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COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE  
HUMAN RIGHTS IN MOTION



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HUMAN RIGHTS

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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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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!





#### MALAK EL-CHICHINI POPPOVIC

Malak El-Chichini Poppovic, currently Coordinator of the Business and Human Rights Group of *FGV Direito SP*, was the Executive Director of Conectas from 2005 to April 2011. She was Senior Consultant in the Peace, Security and Human Rights area of the United Nations Foundation (2001-2004). She was Senior Researcher at the Center for the Study of Violence, University of São Paulo (1989-1994). She also served at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees - UNHCR, (1975-1988). She holds a postgraduate degree in Economics and International Relations awarded by the Graduate Institute for International Studies, Geneva. Malak has written several articles on refugee,

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#### OSCAR VILHENA VIEIRA

Oscar Vilhena Vieira is the Director of *FGV Direito SP*, where he teaches Constitutional Law, Human Rights and Law & Development. He holds a Masters in Law from Columbia University, New York (1995), a PhD in Political Science from the University of São Paulo (1991-1998) and a Postdoctoral award from the University of Oxford (2007). He was Executive Director of the UN Latin American Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (ILANUD), as well as the founder and director of the NGO Conectas Human Rights. He is the editor of *Sur - International Journal on Human Rights*. He is also a board member of several civil society organizations, including the

*Pro Bono Institute* and *Open Society Foundations*. He has published several articles and books, including "Direitos Fundamentais: uma Leitura da Jurisprudência do STF" (2006), "Supremo Tribunal Federal - Jurisprudência Política" (2002) and "A Constituição e sua Reserva de Justiça" (1999).

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#### ABSTRACT

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In this article, the two authors answer questions put to them by the editors of this issue of *Sur Journal*. On the representativity of human rights NGOs, the authors argue that the organizations' legitimacy springs not from their majority support but from the integrity of their approach. With regard to new ways of improving NGOs' current performance with a view to better long-term impacts, the authors suggest that the prospects for enhancing respect for human rights will improve only if there is greater diversity both among the organizations themselves and their action strategies in particular. As for the language of human rights, the authors believe in its current transformative potential, arguing that human rights have made, and continue to make, a substantial contribution in terms of discourse and practice. With regard to new forms of technology, the authors consider that the challenge faced by the organizations is to try to understand what their new role is. Finally, they analyze North-South interaction on the international stage, arguing that the Global South increasingly questions the perception that only the organizations of the North are truly international, while those in the South remain focused on the local agenda.

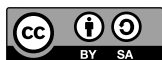
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# REFLECTIONS ON THE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY: ONLY THE ANSWERS CHANGE

Malak El-Chichini Poppovic  
Oscar Vilhena Vieira

Many of the questions asked by the editors of Sur Journal have much in common with the many different questions we asked ourselves in the course of establishing Conectas Human Rights, an international organization based in the South, over ten years ago.

The editors' questionnaire asked us to try and identify the changes that have influenced the policies of human rights organizations over the past decade. The famous justification presented by Albert Einstein is apposite. When asked why he would give the same test to the same students two years in a row, he replied, "the questions are the same, only the answers change".

This aphorism rings even truer today. The basic issues are still highly relevant, while the answers have been enriched with everyday learning, experience, errors, achievements by new actors and causes that have gained visibility and recognition.

Perhaps the most striking change has been the increasing democratization and participation of civil society. This is true even of the emerging countries that now play a key role in the globalization process. The emergence of countries that define themselves as the "Global South" has led to new demands and a new *modus operandi* in the language of human rights.

Over a decade ago, we were already beginning to realize that the advent of democracy did not necessarily coincide with universal respect for human rights. We asked ourselves what was needed to protect "vulnerable groups" and to monitor the proper functioning of the institutions that sustain democracy and ensure compliance with laws that should apply equally to everyone?

There is always a degree of dissatisfaction with the inability of new democracies to overcome obstacles and the legacy of arbitrary rule. Persistent and growing social inequality, unfulfilled promises of a better life and the lack of accountability of public policies create frustration not only within political regimes but also in the human rights organizations themselves. This has led to new forms of participation and protest, as can be seen by the street demonstrations that have

mushroomed in Brazil and throughout the world over recent years. The most significant achievement has undoubtedly been the beginning of a discourse of greater plurality and tolerance.

What is the role of NGOs in this new scenario of growing popular demand? NGOs are essentially goodwill organizations that renounce the interests of the market, which is mainly interested in maximizing profit, and of political parties, who aim to maximize power. In this sense NGOs are “micro-powers” that can “destabilize” traditional policies and create difficulties for the leaders of both democracies and autocracies when it comes to demanding justice based on rights. However this does not mean that they have the power to pursue or implement a broader agenda.

Perhaps the new restlessness of human rights NGOs nowadays has something to do with redefining their roles when faced by the proliferation of the different types of micro-powers. How can a human rights NGO make itself visible, to significantly influence public policies, and at the same time retain a crucial role by knowing how to listen, see and dialogue with these new forms of protest?

## 1 Who do we represent?

Human rights organizations are not “representative”, in the strictest sense, insofar as they are not delegated to act on behalf of individuals or collectives. Human rights organizations are by nature identity-based. They are established to promote a wide range of legal, political and moral rights with which their members identify. The legitimacy of these organizations is not the same as that required by the membership of political parties, movements, trade unions or governments. These, claiming to exercise power on behalf of others, aim to be regarded as representative. In the case of human rights organizations, however, their legitimacy is of a different kind, deriving from the integrity with which they seek to promote the rights that have been politically recognized by the international community throughout history.

Integrity means, in the first place, the inseparability between the goals that should guide the actions of human rights organizations and the means employed to achieve these goals. Given that the goals are necessarily linked to promoting, protecting and defending human rights, these activities cannot involve actions that would affront or undermine such rights. It follows that human rights organizations have less leeway than other organizations operating in a social and political context. The concept of integrity must also be linked to the accuracy, clarity and transparency with which the organizations pursue their actions, to avoid destroying the very idea of human rights.

Human rights organizations may have many different types of relationships with the community. However, when any organization makes representation its core mandate, it necessarily assumes a different nature, which can be legitimate and commendable, but this type of organization is not to be confused with a human rights organization in the strict sense.

Human rights organizations obviously need to build channels of dialogue with society, be sensitive to the concerns of the community and, among their multifarious action strategies, include communication tools that are essential for determining

priorities and increasing their prospects of success. In many circumstances, such as in the struggle against authoritarian, discriminatory, colonialist regimes and so on, the actions of human rights groups were, and remain, on the side of social movements and of the majority of the people in the societies where they operate. The mandate of a human rights organization should not however depend on the will of the majority, or of those in power— in a political party, a movement, the State, an economy or even in a community. Because if the majority is in favor of torture and racial discrimination at a particular place and time, it does not mean that human rights organizations should take up this cause. Being in tune with society and with the majority living in that society is an excellent way to advance human rights, but at times these rights are mechanisms that work against the majority.

Such an approach can turn human rights organizations into ineffective bodies that in some circumstances can be very vulnerable indeed. Their legitimacy depends, above all, on the integrity with which they fulfill their mandates.

It would appear therefore that human rights organizations should not be concerned with transforming themselves into full-blown “human rights political parties”. At the same time, this does not mean that they should not seek to influence political parties to work in favor of human rights or exert pressure for human rights to become state policies.

## **2 How to combine current and long-term impacts?**

Once the idea of integrity of mandate has been accepted as a key factor that distinguishes human rights organizations from others, we should look at more diversified ways to implement this mandate, for a number of reasons. Given the enormous complexity of society and the links between social phenomena, there is no way that we can predict the outcome of a particular action pursued by a human rights organization. Losing a lawsuit can bring about unexpected effects: for example, an opportunity to bolster human rights in the wake of anger caused by some injustice. On the other hand, a brilliant report on a series of barbaric practices is simply left on the shelf. Thus, the chance of successfully enhancing respect for human rights will increase in line with growing diversity among the organizations and their action strategies. Opportunities for advancing human rights can emerge from a set of short- and long-term actions, from structural and economic actions or from actions with a public and diplomatic impact. Rather than trying to pursue a line of conduct that is theoretically more efficient than the rest, NGOs should establish their strategies on the basis of what they believe to be necessary and feasible, according to the human, financial and political resources at their disposal. It is vital to bear in mind that persistence, consistency and integrity are the secret keys to success.

While planning, organization and evaluation are certainly important, it must be remembered that an exaggerated level of professionalism can generate endless problems, such as bureaucracy, lack of flexibility and greater dependence on financial resources. Civil society organizations in general and human rights organizations in particular should not be too concerned about attempting to mimic

more complex organizations—commercial firms, political parties, trade unions and so on. Much of the success of many organizations stems from their ability to take risks, set goals, change plans, test multiple strategies and embrace opportunities. Excessively regulated civil society organizations, lack of flexibility and growing dependence on unwieldy professional, financial and organizational resources can undermine the autonomy and vitality of human rights organizations.

The most appropriate way to deal with extreme social complexity, low predictability and diminishing control over the outcome of actions is to seek, in the first place, to boost the plurality of organizations. Rather than engaging in a fratricidal contest for reputation, a thematic monopoly, media exposure and financial resources, organizations should act in a more concerted way, because changes can often be brought about by a combination of factors and not by a single organization. As for the internal functioning of organizations, they should be more pluralistic in staffing terms at the board and management level. Presenting action proposals to groups of people with multiple talents, backgrounds and outlooks can lead to a more positive approach in the field of human rights, to increase the range of partnerships and to reduce errors.

### **3 Is the language of human rights still effective for producing social changes?**

The language of human rights, as well as the ideas of democracy, the Rule of Law and transparency constitute an ideological repertoire that has helped to bring about rapid social emancipation in recent decades. While democracy and the Rule of Law are ideas that are more associated with the functioning of formal institutions, human rights have also succeeded in establishing emancipatory standards in the political, social, community and family contexts. Thus it would not be incorrect to say that human rights have made, and still make, a meaningful, practical contribution to the lives of all those whose dignity has been constrained by the authorities of the state or as a result of their own social environment. The true Velvet Revolution that we have experienced over the past decades, using the language of human rights as foundation, does not allow us to undermine the conceptual strength of human rights, particularly where socialism, as an ideology of social change, has proved wanting in its ability to convince, and where neoliberalism has proved incapable of transforming the fate of the most vulnerable groups in society.

It is difficult to say whether the systematic use of the language of human rights erodes its authority and impact or whether, on the contrary, it transforms human rights into a basic standard to justify what can and cannot be done.

It is even more difficult to answer this question one-dimensionally. While in some societies rapid structural changes appear to have taken place using the language of human rights, others appear to have regressed. Other competing languages or ideologies such as religious fundamentalism, extreme forms of nationalism, market supremacy or anachronistic developmentalism clash with the very logic of human rights in a variety of circumstances.

It is wrong to assert that there is no longer a need for standard-setting rights,

as if history had come to an end. We are constantly faced with the emergence of new struggles for recognition and new demands for well-being and a better life. Technological and environmental change is already powerfully influencing how we relate to one another and organize ourselves as a society. These changes also demand a constant need for the renewal, expansion and rebuilding of mechanisms that provide moral support to guide social interaction as well as society's relationship with the various forms of power to guarantee respect and concern for all human beings.

The normative approach to human rights clearly should not distract us from their political and social dimensions. Rigorous standards of equality and strident demands for freedom and dignity undoubtedly come up against obstacles that characterize the power structures of all kinds of societies. Hierarchies and abuses exist in all societies to a greater or lesser extent. It follows that any process of change involving human rights as a goal should consider the need to operate within both social structures and political institutions. In other words, the human rights ideal needs to be expanded through education and culture. Furthermore, human rights need to be established as non-negotiable for those seeking the legitimate exercise of power within society.

#### **4 How do the new information and communication technologies influence activism?**

The new information and communication technologies obviously have an impact on the field of human rights, as on virtually all other sectors of life. The monopoly over information is being substantially eroded and the time factor is increasingly truncated. Both these phenomena are extremely positive for the process of social emancipation in which the universal moral grammar of human rights competes. The big challenge for organizations now is to seek to understand what their new role is and to find ways of repositioning their programs to aid those who seek social change through human rights.

If we consider the recent street protests around the world that used social networks as a communication platform, the presence of human rights discourse was notable: demanding better quality public services, democracy and equality. The point at issue is whether human rights organizations still play a central role, as was the case in the closing decades of the last century. As with the print media and communication networks, our organizations need to find a new space for themselves or perish.

Positive changes are to be welcomed. There exists for example the real possibility today of mobilizing, at very low cost, large numbers of people to engage specific issues and topics. Technology is also invaluable for recording all types of human rights violations and bringing them rapidly to the notice of the entire world. These new developments are however no substitute for the need for our NGOs to galvanize the debate. The artificial, fragmented and cross-thematic way in which people appear to coalesce through the internet provides a vast new opportunity for the organizations to generate more systematic and consistent ideas which, if properly

disseminated, could well be leveraged in a new field of human rights activism.

## 5 What are the challenges of working internationally from the South?

Given that human rights are the result of a particular historical context and of a set of decisions taken at a particular time and place, they do not necessarily have the same impact on different cultures and societies. Politically, however, human rights have become a kind of moral anchor. Despite systematic violations by many governments, reluctant to address cultural and other tensions in their own countries, it has become very difficult for a regime or government to argue that such breaches of rights are legitimate.

This new consensus on human rights as a precondition for the legitimate exercise of power does not mean, however, that arguments between nations about their content, or the ways in which they are implemented, have ceased. Strains between individualistic and communitarian approaches to human rights issues divide East and West. More liberal and social interpretations divide the North and the Global South. Although efforts are made to reduce these paradoxes and construct a more flexible discourse arguing for the inseparability and interdependence of “generations of rights”, the fact is that separate blocks of countries only focus on what they regard as convenient for them in this broad universe of human rights.

While this tension may be a sign of legitimate differences between nations, it can also be a mere subterfuge by countries that interpret human rights more broadly and selectively, to gloss over their lack of commitment to the cause. In short, states are selective when referring to and employing the tools of human rights.

Human rights NGOs, when defining their mandates, are to a certain extent also required to restrict their activities to specific spheres in the broad field of human rights. Since most organizations have carved out an international role for themselves from their base in the westernized countries of the North, they have tended to work toward an agenda more focused on civil and political rights, faced with the specific challenge of fighting arbitrary authoritarian right and left regimes around the world. Notwithstanding the enormous importance of these organizations, their activities began to be questioned, not only rhetorically by those who sought to evade their human rights obligations, but also by those whose criticisms were more legitimate and who realized that the one-dimensionality and control of the human rights agenda were undermining the cause of human rights.

With the third wave of re-democratization, which started in Spain and Portugal, passed through Latin America and then later embraced Eastern Europe and a number of African countries, a huge, vibrant mass of movements and organizations accepted the language of human rights as a guiding principle for their actions. As a result of the UN conferences of the 1990s and the advent of the new century, many of these organizations savored the chance to become more cosmopolitan, paving the way for the emergence of genuinely international movements with their roots in the South.

These organizations bring to the international agenda new demands and

political practices. They question not only the conduct of their own states, but also that of the “core” democracies. They also raise questions about the more traditional and hegemonic organizations of the North.

The most tangible result has been the incorporation of some of these new demands into the international agenda through new mechanisms such as the Millennium Development Goals and various platforms to combat poverty, AIDS and so on.

While the international human rights policy agenda expanded, more traditional hegemonic organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch were obliged to qualify their discourse and activities by broadening the scope of protected rights and changing the pattern of their relations with so-called regional and local organizations.

These changes also gradually had an impact on the philanthropic and international cooperation field. The prevailing ideas that international organizations were necessarily rooted in the North and that the South should busy itself with its local agenda were robustly questioned by the Global South.

This was not a purely instrumental critique, aimed at increasing the power of organizations in the South, but a major shift designed to give a more cosmopolitan and integral dimension to human rights. In due course the rhetoric of civil rights came to be regarded with suspicion on account of its use by the liberal countries. On the other hand, the social rights discourse also began to be regarded as a hypocritical device used to conceal violations of civil rights.

The burst of optimism on the human rights front that occurred in the 1990s, mirrored in the Rio Conference (1992) and Vienna (1993), gradually faded as it became apparent that the commitment of the new democracies was partial, especially that of the new major international player, China, which has obdurately refused to commit to the imperatives of human rights. On the other hand, the extremely selective posture of the United States and some of its allies has also contributed to a less than constructive environment, internationally. The heated arguments over the inclusion of clauses related to justice, Rule of Law and security in the new Millennium Development Goals (particularly the resistance showed by the countries of the South to include these goals to benefit their own peoples) clearly demonstrates the level of tension.

North-South or East-West rhetoric has been used in many circumstances to conceal violations, exclusion and arbitrary acts or simply to boost hegemonic interests.

The challenge faced by local, regional or international organizations, whether North or South, West or East, is to focus on the foundational human rights dimension, which is to regard each person as an end in him/herself, and to treat individuals with equal respect and consideration within the many different contexts in which they find themselves.



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