Introduction

The Centre for Applied Human Rights (CAHR), like so many other institutions and employers, is adapting to the new circumstances created by coronavirus. The extended CAHR family includes staff, human rights defenders (HRDs), students, and partners on research projects. Given our focus on applied human rights, and in particular supporting HRDs, this pandemic will have specific implications for us. Defenders on our fellowship scheme this year made it home in very challenging circumstances. Many HRDs around the world face responses to coronavirus and lockdowns which are also being used as a cover to attack democratic freedoms and further shrink civic space. As you will see below, we are looking to respond to the implications of coronavirus for human rights both locally and globally.

Times of crisis and great disruption can of course be used to advance regressive and repressive agendas. But this is not an inevitable outcome of the pandemic. As so much of our normal lives is stripped away, it is an opportunity to return to what is essential and re-imagine what is possible. From enhanced local engagements to stronger bonds of global solidarity, there are possibilities as well as challenges in the current moment.

I urge you to keep safe, but also to keep engaged, at these difficult times.

Let me end by welcoming several new staff to CAHR: Claire Fox, the new Centre Manager; Pier Parisi, as Research Associate at the Human Rights Defender Hub; and Jelena Erstic, Alice Trotter and Jonathan Zaragoza on recently started research projects.

By Paul Gready - Director of the CAHR, April 2020
THIS WEEK'S TOP STORIES

CALL FOR ‘ARCTIVISTS’

ART + ACTIVISM AGAINST REPRESSION DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

As you are certainly aware of, the Covid-19 emergency is providing an opportunity for repressive or authoritarian governments around the world to crack down on civil society and to further shrink democratic spaces. As a consequence, activists and human rights defenders are at heightened risk. Yet, even uncertain times such as the one we are living in right now can be nests for innovative ideas, which may translate into new forms of activism often through alternative, more creative or even visionary means, such as art.

For these reasons, the Centre for Applied Human Rights (CAHR), through a grant from the Open Society Foundations, has set up a fund – Arctivists – to support activists and artists across the world responding to the outbreak of Covid-19 and its implications for human rights defenders, activism, and shrinking civic and political space. Paired activists and artists are able to apply for up to £3,000; it is envisaged that most grants will be for between £1,000 and £2,000.

For further information and details of how to apply, please visit the Human Rights Defenders Hub website.

**********

York Human Rights City network (YHRC) - COVID-19

The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights has launched an inquiry into the human rights implications of the recently passed Coronavirus Act, which swept away a number of current human rights protections.

The Committee released a call for evidence, seeking views on:

1. Which groups will be disproportionately affected by measures taken by the Government to address the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What steps need to be taken to ensure that measures taken by the Government to address the COVID-19 pandemic are human rights compliant?
3. What will the impact of specific measures taken by Government to address the COVID-19 pandemic be on human rights in the UK?

The YHRC network has agreed to set up a system to collect and collate these submissions through email, survey monkey and telephone interviews. To take part in this submission please
complete the following survey. Alternatively If you prefer to speak to someone in person, and would like to arrange an interview please email info@yorkhumanrights.org

Photo taken from the UK Parliament Committee

READ MORE ON OUR WEBSITE

Human Rights Defenders @CAHR

Lessons in networking from a CAHR visiting fellow: How to lobby your government to re-open the border and let you home during Covid-19

CAHR’s Protective Fellowship Scheme for human rights defenders (HRDs) at risk normally runs from September to the end of March. In 2020, the fellowship was cut short due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the impact of which was starting to be felt in the UK in the middle of March. Instead of undertaking a scheduled advocacy and networking visit to London, the HRDs needed to return home on an expedited schedule – in most cases racing to book onto increasingly sold out flights in order to reach home before the borders closed. It was a time that showed how HRDs, even when they know they are returning to risky and outright dangerous situations, want to be working in their communities, particularly at a time when they know they are needed more urgently than ever.
Tajik human rights lawyer Dilrabo Samadova needed to put in a bit more effort to get home, as she was informed on her way to the airport that the borders of Tajikistan would be closed before her flight reached its destination. Her experience shows the importance of networks in human rights work, and how human rights networks can become useful in the most unexpected of situations. To read more on Dilrabo’s return home and her subsequent work in Tajikistan to support vulnerable communities facing Covid-19, visit the [CAHR website.](#)

![Photo credit Dilrabo Samadova - Dubai Airport](#)

**Colombombian Truth Commission**

In February 2020, the [Human Rights Defender Hub](#) hosted the Colombian Truth Commission, also known as the [Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-repetition.](#) Tatiana Pedraza and Alejandra Coll, representatives from the working group on gender, spoke about the contribution of women HRD’s to truth-seeking and transitional justice in Colombia, as well as the testimony of Oto Higuita, a Colombian human rights activist.

The Commission was created following the peace agreement signed between the government of Colombia and the guerrilla group known as FARC in 2017, after decades of armed conflict. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that 550,000 Colombians fled the country during the conflict, and the Commission is working to ensure that these communities in the diaspora are included in the truth-seeking process. A [leaflet in Spanish](#) explaining the Commission’s work and including contact details for Colombian’s in the UK was made available by Peter Drury, the Representative of the Truth Commission - UK, who can be contacted directly by [email.](#)
CAHR Research

Refugees in the time of pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting all of us. However, it has the potential to impact those in vulnerable situations and already marginalised the most, including refugees and displaced persons. As Anna Shea at Amnesty International has noted "In prosperous nations around the world, previously familiar and safe spaces – buses, shops, restaurants – are now sites of fear and danger. People wake up without knowing if they have a pay cheque, whether their children can attend school, whether the grocery stores and pharmacies will have enough supplies for their basic needs." These are feelings and situations faced by millions of refugees and displaced persons around the world, even before the pandemic.

The Access to Justice in Displacement project is working with Asylum Access, the International Detention Coalition, the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network, and local legal advocacy organisations in Asia and the Middle East to develop resources for front-line organisations working with refugees. The project is providing an up-to-date map of the changes in law and policy that affect the right to asylum, documenting the various impacts of the pandemic on refugee communities and their allies and developing new funding streams for impacted organisations and communities.

Martin Jones and Alice Nah are leading these activities while being helped by a team of researchers drawn from the Centre's post-graduate and undergraduate students. Martin notes that "We also hope to document and disseminate good practices - there have been some
remarkable expressions of solidarity, and humanity. The pandemic might yet have some positive legacies for the protection of refugees and displaced persons."

By Martin Jones April 2020

-------------------

Religious leaders as influencers of international humanitarian law compliance

A team of nine researchers and support staff, benefiting from valuable research assistance by postgraduate students of the LLM in International Human Rights Law and Practice and York Law School undergraduate students, are mapping religious actors’ activities and interpretations relating to armed conflicts in Colombia, Libya, Mali and Myanmar. The research is part of the ESRC-funded project Generating Respect for Humanitarian Norms: The Influence of Religious Leaders on Parties to Armed Conflict.

CAHR’s Dr Ioana Cismas, the project’s principal investigator, notes: “Religious leaders are ‘not the usual suspects’ when one thinks of influencers of armed actors’ behaviour in war. Yet, our researchers have produced exceptionally rich material, which illustrates that these actors can exert significant influence. We are working to understand the fine-grained factors and conditions that explain this influence and determine states and non-state armed groups to refrain from violating humanitarian norms”.

An article on the topic, written by Ioana together with Ezequiel Heffes, thematic legal advisor for the humanitarian NGO Geneva Call, will be published by the Yearbook of International Humanitarian Law later this year – pre-proofs of the article are now available.

By Ioana Cismas April 2020

-------------------

York: Human Rights City network (YHRC)

Throughout 2019, YHRC network continued to build on the momentum created by the 2017 declaration of York as a Human Rights City. The 2019 indicator report aims to inspire debate and action in York to achieve the vision of fundamental rights at the heart of our policies, hopes and dreams for the future. This year the report focused on the right to a decent standard of living – one of the five priority human rights. To review the key findings, achievements, impact and recommendations please read the full report.
CAHR: MA and LLM Student Fieldwork

CAHR students of the 2019/20 cohort have successfully completed work on impactful human rights placement projects. Students on the MA in Applied Human Rights worked in partnership with Rape Crisis (sexual violence), Voices of Africans for Change (refugees) and Natural Justice (indigencus rights) in South Africa and with York City of Sanctuary (refugees), York: Human Rights City network (homelessness), and the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (Rohingya University and women in leadership) in York. Students on the LLM in International Human Rights Law & Practice collaborated with SUARAM on the protection of human rights defenders, Asylum Access on refugee rights in Malaysia, the International Committee of the Red Cross on missing persons, the North Yorkshire Police on hate crimes, and Survive on the implications of devolved funding for sexual abuse survivors.

To find out more about the students’ projects and fieldwork in Cape Town, Kuala Lumpur and York, you can read their testimonials on the CAHR website.

---

6 Innovation Close, University of York, Heslington, York, YO10 5ZF, UK

Tel: +44 (0)1904 325830 | cahr-admin@york.ac.uk