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HUMAN RIGHTS IN MOTION: A MAP TO A MOVEMENT'S FUTURE

Lucia Nader (Executive Director, Conectas) Juana Kweitel (Program Director, Conectas) Marcos Fuchs (Associate Director, Conectas)

Sur Journal was created ten years ago as a vehicle to deepen and strengthen bonds between academics and activists from the Global South concerned with human rights, in order to magnify their voices and their participation before international organizations and academia. Our main motivation was the fact that, particularly in the Southern hemisphere, academics were working alone and there was very little exchange between researchers from different countries. The journal's aim has been to provide individuals and organizations working to defend human rights with research, analyses and case studies that combine academic rigor and practical interest. In many ways, these lofty ambitions have been met with success: in the past decade, we have published articles from dozens of countries on issues as diverse as health and access to treatment, transitional justice, regional mechanisms and information and human rights, to name a few. Published in three languages and available online and in print for free, our project also remains unique in terms of geographical reach, critical perspective and its Southern 'accent'. In honour of the founding editor of this journal, Pedro Paulo Poppovic, the 20th issue

opens with a biography (by João Paulo Charleaux) of this sociologist who has been one of the main contributors to this publication's success.

This past decade has also been, in many ways, a successful one for the human rights movement as a whole. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has recently turned 60, new international treaties have been adopted and the old but good global and regional monitoring systems are in full operation, despite criticisms regarding their effectiveness and attempts by States to curb their authority. From a strategic perspective, we continue to use, with more or less success, advocacy, litigation and naming-and-shaming as our main tools for change. In addition, we continue to nurture partnerships between what we categorize as local, national and international organizations within our movement.

Nevertheless, the political and geographic coordinates under which the global human rights movement has operated have undergone profound changes. Over the past decade, we have witnessed hundreds of thousands of people take to the streets to protest against social and political injustices. We have also seen emerging powers from the South play an increasingly influential

role in the definition of the global human rights agenda. Additionally, the past ten years have seen the rapid growth of social networks as a tool of mobilization and as a privileged forum for sharing political information between users. In other words, the journal is publishing its 20th issue against a backdrop that is very different from that of ten years ago. The protests that recently filled the streets of many countries around the globe, for example, were not organized by traditional social movements nor by unions or human rights NGOs, and people's grievances, more often than not, were expressed in terms of social justice and not as rights. Does this mean that human rights are no longer seen as an effective language for producing social change? Or that human rights organizations have lost some of their ability to represent wronged citizens? Emerging powers themselves, despite their newly-acquired international influence, have hardly been able - or willing - to assume stances departing greatly from those of "traditional" powers. How and where can human rights organizations advocate for change? Are Southern-based NGOs in a privileged position to do this? Are NGOs from emerging powers also gaining influence in international forums?

It was precisely to reflect upon these and other pressing issues that, for this 20th issue, SUR's editors decided to enlist the help of over 50 leading human rights activists and academics from 18 countries, from Ecuador to Nepal, from China to the US. We asked them to ponder on what we saw as some of the most urgent and relevant questions facing the global human rights movement today: 1. Who do we represent? 2. How do we combine urgent issues with long-term impacts? 3. Are human rights still an effective language for producing social change? 4. How have new information and communication technologies influenced activism? 5. What are the challenges of working internationally from the South?

The result, which you now hold in your hands, is a roadmap for the global human rights movement in the 21st century – it offers a vantage point from which it is possible to observe where the movement stands today and where it is heading. The first stop is a reflection on these issues by the founding

directors of Conectas Human Rights, Oscar Vilhena Vieira and Malak El-Chichini Poppovic. The roadmap then goes on to include interviews and articles, both providing in-depth analyses of human rights issues, as well as notes from the field, more personalized accounts of experiences working with human rights, which we have organized into six categories, although most of them could arguably be allocated to more than one category:

Language. In this section, we have included articles that ponder the question of whether human rights - as a utopia, as norms and as institutions - are still effective for producing social change. Here, the contributions range from analyses on human rights as a language for change (Stephen Hopgood and Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro), empirical research on the use of the language of human rights for articulating grievances in recent mass protests (Sara Burke), to reflections on the standard-setting role and effectiveness of international human rights institutions (Raquel Rolnik, Vinodh Jaichand and Emílio Álvarez Icaza). It also includes studies on the movement's global trends (David Petrasek), challenges to the movement's emphasis on protecting the rule of law (Kumi Naidoo), and strategic proposals to better ensure a compromise between utopianism and realism in relation to human rights (Samuel Moyn).

Themes. Here we have included contributions that address specific human rights topics from an original and critical standpoint. Four themes were analysed: economic power and corporate accountability for human rights violations (Phil Bloomer, Janet Love and Gonzalo Berrón); sexual politics and LGBTI rights (Sonia Corrêa, Gloria Careaga Pérez and Arvind Narrain); migration (Diego Lorente Pérez de Eulate); and, finally, transitional justice (Clara Sandoval).

Perspectives. This section encompasses country-specific accounts, mostly field notes from human rights activists on the ground. Those contributions come from places as diverse as Angola (Maria Lúcia da Silveira), Brazil (Ana Valéria Araújo), Cuba (María-Ileana Faguaga Iglesias), Indonesia (Haris Azhar), Mozambique (Salvador Nkamate) and Nepal (Mandira Sharma). But they all share a critical perspective on human rights, including

for instance a sceptical perspective on the relation between litigation and public opinion in Southern Africa (Nicole Fritz), a provocative view of the democratic future of China and its relation to labour rights (Han Dongfang), and a thoughtful analysis of the North-South duality from Northern Ireland (Maggie Beirne).

Voices. Here the articles go to the core of the question of whom the global human rights movement represents. Adrian Gurza Lavalle and Juana Kweitel take note of the pluralisation of representation and innovative forms of accountability adopted by human rights NGOs. Others study the pressure for more representation or a louder voice in international human rights mechanisms (such as in the Inter-American system, as reported by Mario Melo) and in representative institutions such as national legislatures (as analysed by Pedro Abramovay and Heloisa Griggs). Finally, Chris Grove, as well as James Ron, David Crow and Shannon Golden emphasize, in their contributions, the need for a link between human rights NGOs and grassroots groups, including economically disadvantaged populations. As a counter-argument, Fateh Azzam questions the need of human rights activists to represent anyone, taking issue with the critique of NGOs as being overly dependent on donors. Finally, Mary Lawlor and Andrew Anderson provide an account of a Northern organization's efforts to attend to the needs of local human rights defenders as they, and only they, define them.

Tools. In this section, the editors included contributions that focus on the instruments used by the global human rights movement to do its work. This includes a debate on the role of technology in promoting change (Mallika Dutt and Nadia Rasul, as well as Sopheap Chak and Miguel Pulido Jiménez) and perspectives on the challenges of human rights campaigning, analysed provocatively by Martin Kirk and Fernand Alphen in their respective contributions. Other articles point to the need of organizations to be more grounded in local contexts, as noted by Ana Paula Hernández in relation to Mexico, by Louis Bickford in what he sees as a convergence towards the global middle, and finally by Rochelle Jones, Sarah Rosenhek and

Anna Turley in their movement-support model. In addition, it is noted by Mary Kaldor that NGOs are not the same as civil society, properly understood. Furthermore, litigation and international work are cast in a critical light by Sandra Carvalho and Eduardo Baker in relation to the dilemma between long and short term strategies in the Inter-American system. Finally, Gastón Chillier and Pétalla Brandão Timo analyse South-South cooperation from the viewpoint of a national human rights NGO in Argentina.

Multipolarity. Here, the articles challenge our ways of thinking about power in the multipolar world we currently live in, with contributions from the heads of some of the world's largest international human rights organizations based in the North (Kenneth Roth and Salil Shetty) and in the South (Lucia Nader, César Rodríguez-Garavito, Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah and Mandeep Tiwana). This section also debates what multipolarity means in relation to States (Emilie M. Hafner-Burton), international organizations and civil society (Louise Arbour) and businesses (Mark Malloch-Brown).

Conectas hopes this issue will foster debate on the future of the global human rights movement in the 21st century, enabling it to reinvent itself as necessary to offer better protection of human rights on the ground.

Conectas Human Rights is especially grateful for the collaboration of the authors and support of Conectas' team, in special Laura Daudén, João Brito and Laura Waisbich. We would also like to extend our appreciation for the work of Maria Brant and Manoela Miklos for conceiving this Issue and for conducting most of the interviews, and for Thiago Amparo for joining the editorial team and making this Issue possible. Last, but not least, we are also immensely thankful for Luz González's relentless work editing the contributions received, and for Ana Cernov for coordinating the overall editorial. Thanks to all!



KUMI NAIDOO

Kumi Naidoo possesses a unique perspective on what it means to work internationally from the South. And from the North. Born in South Africa in 1965, Naidoo has been Greenpeace's executive director since 2009, being the first African to head the international environmental giant. Prior to joining Greenpeace, he has been an activist against apartheid in his home country, headed an international organization based in the South – Civicus – and led global initiatives such as the

Global Call to Action Against Poverty and the Global Call for Climate Action.

Never one to be content working from behind a desk, Naidoo has been arrested, imprisoned and deported several times while fighting for human rights and environmental justice, most recently for occupying an oil platform in the Artic in 2011. Perhaps surprisingly, he has also always had much transit in the highest circles of those who he combats, having been invited many times to participate in meetings such as the UN and the World Economic Forum. But he has not been awed by this. In the interview below, which he has granted Conectas last May, Naidoo calls on human rights defenders to engage in civil disobedience and questions civil society participation in high profile meetings and even challenges consecrated concepts such as the rule of law.

"The rule of law consolidated all the injustices in the world that existed before the rule of law", he says. "We need a new, nuanced, more critical reading of exactly what the rule of law means in a context of extreme injustice, in which the powerful in society are literally able to get away with murder, with regard to ensuring that the majority of people aren't denied justice."

But how to achieve change? For him, strategies such as high profile advocacy have limited chances of success. A regular in high profile gatherings in New York, Geneva and even Davos, Naidoo warns against organizations "confusing access for influence" – that is, being used solely to grant legitimacy to these meetings. "Some official is ticking off some box that says 'civil society consulted', 'civil society input achieved' because some of us were at the meeting. But too often, we might have the right to speak, but we don't have the right to be listened to properly."

His solution is combining advocacy and direct action. "If you put all your eggs on the advocacy basket, and you do not have a constituency and you cannot engage in civil disobedience, politicians will continue to do what they have been doing for decades and decades, which is: they make nice speeches, they listen to us, and then they ignore us."

For him, the answer is civil disobedience. "Whenever humanity was confronted with great injustice or challenges — women's right to vote, slavery, colonialism, civil rights in the United States, apartheid in South Africa —, these issues only moved forward when decent men and women stood up and said 'Enough is enough, and no more!'. People were prepared to go to prison if necessary; they were prepared to put their lives on the line if necessary."

Read below the complete interview with Naidoo, where he also speaks about issues such as the right to peaceful protest, the corporate capture of democracy and Greenpeace's member participation strategies.

Original in English.

Interview conducted in April 2014 by Maria Brant (Conectas Human Rights)



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This paper is available in digital format at <www.surjournal.org>.

INTERVIEW

"THE RULE OF LAW HAS CONSOLIDATED ALL THE INJUSTICES THAT EXISTED BEFORE IT"

Interview with Kumi Naidoo

Conectas Human Rights: You were born in South Africa, you worked for a long time for Civicus, which is a southern-based international organization, and then worked for Greenpeace – which is a Northern international organization. What would you say were the main challenges that you faced while working internationally from the South, and what's the difference now that you are working from the North?

Kumi Naidoo: Good question. I think the big challenge is that we still live in a world where a lot of the key intellectual developments in our fields – the cutting-edge in human rights, in environmental science and so on – is still fairly dominated by the North, by developed countries. When you have civil society organizations located in southern locations like *Conectas* in Brazil and *Civicus* in South Africa, it turns things on their head, and it sort of says that, actually, the majority of the people live in the Global South anyway, and in fact that's where the engine of thinking, ideas, conceptual understandings and so on need to be coming from. So while I think there are huge benefits of working from the Global South. I think that still there is a perception that actually excellence only comes from the North, and we still need to break that.

Working now in the North, I would say that there are really some excellent skills here, but those skills are not necessarily contextually relevant. People might have a conceptual understanding of a particular issue, and might be very, very good in the analysis at a theoretical level, but actually how that plays out in a country where the governance is different... Certain notions of democratic space are taken for granted in some places, but actually don't play out like that in many countries. This is extremely challenging and different. One of the things that international organizations, including NGOs, sometimes do is that they underestimate the importance of contextual knowledge. Take Brazil: You can be a theoretical expert on forests, but if you have not lived in the Amazon, if you do not breathe the Amazon, if you don't really engage with the indigenous communities in the Amazon, to understand how to organize things, you can have theoretical knowledge, but not in practice. So we need folks from the Global South to be more assertive about the power and the importance of contextual knowledge. What I'm saying is that I think – yes, there are some good technical

skills that we have in large international NGOs, but they are not necessarily the ones that are rooted in the contextual understanding, in a clear and strong manner for successful campaigns sometimes.

Conectas: Do you find any difference in terms of your ability to influence the agenda internationally, or access places like the UN, or a big international **fora** now that you work from the North?

K.N.: Historically, I think that the UN was more accessible to folks that were located where the UN is located, in New York, in Geneva, in Vienna; and previously, the UN and other international organizations like the World Bank were pretty comfortable to have representatives of Oxfam and Save the Children and Action Aid, and CARE, and so on, to be their major interlocutors. What is changing is that, increasingly, also because some of us from the South have argued for it, those institutions are recognizing the need to have much more diverse voices represented in those fora. I am seeing a great effort by people organizing various UN conferences to bring the Southern perspective into them. And increasingly even international NGOs, if they are going to do a big push at the UN General Assembly, they're bringing more Southern leaders to it, whereas in the past the thinking was "well, we have five people here in New York – they can just do it." They are recognizing a little bit more the symbolic importance, as well as the content importance, of having people who are most affected by the issues that we are talking about to be able to have the ability to express those opinions.

Conectas: About representation: Greenpeace is one of the main member-based civil society organizations in the world, but at the same time I understand you do receive donations not only from individuals but also from foundations...

K.N.: The majority of our resources comes from individual citizens. And we don't take any money from government or business. We do take some money from foundations and trusts, but only from those that meet certain ethical criteria. For example, we probably wouldn't take money from the Gates Foundation, even though it is a foundation, because they support GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms) and all of that. If a foundation got its money from fossil fuels, for example, or from ocean destruction, or forest destruction, then we wouldn't accept it. So, for us, foundation money is a bit more difficult.

Conectas: And how do you communicate with your members? Can members influence Greenpeace's plans or agenda? And how does that work?

K.N.: Yes, they can influence it, but I will be honest with you: not as much as I would like them to, and that is one of the changes that we are facing as part of our new strategy. We are trying to give more voice to our members, volunteers and supporters.

It varies from country to country, so in Spain and in France the supporters have a big role, formally voting for the board and so on. In Germany, supporters and volunteers are consulted on key elements of the program. But if I'm brutally honest, I'd like to see a much more systematic way of getting supporter input.

The difficulty is that it is a lot of people. If you just take financial contributors, there are more than 3 million of them. If you take all the cyber volunteers, we are talking about 20 million people. So it is a little bit hard. We do a lot of surveying members on specific issues. Sometimes, if I want to get input on something, we do a sample. We send a survey on an issue to 10,000 people, and then I get their feedback on it. If I send it out to everybody, it would take about three months to process the feedback.

But it is really not as good as I think it needs to be and could be. As part of our new strategy, we are working to improve that.

Conectas: How do you combine direct action and long-term goals? Is it possible? Using long-term goals and strategies to work in agenda setting – what is the place of direct action and what the place of advocacy?

K.N.: Excellent question. I think both are important and both are necessary, but the issue is that action speaks louder than words.

Quite often, civil society organizations make the mistake of confusing access for influence. Just because we get access to the UN or to the Human Rights Council etcetera, does that really mean we have influence? Quite often, we are going to these gatherings and providing legitimacy to them but we are not necessarily getting the outcomes that we want. Some official, either some intergovernmental official or some national governmental official, is ticking off some box that says "civil society consulted", "civil society input achieved" because some of us were at the meeting. But too often, we might have the right to speak, but we don't have the right to be listened to properly and we don't have the right to be heard properly.

I have spoken at so many high-level advocacy things at the UN – where, if there are heads of State involved, they come, they give their speech and they leave. And usually their speech is written by some official, and they just read it. We, on the other hand, sometimes get really orgasmic about it - "oh, wow! We are with the heads of State, and blah, blah" - when in fact it's just a theater, it's just a game.

I'm not saying that we should not be talking, that we should not be engaging in dialogue. I believe that when we bring both those strategies together it is when in fact, advocacy works best.

Say, at Rio+20, if I were in a meeting with Ban Ki-moon, where I raise the issue of the need to give more voice to indigenous peoples in these conversations, because indigenous peoples actually have had more wisdom about how to take care of the environment than the so-called civilized parts of the world. (If you and I were the last two people on this planet, and if we were to write the history of the planet, we would probably say that, actually, the most civilized people on this planet were indigenous peoples, and those who have tried to so-call civilize them, were actually the uncivilized ones). So, on an issue like that, on trying to encourage the UN to do the right thing with regards to the indigenous peoples, for example, the best scenario is when there are also people outside demonstrating, who are organized. This is what is called insider-outsider strategy. We are stronger in the inside when we are more visible and stronger on the outside. Because they can easily ignore us, if they think like "these two, three people are just intellectuals who have good ideas, and are well-meaning, but we can ignore them, because they don't really have a constituency".

On direct action itself and the need to engage on civil disobedience: if you look

at history, whenever humanity was confronted with great injustice or challenges – women's right to vote, slavery, colonialism, civil rights in the United States, *apartheid* in South Africa, - these issues only moved forward when decent men and women stood up and said "Enough is enough, and no more!". People were prepared to go to prison if necessary; they were prepared to put their lives on the line if necessary.

Now, in this moment of history, we have seen a convergence of crises – ongoing poverty crisis, deepening climate crisis, financial crisis, gender equality crisis, crisis around basic services – in a very short time span. Some have called this "the perfect storm". In a book that I wrote in 2010 I called it "the boiling point". If you look at any of the other crises or injustices that I mentioned, slavery affected people from countries that were conquests of slavery, colonialism affected countries that were colonized, *apartheid* affected the people in my country, lack of civil rights affected the people in the United States. But when we look at the current threats, particularly when you add the climate threat, the challenges that we now face are more important than all the previous ones because, yes, it is true that it is a terrible injustice that the people that are facing the first and most brutal impacts of the climate are from the developing world, and often are from very low consumptive and low-carbon-emission realities, but the reality is we have to get it right, as rich and poor countries acting together, to secure the future of all our children and grandchildren.

We have that reality, and who are the people we celebrate today as historical figures that we should be inspired by? Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King. They are people who went to prison for long times, people who got assassinated in the course of their work. As an American grandmother once said: "If you want to make an omelet, you gotta break some eggs".

By the way, it's not about saving the planet, because actually the planet doesn't need any saving. If humanity runs up to the point where it can no longer exist on the planet, the planet will still be here. It will be scarred and battered by the human crimes against it, but it would actually be in better shape, because the forests would grow back, the oceans will replenish and so on. The struggle is not about saving the planet, the struggle is about ensuring that humanity can coexist with nature in a mutually interdependent way for centuries and centuries to come. Put differently, the struggle is about securing our children and grandchildren's futures.

One thing with which human rights communities do help with a little bit more is strengthening this whole body of knowledge around what I would call intergenerational solidarity and intergenerational rights. Our current generation of [herald] leaders is leading as if we did not have other generations coming after us, our consumption patterns are already one and a half times what this planet can currently endure.

In that sense, just to go back to where we started. I am not saying that advocacy is not important, and that only actions are important. Both are important, in different ways. However, if you put all your eggs in the advocacy basket, and you do not have a constituency and you cannot engage in civil disobedience, politicians will continue to do what they have been doing for decades and decades, which is: they make nice speeches, they listen to us, and then they ignore us.

The only changes that we are seeing, whether it was the overthrow of Mubarak or the overthrow of the Yemeni government and so on, is when citizens said "Enough! We are prepared to occupy the squares, and shoot us if you want, but we are not leaving". That's the spirit we need to see in all the areas of social endeavor, whether it be gender equality, indigenous rights or certainly climate.

Conectas: Last year we had many street protests in Brazil, and the problem is that if human rights organizations are engaged in direct action, the government says "you are vandals, you are criminals, you are breaking the law - how do you want us to respect the law if you yourselves are not respecting it?" It doesn't make it illegitimate, but it is a lot harder to justify to the general public why you are doing that.

K.N.: We in the human rights community have a dilemma about the rule of law and how we engage with the rule of law. To a large extent, we are slaves to the rule of law, but the rule of law is not a thousand-year old concept. The rule of law was introduced by the powerful. Some of us fought for certain things – in South Africa, we fought for the Constitution, to be progressive etcetera -, but governments must know that we are not going to accept that the right to peaceful protest is illegitimate.

It is critically important that these protests remain peaceful. Governments tend to paint everybody with the same brush. This is totally unacceptable. In many, many cases, even in so-called democratic countries like Canada, I can provide you with evidence which shows that when there have been demonstrations of violence, such as in Quebec, a couple of years ago, when the Three Amigos meeting* took place, it was proven beyond doubt that the person that was instigating the violence was an employee of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. He got discovered because he had police shoes. You can see it on a video. He is the one saying: "Let's throw stones!". People then were saying: "No, no, no! This is a peaceful protest, please put those stones away". And some said: "Hey! Look! He's wearing police boots!" He then runs, and the police just opens up a corridor and take him. They denied it for a few days, but eventually they had to concede it.

So, let us say to governments: "We believe that the right to peaceful protest is a right that we will not give up". Let us say to president Dilma and everybody else: "Don't go celebrating Mandela, Martin Luther King and Gandhi and so on, and then deny the very thing that they fought for, which was democracy". Democracy is not about casting a ballot once every four or five years. It is about the right to be able to participate actively in public life, including in between election periods, in a way that allows us to show our support or our opposition to policies being pursued by our governments.

Coming back to the rule of law: basically, the rule of law consolidated all the injustices in the world that existed before the rule of law. The rule of law has become the darling of the powerful, and almost a threat to the powerless. Because, if you take the O.J. Simpson trial, it is an example of how, if you are wealthy, you can use the legal system and get away with murder. My best example: HSBC was engaged in massive money laundering for the drug cartels in Mexico. All the evidence was found, and the U.S. government could have taken them to court and convicted the managers and directors who were engaged in it. But they just made it into a US \$1 billion fine, which is not even like one week's worth of profit for HSBC. But then, a young African-American or a Latino kid in California gets caught three times with a joint in his pocket and he spends years in prison. For years, if anybody asked me if I supported the rule of law, I would say: "Of course I do." But I'm not saying that we have to throw out the rule of law lock, stock and barrel. I think we need a new, nuanced, more critical reading of exactly what the rule of law means in a context of extreme injustice, in a context where the powerful in society are literally able to get away with murder, with regard to ensuring that the majority of people aren't denied justice.

^{*}Editor Note: North American Leaders' Summit between Canada, Mexico and the United States.

Conectas: My last question was going to be exactly about that: whether human rights are still an effective language to deal with injustices and promote social change. For example, if the main violators are not State actors, but big business, human rights are directed at States, how do we address this kind of injustice and promote social change? We have this in common with the environmental movement, no?

K.N.: This is a complicated answer.

Firstly, what is democracy? Democracy was supposed to balance the wallets of wealthy people by the ballots. The ballots were supposed to balance the wallets, to equalize the voice of ordinary people with those who have power. Today, to be brutally honest, our democracies have been captured by the powerful economic interests in society.

The United States can best be described today, in my judgment, as the best democracy money can buy. There are three types of people that can run successfully for national political office in the U.S.: the rich, the extremely rich, and the obscenely rich. Our electoral systems have been captured. The money of the corporate sector has polluted American democracy to the point that, if we look at it from a climate perspective, even though we are seeing serious climate impacts in the United States, what you see is... For every member of Congress in the United States, there are between three to eight full-time lobbyists paid for by the oil, coal, and gas industries to make sure no progressive climate legislation goes through. They are basically buying off the politicians who need that money to run for political office.

In too many countries around the world today our elected political officials are completely powerless. They are dependent on the power of corporations to exist. We have to get big money out of democracy, out of our democratic politics. We have to go back to some of the basic tenets of democracy, one of which is the equality of voice, which certainly does not exist in most political systems across the world today. In many countries, we have the form of democracy without the substance of democracy. Many things that we call today democracies are really not democracies, but liberal oligarchies - that means that they have the form of elections. Yet, elections, I believe, don't equal democracy anymore. When women couldn't participate fairly, when working class perspectives are not listened to, when indigenous are marginalized, you cannot call that an effective working democracy that listen to various voices - and today I would say that elections have become a preordained elite-legitimation exercise. Think about it, today, when people go to vote, they are not going to vote for the best candidate, they are going to vote for the least bad candidate. That's the situation in many, many countries. What does that mean for activism? For activism and for civil society, it means that we do not have luxury of saying: we just focus on corporations, or we just focus on some governments. We have to focus on both, and if we fail to focus on the role of corporations, I think that we will not be fulfilling our full potential and mission as civil society.

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