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COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE
HUMAN RIGHTS IN MOTION



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INTRODUCTION



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 Hoggood** 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 Petrusek**), 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.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that this issue of Sur Journal was made possible by the support of the Ford Foundation, Open Society Foundations, the Oak Foundation, the Sigrid Rausing Trust, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). Additionally, Conectas Human Rights is especially grateful for the collaboration of the authors and the hard work of the Journal's editorial team. We are also extremely thankful 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. We are also tremendously thankful for Luz González's tireless work with editing the contributions received, and for Ana Cernov for coordinating the overall editorial process.



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Human Rights in Motion

Multipolarity

LUCIA NADER

Solid Organisations in a Liquid World

KENNETH ROTH

Why We Welcome Human Rights Partnerships

CÉSAR RODRÍGUEZ-GARAVITO

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“Human Rights Organisations Should Have a Closer Pulse to the Ground” Or How We Missed the Bus

INTERVIEW WITH LOUISE ARBOR

“North-South solidarity is Key”



LOISE ARBOUR

Louise Arbour has an extensive history as a human rights defender. She has served for the Supreme Court of Ontario, was Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda (1996-1999), and Justice for the Supreme Court of Canada (1999-2004). In 2004, Arbour became the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, a position she occupied until 2008. Since 2009, she serves as President and CEO

of the International Crisis Group—an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organization committed to preventing and resolving deadly conflict.

For someone with such an extensive “institutional” record, Arbour is surprisingly critical of the international human rights framework, which, for her, is “very weak,” and stuck in a “norm-setting addiction” instead of focusing on implementation. The problem, according to Arbour, is that “[The Human Rights Council] is a body of States, which invariably is driven by each State advancing its own interests, by alliances and tradeoffs and so on.” In this context, she regrets that there is not enough development in establishing an eventual international court of human rights, while concluding with pragmatism that such court “is so far down the road, and very unlikely to happen”. She has recently called for a “New York and Geneva Spring,” “something that challenges the entire system much more profoundly, the same way that starting in Tunisia and then right through the Arab world we have seen an actual civil society-based challenge to a total political order.”

The pragmatic former High Commissioner, however, thinks institutional reform should not be made a priority by human rights defenders, since “it is so far down the road, and very unlikely to happen.” But she warns: “there may come a time when people will have turned their backs on the human rights agenda because it is too slow to deliver, or take it on in a much more radical fashion.”

According to Arbour, international NGOs must “be careful not to get drawn into this doctrinal and normative environment and should remain extremely anchored in fieldwork.” For her, organizations in the North should be willing to share their resources with their counterparts in the South, who “have a much better claim at understanding the context in which human rights promotion and protection has to take place.” This North-South solidarity would not only help actual human rights protection, but also “pushback the claim that the human rights movement, despite its universality, is really a Western concept advancing Western cultural views of the world.”

Read below the complete interview with Arbour, where she also touches upon issues such as the need for human rights defenders to work on “cutting-edge” issues such as LGBT rights and focus on advancing the agenda of human rights with nations that are open to refining the norms, as opposed to naming and shaming violators or working to bring the standards down to include resistant countries. “If you had to find the model that would make North Korea become a fully human rights-based country - I wouldn’t hold the entire system hostage waiting for that to happen.”

Original in English.

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



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

INTERVIEW

“NORTH-SOUTH SOLIDARITY IS KEY”

Interview with Louise Arbour

Conectas Human Rights: You have recently said that, despite the constant challenges to universality in our contemporary multipolar world, one of the great unifying forces has been the international human rights framework. Does it mean you believe human rights are still an effective language for producing social change?

Louise Arbour: Yes. I think the international human rights framework has been very useful. It has actually inspired, in some cases very directly, constitutions and the laws in many countries. So it has had an impact. Its call for sort of universality and non-divisibility of rights has also forced a very unifying international conversation. But it has had some drawbacks. The most important one is that, in the last decade, the international human rights framework, as opposed to in-country human rights defenders, has been stuck in a norm-setting addiction. And, in some ways, I think this not all that useful, particularly since everything is done at the cost of something else.

There have been some important new normative initiatives, like, for instance, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. So I don't want to be completely negative about the normative environment. But, in Geneva, there is a vast disproportion of efforts towards the refinement of norms and tools and protocols and so on, to the detriment of the actual implementation of rights of people on the ground.

A second remark, and that is probably the biggest remaining challenge – and will be a challenge for a very long time - is the fact that the international institutions for the protection of human rights are very weak. They are essentially the Human Rights Council, with its various mechanisms, and, to some extent, the Security Council of the UN, in the most extreme cases. Both of them are bodies of States, where States trade interests. So, if you compare that to real human rights protection institutions, like courts – not only national courts, but also the European Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Court – there is nothing like that in the international scene. And, as long as that remains the case, the actual implementation will always be deficient.

And I think the great strength of the international human rights framework is the civil society community of human rights defenders, of various NGOs, both international and domestic ones. I think that is the heart and lungs of the human rights movement.

Conectas: How do you think those organizations and defenders can influence the international human rights framework to work more with implementation than with standard-setting? What is the role of civil society in the international human rights framework? Is there a role?

L.A.: I think there is a role, obviously. The international NGOs have to be careful not to get drawn in to this doctrinal and normative environment and should remain extremely anchored in fieldwork. That is key. And, for large international human rights NGOs, the partnership with national actors is critical. That is where the real impact can start being felt. Not just because violations of human rights are very contextualized and very local and it's the local actors that have the best understanding of how to move forward, how to address these issues, but also, if there is more cohesion between the international and the local NGOs, this will go a long way to dispel the claim by some that the human rights movement is essentially a Western-dominated agenda that serves a lot of Western interests, cultural interests and possibly economic ones. I think partnerships and more North-South solidarity will help to pushback this claim that the human rights movement, despite its universality, is really a Western concept advancing Western cultural views of the world.

Conectas: Do you think the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism has been able to incorporate civil society views into the UN Human Rights Council? NGOs have been complaining that their feedback is not really taken into consideration. What is your view on that?

L.A.: I was the High Commissioner when the UPR system was brought into place. The real driving idea behind the UPR was the idea of universal scrutiny. Before the Human Rights Council and the UPR existed, part of this claim that the human rights system was really a Western-dominated system came from a lot of countries that felt that the Human Rights Commission had been very selective and biased. Another idea that was floating at the time was the idea of universal membership in the Human Rights Council, but this didn't attract a lot of interest. So the tradeoff was: with the UPR, every country, not just Belarus and Cuba, should be object of scrutiny. Everybody's human rights' record should be examined. And my position has always been that is not useful to compare one country to another; it is not useful to compare Norway to Venezuela or Russia to Bolivia. What is useful is to compare each country against its own record to see if we can measure progress, regression or stagnation. That was the spirit of it. And, of course, the participation of civil society was a vehicle by which this assessment could be made reliably, measuring a country against its own record.

I have also always said that we are going to need two full cycles of UPR before we can measure whether it is having any impact, because the first time around, countries make commitments and so on and you take it as face value. It is when they come back the second time that we can really start measuring whether it worked.

At the end of the day, it comes back to what I said at the beginning: the Human Rights Council is a body of States, which invariably is driven by each State advancing its own interests, by alliances and tradeoffs and so on. And that is an inherent limitation to the usefulness of that entire exercise. And it will never overcome that.

Conectas: With regards to the standard-setting, it has been very important and still is – you have mentioned the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, there was a recent study that concluded that standard-setting mechanisms are put into practice only in countries that are already sympathetic to the causes or that already had internal human rights mechanisms into place, and it doesn't really make a difference in countries that are completely impermeable to these issues. These results are disputed and some argue that, even though it doesn't produce concrete results, it does advance the agenda and creates a fertile ground for civil society to pressure the next government to sign those mechanisms. Would you have anything to comment on that?

L.A.: I think the question is: compared to what? In the case of countries that are completely resistant to making any kind of progress on human rights, whether it is on civil and political rights or economic and social rights, there are limits in the international political and juridical system vis-à-vis these countries. Apart from Security Council Chapter 7 action as guardian of international peace and security, there is no serious coercive enforcement mechanism, even for countries that have actually ratified treaties and so on. And there is a reasonable debate as to whether you are more likely to make countries do something that they really do not want to do by some form of political coercion, like naming and shaming, isolation and sanctions and so on, or by trying to find ways to make it more attractive for them to join some consensus, to be part of a community. These are basically different strategies to compensate for the fact that you just cannot force countries to live up to commitments that they have actually made.

I think that, on balance, it is probably more productive to try to refine the standards and reaffirm them and try to entice others to join them. And it is true that it only happens amongst communities or countries that are already committed to the general agenda. In a sense, I think it is better to advance everybody within this positive agenda, even if it means that we don't have a lot to show for those who are completely left behind. If you had to find the model that would make North Korea become a fully human rights-based country... I wouldn't hold the entire system hostage waiting for that to happen. And if you take the issue of indigenous rights, for instance, I think it's better to work with those trying to engage and refine the thinking, with countries that have at least publicly expressed a positive disposition towards progress. That is a better investment.

Conectas: The next question is about North-South solidarity. We sometimes see a competition between Northern and Southern human rights organizations on who is the most influential, who gets more funds etc. How do you think organizations from the North and South can work in a complementary manner rather than compete for resources and influence?

L.A.: First, I think this competition for resources is very real - it is just a reality that NGOs have to get funded – and, on balance, is very damaging. And the aggressive pursuit of resources plays in the hands of many governments, in the South in particular, many in Africa, who claim that the work done by human rights NGOs - particularly by international NGOs, and even by some humanitarian actors - is basically just a kind of self-propelling initiative. That is,

that you need to show that the country is bad in order to generate more money, to hire more people to do more work, who will then say the country is still very bad in order to get more money... They see that as an industry. And I think that the aggressive competition for resources feeds into that narrative. That is very unhelpful.

And the second thing is I think, frankly, that at the end of the day the main sources of funding are in the North. And it is therefore incumbent on NGOs who come from the North and have access to these funds to be very open to partnerships and share and support those who are much closer to the ground, whom I think have a much better claim at understanding the context in which human rights promotion and protection has to take place.

The bottom line is, for this kind of North-South solidarity, the burden is on the international Northern NGOs to be much more attentive to the necessities... I hate the expression “capacity-building,” because it is always used by governments to avoid doing anything they don’t like to do, but within civil society movements the sharing of skills and of resources to the benefit of those who would have a lot more impact if they had more capacity, is a burden that the North should assume.

The flipside of that is that NGOs in the South, I fully understand the limitations on their capacities, but I think at the same time an effort to internationalize their efforts would come some distance, because the more parochial they remain, the more difficult it is to have these partnerships with a broader community.

I’ll give you an example that I am currently sort of working on, not strictly speaking as a human rights issue but as a conflict prevention issue, but it comes down to the same thing. It is the case of Sri Lanka. Here in Crisis Group we published a report in 2010 in which we documented massive war crimes, crimes against humanity, maybe 30,000, 40,000 people killed in Sri Lanka when the government finished the war against the LTTE – Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. We have been working on that case ever since, really trying to push for proper accountability, an International Commission of Inquiry. The government has always said they would do it themselves, but of course they have done absolutely nothing. The issue comes up in the Human Rights Council every year, but is very difficult to mobilize countries of the South. The government of Sri Lanka has a very aggressive diplomatic campaign to try to rally the brotherhood of the South to support them. So this is an example where it is made a lot harder because most of the NGOs who work in the South work on domestic issues. They don’t know about Sri Lanka, they just can’t. So, to me, this is a very big shortcoming. Because then it looks again like that it is all the big Northern international NGOs who are picking on poor small little Sri Lanka. And it is very difficult to mobilize the Global South through its civil society human rights actors to engage on this issue.

Conectas: We do feel that usually Northern scholars and NGOs feel entitled to speak about issues all over the world, even if they are not on the ground and are not very experts on the issue. If it is about human rights, for example, and they get reports from a local organization, or however they get the information, they feel that they can speak about it and pressure governments to work on that. Whereas scholars from the South and NGOs feel uneasy to speak about violations in another country. We have a lot of difficulty trying to find scholars from the South that want to generalize

concepts or give names to trends and speak about issues that are not strictly domestic. From Brazil, to speak about Sri Lanka - what do we know about it? We would need to have a much stronger network to know what is actually going on in Sri Lanka. And that is what we try to do, but it is difficult.

L.A.: Yes. Again, I think that it is a real challenge for NGOs from the South to develop South-South partnerships. There are some terrific NGOs if you want to understand Sri Lanka, or at least feel sufficiently confident that you can be mobilized in support of human rights defenders in Sri Lanka. All you have to do is identify partners that you trust. Now, it takes time to build these partnerships, but you don't have to rely just on Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International or the big international ones.

I know it is very difficult because in lots of regions of the world, in Asia in particular, there are very few regional organizations. So you go from Geneva, basically from the international framework level, straight down to the country level. There is very little at the regional or sub-regional level. There is a little bit more in Africa. And Latin America has enough language homogeneity – not completely, I understand Brazil is different – and a reasonably sort of coherent recent narrative, particularly about civil and political rights. And there's a lot to do.

So I understand fully why it is not happening, but, as we talk more and more about the interconnected world and so on, it undermines the credibility of particularly Western international NGOs who speak on Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Guinea-Bissau and so on, to never ever have the voice of their, for instance, Latin American or Asian friends to mobilize on these issues.

Governments are very good, they don't have any difficulty mobilizing support, and you see lots of governments supporting Sri Lanka. They don't know any more than you do about what is actually happening in the country. They just decide to believe what the government of Sri Lanka tells them.

So I think developing this capacity would go a long way to help the advancement of human rights in countries where is particularly difficult for local human rights defenders to do it on their own. Let's put it another way: it is a lot easier for the government of Sri Lanka to pushback against Europe with the usual claims of neocolonialism than it is to pushback against communities from the South.

Conectas: But one can find a bit of resistance within one's country in the sense that, for example, Conectas has been doing work on North Korea, Iran, and Syria more recently, and we find resistance within Brazilian civil society because they say "we have so many problems, why are you worrying about North Korea? Let's look at our own problems, let's pressure the government to deal with prisons, torture, instead of using your influence to talk about Iran."

L.A.: If you engage with smaller issues, you might actually be very surprised at the fact that you can actually show impact. For instance, some of the West African countries where Brazil - economically and politically as a country - has a very big footprint... I mean, it is a real presence, so if Brazilian civil society actors started agitating on issues where your own government and your own private sector industry have an interest, then all of the sudden you have an impact much,

much larger than that some countries like Canada or Norway, say, on Guinea-Bissau or the Gulf of Guinea generally or Nigeria.

So you don't have to go all the way to North Korea is my point. You could start with something where your impact could be demonstrable.

Conectas: What do you think are the main challenges that will need to be addressed by human rights organizations and defenders in the next decade?

L.A.: On the one hand, as we discussed before, human rights organizations and defenders in countries that already have at least a political commitment and a legal framework for the advancement of human rights will want to work on what you can call cutting-edge issues, such as LGBT rights. Just keep advancing the agenda, standard-setting and refining standards. Surprisingly, we have to reclaim some territory: the challenges in the last decade against the Torture Convention, even questioning the universality of the prohibition against torture; women's rights in some parts of the world, such as Afghanistan, we are going to see... it's starting already, potentially wiping out all the gains that have been made, surprisingly, when you think that gender equality rhetorically at least seems to be acceptable to most governments. So I think there is still a lot to do just in terms of advancing the agenda and maintaining some of the gains.

Some of the most challenging issues are going to come from a revival of calls of cultural and religious specificity. I think we see an increasing and very constant rejection of human rights universality in the international scene. I don't know how much of that is penetrating, for instance, in Brazil, but globally, I think it is going to be the calls for cultural or religious values that come and clash with the human rights agenda. It is going to be a very big issue.

And, finally, there is a question of institutional reform that one I don't see any potential progress, for instance, towards the establishment of a reform of the treaty-body system towards eventually an international human rights court. At this point I would not make that a priority because it is so far down the road, and very unlikely to happen.

Conectas: Finally, at the time of the so-called Arab Spring, you mentioned the need of a “New York and Geneva Spring”. What did you mean by that? What would that entail?

L.A.: What I had in mind is exactly that denouncing the shortcomings of the institutional international human rights protection framework - the Human Rights Council, the Security Council - as opposed to treating it as business as usual - you know, just trying to get a better voice in the UPR and so on... Asking whether we are poised for something that challenges the entire system much more profoundly, the same way that starting in Tunisia and then right through the Arab world we have seen an actual civil society-based challenge to a total political order. Again, I don't think we are there yet. And maybe we'll contend that there is still progress that could be made inside the box. But there may come a time when people will have turned their backs on the human rights agenda because it is too slow to deliver, or take it on in a much more radical fashion. I'll leave that with you.

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