way of providing a vision of the diversity of social experiences in São Paulo.

With less formal teacher-student presentations, the colloquium's structure has become more interactive, giving wider space for participants to express their views, fostering intense collaborative advocacy work and increasing its receptivity to innovations.

"The colloquium today is a more democratic and horizontal meeting where differences between capacity-building and peer-learning activities have practically disappeared," says Conectas's Program Director, Juana Kweitel.

Evaluation processes carried out with participants and panelists for each colloquium have permitted to adapt changes to the demands of the beneficiaries. Criticisms and suggestions were incorporated in the planning of future programs. Participants are asked to fill in a daily questionnaire covering all aspects of the event –from logistic matters to rating lectures on content– and on the last day they are asked to give a general assessment of overall objectives. Carried out by external consulting firms, the oscillations in the results allow the organizers to test innovations and introduce improvements in its format and content. Since 2006, Conectas has used a complementary in-house tool: an online questionnaire sent to former participants six months after the colloquium to assess how they used their newly acquired knowledge in their daily work (CONECTAS, 2009, p. 188).

To obtain an overall assessment of past colloquia and prepare for the future, in the 9th edition, Conectas brought together 34 participants who had participated in the 8 previous events to contribute to a more in-depth evaluation of its format and content. For a detailed description of the methodology and the results, see Conectas's article: Report on the IX International Human Rights Colloquium (CONECTAS, 2009, p. 182-190).

Unfulfilled goals: All colloquia took place in São Paulo, although the initial plan was to try other locations. In 2003, discussions were held with members of the Sur network in South Africa to move the venue to Johannesburg or Cape Town. However, the cost and time involved in setting up an infrastructure to carry out the complex organization process exceeded our capacities and resources. Instead Conectas/Sur reached out to partners in other regions to learn from their experiences and discuss possible joint agendas (see below).

Among other unfulfilled goals in the colloquium were: the failure to use the Internet for the online transmission of the colloquium for those who were not chosen or could not attend; and the non-inclusion of French as a working language because of human and financial constraints until 2011.

Networking and the Use of New Technologies: At the time of the launch there was much excitement at the development of new Information Communication Technologies (ICT) which some felt would remove the need for 'old-fashioned meetings.' Throughout these years, Conectas made wide use of technology to reach its audiences, but it also had to adapt to the limitations imposed by Southern conditions. As few organizations outside the big cities in Latin America, Africa or Asia had access to ICT, fax and telephones were mainly used for the organization of the first years. This is why courses on the use of the Internet were provided, thanks to an agreement with the Brazilian Ministry of Education, for those participants who did not have previous access to it during the first colloquia. Likewise, Conectas launched its own

interactive portal where participants of the colloquia could post news about their work on an ongoing basis, but discovered that its server was inaccessible to many people in Asia so it had to contract a new host company outside Brazil.

Many of our difficulties have been superseded as communication technologies have become more reliable over the last five years. They have been essential working tools for our daily exchanges with partners, online courses and campaigning activities. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that the strength of the South-South network, formed during its ten-year existence, was that it brought together protagonists working on the same issues but who, otherwise, would not have had the opportunity to dialogue and work together. Building this type of partnerships requires, besides virtual communication, personal contacts to establish trust and an outreach strategy to follow up on outcomes.

Joint advocacy: The Colloquium also aims to have a multiplier effect, which benefits participants and their organizations, through joint actions. With the setting up of its Foreign Policy and Human Rights Project in 2005, Conectas established mechanisms of collaboration with the UN and regional systems that enlarged its advocacy work with Southern partners, as explained below.

4.2 Expanding Horizons

South-South cooperation was a relatively new experience at the beginning of the 2000 decade. To have a better understanding of the problems at stake, Conectas felt the need to involve more closely scholars and researchers in its work. It also made special efforts to diversify its activities by reaching out to partners in their countries and regions.

4.2.1 Knowledge Production

The **Sur –Human Rights University Network**, mentioned above, created during the 2nd Colloquium and facilitated by Conectas, became a sister organization run by the same team and practically the same board. Most activities related to knowledge production and to human rights, security and peace matters at the UN and regional systems, were carried out jointly by SUR and Conectas.

The SUR initial group attracted new members through various initiatives. Strictly speaking, it was never a network linked to universities but took the form of a loose gathering of academics and specialists who felt the need to discuss among themselves and with others human rights theories, to go beyond the existing dogmas and to propose Southern approaches to current issues.

Thanks to the generous support of the United Nations Foundation (UNF) and the Ford Foundation, the Sur - Human Rights University Network, in collaboration with Conectas, organized regular meetings. Most of them took place at the time of the colloquia to take advantage of the presence of lecturers and UN officials.

One of the first Conectas/SUR activities was to co-organize with the Center for Human Rights of the Columbia Law School a “Symposium on the

10th Anniversary of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR),” to examine its achievements and challenges ahead. The Symposium took place at Columbia University in New York on February 17-18, 2003 with the support of UNF. It featured discussions with the Office’s High Commissioners: José Ayala Lasso (1994-1997); Mary Robinson (1998-2002) and the newly appointed HC, Sergio Vieira de Mello (2003- killed in Iraq later that year), as well as leading human rights activists, scholars and experts.

On the eve of this event, SUR convened a meeting with those members who were present at the Symposium to define its agenda. One of the conclusions was that an independent publication would provide a good communication channel for academics and activists. *Sur –International Journal on Human Rights*⁵ was created in 2004 to respond to this demand. Published in three languages, the journal aimed at allowing a more ‘accessible’ internationalization of Southern voices and at providing an intellectual arena for Northern and Southern perspectives to be analyzed and debated. For more information, see article by Kweitel and Poppovic (2011) in the same issue.

SUR members also voiced their concern that the expertise of Southern universities was underutilized by the UN, either due to lack of access or knowledge. The attempts made by Conectas at the time to create a complete database of Southern scholars were not very successful. However, the Sur network became known, and many of its members collaborated with the UN human rights system, as researchers, rapporteurs and/or experts.

Between 2003 and 2006, SUR/Conectas organized several Knowledge Development Groups (KDG) composed of experts and practitioners to study linkages with other disciplines and exchange information with partners.

- **Human Rights and Access to Justice**, several meetings between 2003 and 2005 to discuss public interest law and legal clinics
- **Human Rights and Security**, co-organized with the Washington Office for Latin America (WOLA) and Viva Rio, in October 2004.
- **Human Rights and Trade**, co-organized with the International Trade Law and Development Institute (April 2005).

Another long-term project was a three-year collaborative research (2006-2009) on the constitutional jurisprudence of the Apex courts from the three Southern countries entitled: “**The Justiciability of Human Rights - a comparative analysis: India, Brazil and South Africa**,” also known as **IBSA Project**. The research involving scholars and practitioners was coordinated by Prof. Oscar Vilhena Vieira in Brazil, Prof. Frans Viljoen in South Africa and Prof. Upendra Baxi in India. Its main objectives were: one, to understand the role of the Constitutional Courts in India, Brazil and South Africa in the promotion and protection of human rights; two, to provide a comparative array of legal decisions and strategies to the legal professions and public interest centers. The IBSA Project helped Conectas rethink its constitutional litigation projects, providing it with new strategies available in South Africa and India to change society via courts as well as to expose the limits of Apex courts in achieving real impact on concrete human rights situations.

4.2.2 Geographical outreach

To learn about its partners' projects and plans, to present its own and win the adherence of practitioners, scholars and researchers, the Conectas team traveled extensively to countries in Latin America and Africa and, to a lesser extent, Asia. During the first five years, these outreach activities were essential for the international development of the organization, as can be seen from the few examples below.

Shortly after its creation, Conectas was accepted to take part in an informal group of 'flagship' human rights organizations in **Latin America** in 2003. In its annual meetings sponsored by Ford Foundation, the group composed of about 10 organizations discusses priorities of the current agenda and decide on possible collaborative actions. Over the years, the group has established special relations among its members who consider it a reference for the assessment of their work and impact. Also in Latin America, Emilio Garcia Mendez, a founding member of Sur and close collaborator of our Justice Program, created an organization called '*Fundación Sur*' for the promotion and defense of children and youth rights in Argentina.⁶

In Africa, the All-Africa Moot Court annual event organized by the Centre for Human Rights of the University of Pretoria presented a unique opportunity for cooperation with law professors from African universities. Conectas, in collaboration with the Centre and other partners, organized a one-day Sur meeting during three consecutive years, namely in Yaoundé in 2003, in Dar Es Salaam in 2004 and Johannesburg in 2005. Many former participants of these encounters became members of the Sur network and have been partners in various educational activities.

Joint activities undertaken with **Arabic-speaking countries** were one of the most rewarding experiences. After many months of preparation, Conectas/Sur in collaboration with Professor Enid Hill from the American University in Cairo (AUC), Professor Mustapha Kamel Al-Sayyed⁷ from Cairo University and UNESCO Human Rights Chairs in the region, organized a meeting with some 30 activists and scholars from the region in April 2004. The main outcome of the meeting was the creation of an "Arab Network on Education and Capacity Building" that has been active in promoting human rights education in the region. Five years later, in 2009, Al-Sayyed's organization Partners for Development, invited Sur members to participate in another meeting in Cairo: "Human Rights Debates: Perspectives from the South" with many of the members of the Arab network. The outcome of the encounter was published as a Special Number of the Sur Journal in the form of a book in Arabic in 2011.

For the first meeting in 2004, the then Conectas Director Oscar V. Vieira and Malak Poppovic⁸ took part in the encounter. On the first day in the beautiful old building of AUC, the atmosphere was tense. Our presence and intentions were questioned by participants: Why this encounter? Were we the ones determining who joined the network? Did we have a given model in mind? Who paid for the encounter? Did Brazil have a special interest in the Arab world? However, at the end of the two-day meetings, not only were we able to explain our ideas and dissipate

the distrust but we also formed what was to become long term partnerships with several of its participants. This anecdote is a good illustration of how Conectas established, through dialogue and cooperation, relations of mutual trust and credibility with Southern partners.

Conectas has also invested in long term exchange programs, such as the **Fellowship Program for Lusophone Africa**, sponsored by Open Society Foundations. Since 2004, Conectas has received each year fellows from Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique for a non-degree university course and an internship in a Brazilian NGO for a five to eight-months stay. During these years, Conectas has been host to 38 fellows and has kept in close touch with most of them upon their return. In many cases, they pioneered new experiences in their home countries upon return. For example, during his fellowship with Conectas in 2008, Augusto Mario da Silva prepared a project on the prohibition of female genital mutilation which he implemented with his organization, *Liga Guineense de Direitos Humanos*, in Guinea-Bissau. They carried out, together with other NGOs and with the help of UN agencies, an awareness-raising campaign addressed to religious leaders, opinion-makers and victims; as well as advocacy with public authorities. They obtained an unprecedented victory in June 2011 when Congress passed a law prohibiting the practice and punishing it with a five-year prison sentence. Another 2008 Fellow, Salvador Nkamate from *Liga Moçambicana de Direitos Humanos*, became the coordinator of the NGO platform that participated to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Mozambique at the UN Human Rights Council.

5 Foreign Policy and Human Rights Project

Created in 2005, the Foreign Policy and Human Rights Project has developed new synergies within the Global South Program. It has added focus and content to Conectas's work with regional and international human rights systems and introduced innovative ways for NGOs to participate in their mechanisms.

The decision to create this project was triggered by a study on Brazil's votes at the former UN Commission for Human Rights. As Brazil had abstained on a resolution about human rights violations in China at the former Human Rights Commission, Conectas wanted to have a better understanding of Brazil's position and role at the UN and other multilateral forums.

The results of this study showed that in Brazil, as in many new democracies, foreign policy decisions are often taken by the executive branch, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, without checks and balances from the judiciary and the legislative branches and virtually no participation from civil society organizations. There was a need to find replies to a number of questions, as these decisions have an impact on the human rights situation both nationally and internationally. Which principles guide Brazil's foreign policy? How are decisions taken? Are there accountability mechanisms for positions adopted at the UN? How could social participation and democratic controls be used to contribute to rights protection?

The newly created project was able to intensify and expand the scope of its work with the creation in 2006 of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UN

HRC) by the UN General Assembly to replace the sexagenarian UN Commission on Human Rights that had lost credibility. The new body made of 47 member States, elected by the General Assembly for a three-year period, comprised a large majority of countries from the Global South – a total of 34 countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America. Among other mechanisms, the UN HRC introduced the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) according to which all UN member states are submitted to a review of their human rights situation every four years.

With this new geographic composition, it was clear that the effectiveness of the UN HRC would require a commitment to human rights causes by States as well as an active participation of CSOs from the Global South. As is well known, this was not always the case as many countries not only refused to comply with their obligations, but also refused to condemn other countries' violations. This brought about an unprecedented opportunity for NGOs from the South to play a critical role in making their respective governments accountable and in breaking the "South-South complicity" of mutual protection.

Yet human rights NGOs in Latin America, Asia and Africa continued to face a number of obstacles in expanding their activities to the international spheres, such as lack of access to information and of familiarity with international procedures, language barriers, lack of financial resources to attend the UN meetings *in loco*. In 2007, NGOs from the Global South represented only 33% of the 3050 organizations with consultative status with ECOSOC that could participate fully to the UN HRC (NADER, 2007, p. 10).

During the first five years of its existence, Conectas's Global South projects in education, research and advocacy were geared towards collaboration and interaction with various aspects of the UN system and agencies – such as OHCHR, UNESCO, and UNDP. In 2006, Conectas opted to concentrate its efforts primarily on participation in the UN Human Rights Council, as the principal international body responsible for "promoting universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all". This did not exclude its engagement with regional systems that offered possibilities of strengthening its advocacy work.

Two findings directed many of its future actions: 1) some countries of the Global South, among them Brazil, are strategic international actors, and therefore their foreign policies must be respectful of rights, transparent, and participatory, especially in multilateral spheres such as the UN; and 2) Southern NGOs can make better use of regional and international systems to improve the rights situation in their countries.

As emerging powers become more important players on the international stage and look to remake a fairer world order, much of the success of that project will depend on their ability to protect and promote human rights. Coordinated civil society efforts within the Global South, such as those initiated by Conectas, are vital to ensuring that a fairer, more humane world order isn't only realized as between states but that actual tangible benefits in terms of quality of life and protection of human rights are delivered to citizens in the Global South. Nicole Fritz, Executive Director, Southern Africa Litigation Centre.

As it obtained consultative status with UN-ECOSOC that same year, Conectas devised a multi-faceted strategy to make governments accountable for their foreign policies on human rights at home and in the international forums.

5.1 Making Brazil accountable at home for its foreign policy on human rights

Brazil has a favorable legal framework with a Constitution adopted in 1988 which stipulates that one of the ten principles guiding foreign policy is ‘the prevalence of human rights’ (Article 4, II); it is also party to a large number of international human rights treaties. Nevertheless, in the absence of formal mechanisms of participation in foreign policy decisions – including positions adopted in multilateral human rights bodies – the Brazilian government did not always comply with its constitutional obligations.

One of the first lessons learned was that, to be effective, citizen participation in foreign policy needs to be carried out primarily at the national level in the country’s capital, where decisions are made, preferably through formal channels and mechanisms of consultation and monitoring of foreign policy.

In this respect, it is worth mentioning that, in 2006, Conectas persuaded the House of Representatives to establish a Brazilian Committee on Human Rights and Foreign Policy, a coalition composed of members of the executive and legislative branches, the Federal Prosecutor’s Office for the Rights of the Citizen and of civil society organizations, to monitor the degree to which Brazilian foreign policy decisions comply with international human rights. Once a year, the Committee invites the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to present its human rights agenda in the Organization of American States (OAS), *MERCOSUR* and UN to the House of Representatives. In addition, on an ongoing basis, the coalition requires information on Brazil’s international positions and develops strategies, including media, to foster civil society engagement in the country’s foreign policy.

Since 2007, Conectas also increased the public scrutiny of foreign policy by publishing a Yearbook entitled “Human Rights: Brazil at the UN,” showing the Brazilian voting record at the UN and its positions regarding human rights crises in specific countries, such as Burma, Iran, North Korea, Sri Lanka and Sudan. In the absence of any official documentation on the subject, the yearbook is considered a source of quality information for NGOs, journalists, scholars and even government authorities.

Another initiative to enhance public scrutiny and accountability of Brazilian foreign policy is the organization of visits by human rights defenders from countries with flagrant rights violations to Brazil. As an example visits from Zimbabwe (2007), Burma (in 2008 and 2011) and Iran (in 2011) came to Brazil, and Conectas coordinated their meetings with Government officials, CSOs, trade unions and the media. During their meetings, they asked for more pro-active foreign policy positions of the Brazilian government in relation to rights abuses in their countries.

“The way in which Brazil positions itself is critical in order that the violations in Iran be, at least, the subject of discussion, as Brazil’s stance in the international

area will influence the foreign policy of other Latin American countries.” Says Hadi Ghaemi, International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, who came to Brazil in 2011.

By fostering access to information, checks and balances mechanisms and building advocacy coalitions, Conectas has gained experience in promoting civil society participation in Brazilian foreign policy to make it more accountable and respectful of human rights.

In the coming years, Conectas intends to encourage the participation of human rights NGOs from key emerging democratic powers to work on their countries’ foreign policies— such as Argentina, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and South Africa, by sharing its national experience and promoting a collaborative environment.

5.2 Building capacity of Southern NGOs to make use the multilateral bodies

Since its creation, the Foreign Policy and Human Rights Project aimed at using regional and international human rights protection systems to contribute to the improvement of the human rights situation in Brazil and Global South countries.

It realized the importance of sharing lessons learned with its partners, as a more robust participation of Southern NGOs was indispensable to strengthen regional and international human rights bodies. Although many Southern NGOs were not totally prepared, there was an enormous untapped potential for incorporating an international perspective in their work.

5.2.1 UN HRC and the UPR

The project benefited from its synergy with other of Conectas’ initiatives, such as the International Human Rights Colloquium, the *Sur - International Journal on Human Rights* and the Fellowship Program for Portuguese-speaking Africa to set up an extensive program that included training courses, technical support, production of action-oriented materials, as well as networking advocacy and cross-regional campaigns. For instance in 2007 and 2008, ‘Strategic Meetings on NGO Participation in the UN HRC’ were organized, in collaboration with the International Service for Human Rights, with interested organizations on the eve of the colloquia in São Paulo. Likewise the main themes of the last four colloquia were related to the regional and international human rights systems, and the criteria for the selection of participants now include prior familiarity or work with these systems.

Conectas participated in all the main UN HRC sessions in Geneva to give visibility to national human rights situations, both in Brazil and in the countries of partner organizations that have no easy access to the UN system. In addition, Conectas is a member of HRCNet – Human Rights Council Network, a coalition composed by civil society organizations from several countries working together to improve the effectiveness of the UN HRC.

In Brazil, Conectas, together with national partners, denounced at the UN several abuses occurring in the country. In March 2009, for instance, a side-event was organized during the UN HRC session to give visibility to severe and systematic violations occurring in the prisons of the state of Espírito Santo. As a result of the repercussion of the UN side-event in the local and international media, combined with interventions at the Organization of American States (OAS) and national level, Brazilian authorities took measures to improve conditions and diminish overpopulation in pre-trial detention centers.

In the case of other Southern countries, this was done by convincing partners to attend personally the sessions and facilitate their participation, by finding funds for their travel, helping them set up meeting, designing joint strategies, delivering oral statements and organizing side-events. Human rights defenders from Angola, Burma, Iran, Lesotho, Mozambique, among other Southern countries, were thus able to make their voices heard directly in the UN system. In cases where they cannot attend personally, Conectas reads on their behalf a text prepared by them.

Conectas also accompanied the **UPR process** of several countries from the South – either by training civil society organizations to engage with it, or by attending review working groups in Geneva. As Brazil was one of the first countries to undergo the UPR in 2008, Conectas was able to develop first-hand strategies to engage in the review and to develop a road map for civil society engagement with this process.⁹

Based on this experience, Conectas was able to reach more than 550 human rights defenders from 25 countries through courses and collaborative activities. As an example, Conectas, in partnership with the African Women Millennium Initiative on Poverty (AWOMI), organized in Zambia the “I Strategic Meeting on Southern African Civil Society Participation in the UN Human Rights Council: How to work with Universal Periodic Review,” which gathered, in September 2009, organizations from seven sub-Saharan African countries (Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe). That same year, Conectas was also invited as resource organization to contribute to training courses in Angola, Cape Verde, Kenya and Panama. In 2010, Conectas explored new technology tools by offering an e-learning course for NGOs in Bolivia, Nicaragua and El Salvador on how to participate in their countries’ UPR.

In addition, Conectas has been involved in Brazil’s upcoming review in the UN Treaty bodies, such as the Committee against Torture (CAT) and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). In the latter case, Conectas contributed to the creation of a coalition of 20 Brazilian organizations and is coordinating the drafting of a joint shadow report to be submitted to the UN to pressure the Brazilian government to implement the Committee’s recommendations.

To ensure the continuity of its activities at the UNHRC, Conectas, in partnership with two Latin American NGOs – Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (Argentina) and Corporación Humanas (Chile), established, since June 2010, a more permanent presence in Geneva by appointing a representative. This was done to facilitate and strengthen the participation of Latin American organizations in the HRC and in the UN system in general.

5.2.2 African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

Finally, in May 2009, Conectas was accorded Observer Status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

This was a great opportunity to strengthen our collaborative work with African NGOs, to share experiences and introduce innovative cross-regional cooperation among countries from the Global South.

The decision to expand our participation in the African system arose from the demands of our partners in Africa, especially in Portuguese-speaking countries, as well as from a strategic evaluation of its importance in protecting human rights in the continent and strengthening the international system itself.

Camila Asano, Coordinator of Conectas's Foreign Policy and Human Rights Project.

In 2010, Conectas participated in the session of the ACHPR and organized, with partners, a two-day seminar on "Women Human Rights Defenders" in Banjul, The Gambia. The main theme of the meeting was the safety of women human rights defenders and the challenges they face in their work. A total of 35 activists attended the meeting, most of them African women, but also participants from Latin America and Asia who shared lessons learned in the use of regional and multilateral human rights systems. In a common Declaration, the participants defined an eleven-point strategy to overcome barriers faced by human rights defenders, which include awareness-raising activities on gender issues and a request to the African Union to include the protection of defenders in the continent's human rights policy.

The Foreign Policy and Human Rights project that started timidly in 2005 as a pilot research became in less than six years a central component of the Global South Program. It infused a new life in the educational and research projects, by combining innovative methods to monitor foreign policy at home and in international forums with a professional technical approach for rights advocacy.

Conectas's work to promote civil society participation in Southern countries' foreign policy, particularly in Brazil, has been shown to be viable, strategic and potentially crucial to the democratic functioning of multilateral human rights protection systems. Southern countries, and South-South cooperation, became more relevant and gradually changed the *status quo* of international affairs. In addition, Conectas was able to consolidate itself as a reference in promoting civil society engagement with international mechanisms, such as the UPR.

There are still many challenges ahead but these preliminary results are most encouraging. Further developments will demand continuing growth and innovation to democratize globalization.

6 Dialogue with Institutional Partners

6.1 *Partnership with the UN*

If we look at our relations with the UN system, they too have evolved over the years.

The international conferences on major global themes organized by the

United Nations during the decade of the 1990's with their parallel worldwide NGO Forums (e.g. Rio de Janeiro, 1992; Vienna, 1993; Cairo, 1994; Beijing, 1995; Istanbul, 1996 and Durban, 2001) had opened the door to the participation of Southern NGOs. The international media covering the event gave visibility to their existence and work. Conectas was created at a time when it was able to benefit from this opening. Yet, it strived to go beyond occasional participation to reach some form of more permanent relations. It has been an interesting apprenticeship to find our way through the UN system and agencies and build bridges with UN officials. When Conectas obtained consultative status with UN-ECOSOC in 2006 and made frequent trips to attend the UN Human Rights Council sessions in Geneva, it gained a better grasp of the system, and set up projects to share its experience with partner organizations.

We could not fail to acknowledge the moral and logistical support received from the then UNDP Administrator, Mark Malloch Brown, himself a mentor of South-South cooperation. During the first five years, the UNF grants were channeled through UNDP projects –both UNFIP and UNDP Brazil helped administrate these funds and gave support to our international activities through their field offices (e.g. by offering training and access to Internet to colloquium participants in certain African countries). We received video messages for the opening ceremony of the Colloquia from the head of UNDP and from the High Commissioners for Human Rights as they could not attend personally (namely from Mark Malloch Brown, Mary Robinson, the late Sergio Vieira de Mello, Louise Arbour, and Navanethem Pillay) which gave prestige and legitimacy to the newly created organization. Besides, practically all colloquia and events received UN experts as speakers from main agencies or bodies. Conectas, for its part, has maintained its advocacy work on behalf of the UN by organizing encounters with CSOs for UN Rapporteurs visiting Brazil to discuss with them national issues and an agenda of work.

6.2 Dialogue and Partnerships with Donors

At a time when philanthropies did not see Brazil as a priority, Conectas had the privilege to be sponsored by two exceptional donors, **United Nations Foundation (UNF)** and **Ford Foundation** that gave full support to its somewhat ambitious' proposals.

UNF was the major contributor during the first five years. It allowed us to become a multi-lingual organization by introducing English, besides our initial working languages –Portuguese and Spanish. It sponsored the inclusion of Southern academics in our networks, and brought us closer to the UN. Most important of all UNF embraced the South-South strategy to strengthen human rights protagonists in the Global South.

The Ford Foundation has a long history of backing human rights organizations in Brazil and of support to educational and academic activities through its field office. Since its creation, Conectas has counted on Ford's support for its Global South Program, although the scope of many of its activities was global. However, it is interesting to note that until recently no 'protocol' existed

for giving international funds to a Southern organization. It is only in 2008/2009 that, besides the donation from the Brazilian office, Conectas also received funds from the international programming undertaken by its New York Office for its Foreign Policy and Human Rights project. Ford adopted a policy of strengthening Southern infrastructure as recognition of the need for strong international NGOs located in the Global South. See Interview of Denise Dora in this issue.

This generous initial support and trust from the two foundations was fundamental for Conectas's growth and progress. It has allowed it to persist in striving towards its goals and to be ready for a more diversified basis of support.

In 2005, UNF changed its funding policy to concentrate on UN advocacy in the field of human rights, peace and security. However, before ending its support, UNF helped Conectas plan its future sustainability by providing the expertise of development strategists who helped Conectas re-define its priorities and approach new donors.

We realized that we had an arduous road ahead before reaching sustainability. Despite the adverse economic conjuncture that obliged us at times to reduce our budget and staff and to keep salaries below competitive market levels, we have managed to fund our major projects thanks to contributions from diversified donors.

Our main donors for the last five years have been: the European Commission, Ford (Brazil and US), Fundação Carlos Chagas, Open Society Foundations, John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Oak Foundation, The Overbrook Foundation/ Better World Fund, The Sigrid Rausing Trust, and United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF).

They have put their trust in our work and we have put the best of our efforts to meet their expectations. Most of them have become partners and friends of the organization. Unfortunately, we have failed to build a local constituency in Brazil. With the exception of the Fundação Carlos Chagas that has generously funded the *Sur-International Journal on Human Rights* for two years, like many other human rights NGOs, we have not yet been able to convince the business sector in Brazil and in the region to contribute to our cause. As for Brazilian government funds, the by-laws of the organization specify that they can only be used to fund educational activities, so as to ensure non-interference and autonomy of its activities (CONECTAS, 2010, p. 96).

7 What's next?

Message from former co-directors, Malak Poppovic and Oscar Vieira: *Ce n'est qu'un au revoir*

Ten years on, looking back at our dream for a more egalitarian and democratic globalized world, we feel that we chose the right 'niche' to make a difference in the international human rights scenario. Our South-South cooperation projects were able to: participate in the formation of a new generation of human rights defenders from the Global South with an international perspective; develop cross-regional initiatives bringing together practitioners, scholars and international experts; foster peer-learning and experience-sharing and stimulate academic debate with a Southern perspective.

Conectas Human Rights, created by a group of activists and academics from the South and based in the South, is seen today as an international organization with a strong network of partners composed of members of organizations and academic centers from the South and the North, and from the UN. It has gained visibility by extending its work to international forums, especially the UN; and more important, it has given visibility to other NGOs from the South.

However, Conectas knew from the beginning that for its work to make a difference in the human rights movement, it was essential to form alliances and coalitions with other organizations. It did it in its own way, gradually and cautiously, to make sure that it was building horizontal relations of equality and mutual respect. It has been a rewarding experience to have established good working relations with individuals and organizations worldwide.

It sounds banal to say that all these achievements would have been impossible without the dedication and the hard work of the Conectas's staff members. However, this is a fact recognized by all those who accompanied our evolution. Having our dream come true meant finding the means to realize it, sustain it and convince others to join as partners and multipliers. We were able to do it thanks to a combination of factors. We could start by saying that Conectas's Director, Oscar Vilhena Vieira, who was at the time teaching human rights at the PUC-São Paulo, motivated many of his young students to join him in this endeavor. Some were still studying for their degrees, others were already doing their post-graduation work but all chose to engage in an NGO where they knew that they would have less perspective for a career than in a well-established firm. Their enthusiasm and dedication often made up for their lack of experience; they embraced the cause and assumed responsibilities. Another factor may have been staff members' freedom to introduce innovative ideas and to implement them. We were well aware that our successes were linked to our capacity to deal with diverse situations and to bring novelties into well-established practices. Unfortunately, it is impossible to name all those who worked at Conectas. What can be affirmed is that along the years, the team has kept its international character with staff and interns from various countries and continents, and that, despite its growth, it has kept its capacity for innovation and auto-critical evaluation.

Ten years on, there is a need to review our premises and to carry on our fight taking into consideration the new world situation: the Arab Spring; the increased influence of emerging democratic powers on the global stage; the economic crisis in Western countries; and the growing recognition of the UN role in world politics.

To tackle these new challenges, a younger generation is taking over. The former co-directors, Malak Poppovic and Oscar Vieira, left their posts in April 2011 after a smooth transition. But they will remain close to Conectas: Vieira joined its Board of Directors and Poppovic continues for a few more months as Senior Advisor for Special Projects.

It is with great pride and optimism that the former co-directors recommend their successors: the Executive Director, Lucia Nader and the Program Director,

Juana Kweitel, who have led the major Conectas projects for many years. There is also Conectas's Associate Director and Instituto Pro Bono's Director, Marcos Fuchs, a founding member of both organizations who ensures continuity in the organization. Their leadership is unanimously accepted by the rest of the organization and will undoubtedly bring the needed new energy and outlooks for a changing human rights perspective.

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NOTES

1. The term 'south' came to substitute what had been designated in the 20th century as 'underdeveloped' and later 'developing' countries.
2. Conectas's Global South Program consists of the following projects: International Human Rights Colloquium; the Human Rights Fellowship for Lusophone Africa; *Sur – International Journal on Human Rights*; and Foreign Policy and Human Rights Project.
3. The University Consortium on Human Rights, which consisted of a cooperative agreement among Columbia University in New York represented by Paul Martin, the Pontifical Catholic University (PUC-SP) represented by Oscar Vilhena Vieira and the University of Sao Paulo represented by Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, organized the 1st Colloquium.

4. This activity was introduced by Conectas staff who had participated in the Annual International Human Rights Training Program in Canada.
5. All editions are available at <www.surjournal.org>. Last accessed on: Nov. 2011.
6. For more information about *Fundación Sur* contact <info@surargentina.org.ar>
7. Al-Sayyed, a founding member of *Sur*, has been a panelist in two colloquia and a close partner in our activities.
8. In the capacity of Senior Advisor to UNF.
9. Available at: <http://www.conectas.org/PDFs/RoadMap_en_13.01.11.pdf>. Last accessed on: Nov. 2011.

RESUMO

Este artigo visa recordar a construção da Conectas Direitos Humanos, uma organização internacional de direitos humanos no/do Sul, criada por um grupo de ativistas e acadêmicos com sede em São Paulo, Brasil. A partir da experiência das autoras, que também são a ex-diretora e diretora executivas da Conectas, este artigo aborda os principais aspectos do Programa Sul Global, concentrando sua análise no Colóquio Internacional de Direitos Humanos e no Programa de Política Externa, como parte dos esforços da Conectas em apoiar organizações e redes fora do Brasil, aproximar direitos humanos e outras disciplinas, e criar pontes entre estas com a Organização das Nações Unidas (ONU).

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Conectas direitos humanos – Colóquio Internacional de Direitos Humanos – Sul Global – Programa de política externa

RESUMEN

Este artículo busca remodelar la construcción de Conectas Derechos Humanos, una organización internacional de derechos humanos desde/en el Sur Global, creada por un grupo de profesionales y académicos con sede en San Pablo, Brasil. Con base en la experiencia de las autoras, que son a su vez ex Directora y Directora ejecutivas de Conectas, este artículo cubre los principales aspectos del Programa Sur Global, concentrando el análisis en el Coloquio Internacional de Derechos Humanos y el Programa de Política Exterior, como parte de los esfuerzos de Conectas para acercarse a otras organizaciones y redes fuera de Brasil, para superar la brecha entre los derechos humanos y otras disciplinas y para facilita el acceso de estas a la ONU.

PALABRAS CLAVE

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