

# **First Annual Conference of the Geneva Human Rights Platform**

## **The Connectivity of Human Rights Mechanisms**

Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2019, 9:00 – 18:00, Maison de la Paix  
(Pétale 5)

# Agenda

9:00 – 9:15

## **Welcome and Introduction**

- Ambassador Valentin Zellweger, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the UN in Geneva
- Marco Sassòli, Director, Geneva Academy
- Felix Kirchmeier, Coordinator of the Geneva Human Rights Platform

9:15 – 9:45

## **Keynote Address**

- Sarah Cleveland, Professor for Human and Constitutional Rights and faculty director of the Human Rights Institute at Columbia Law School

9:45 – 11:15

## **Panel 1: Treaty Bodies, the Universal Periodic Review and the WTO Trade Policy Mechanism: Comparison of Mechanisms**

(Organizer at Geneva Academy: Felix Kirchmeier, in partnership with **Maastricht University, TB Net, UPR Info**)

Speakers:

- Valentina Carraro, Postdoctoral Researcher at Maastricht University and Rubicon Research Fellow at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights
- Eric Tistounet, Chief of the Human Rights Council Branch, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Antonia Diakantoni, Counsellor, Trade Policies Review Division, World Trade Organization

Moderator:

- Mona M'Bikay, Executive Director, UPR Info

11:15 – 11:30

## **Coffee Break**

11:30 – 13:00

## **Panel 2: United Nations Human Rights Mechanisms and Sustainable Development Goals**

(Organizer at Geneva Academy: Christophe Golay, in partnership with **OHCHR, Danish Institute for Human Rights, FIAN International, Franciscans International, Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung**)

Speakers:

- Miloon Kothari, President of UPR Info, former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing
- Emily Mattheisen, FIAN International
- Steven Jensen, Senior Researcher, Danish Institute for Human Rights
- Rio Hada, Team Leader, ESCR, OHCHR
- Caroline Dommen, Independent Researcher, Sustainability, Human Rights and the Economy

Moderator:

- Christophe Golay, Senior Research Fellow and Strategic Adviser on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Geneva Academy

13:00 – 14:00

**Lunch Break and “meeting space”**

**Information / interaction with the panel co-sponsoring organizations**

14:00 – 15:30

**Panel 3: Civil Society space and reprisals**

(Organizer at Geneva Academy: Felix Kirchmeier, in partnership with **OHCHR, International Service for Human Rights, Centre for Civil and Political Rights**)

Speakers: TBC

15:30 – 16:00

**Coffee Break**

16:00 – 17:30

**Panel 4: The Law-Making Role of Human Rights Mechanisms**

(Organizer at Geneva Academy: Kamelia Kemileva, in partnership with **Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, CRDH – Paris Human Rights Center**)

Speakers: TBC

17:30-18:00

**Closing of the Conference**

## Background

The Geneva Human Rights Platform (GHRP) provides a neutral and dynamic forum of interaction in Geneva for all stakeholders in the field of human rights – experts, practitioners, diplomats and civil society – to debate topical issues and challenges related to the functioning of the Geneva-based human rights system. Relying on academic research and findings, it works to enable various actors to be better connected, break silos, and, hence, advance human rights. The GHRP is supported by the Swiss FDFA.

Its first annual conference will focus on the issue of connectivity between human rights mechanisms in the UN Human Rights System, but also with national and regional mechanisms. The conference shall bring together a large number of human rights actors from Geneva and beyond and offer a platform for exchange – on co-organized panels and via a “meeting space” during lunch break.

The modern human rights protection system is comprised of an intricate and disparate web of UN and regional treaties and oversight mechanisms. The last half-century has seen the promulgation of a large number of international and regional human rights instruments, including numerous multilateral UN human rights treaties and the various conventions and protocols of the regional human rights systems.

The multilateral conventions are overseen by 10 treaty bodies, which, though they exercise similar powers, were not created to function as a system. Each treaty body was created by States as a free-standing institution, functioning independently within the framework of its own mandate, with the power to independently establish its own procedures, and with its own reporting and review requirements for States.

The treaty bodies operate in parallel to the UN Charter-based mechanisms of the Human Rights Council, with its Universal Periodic Review and special procedures, including over 55 thematic and country special rapporteurs, as well as working groups and commissions of inquiry. Human rights issues are also addressed in the work of the UN General Assembly and Security Council, including, inter alia, through the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by UNGA Resolution 70/1 (2015).

The UN system, in turn, is complemented by the regional human rights systems in Africa, the Americas and Europe, which are overseen by regional commissions and courts as well as supporting regional political mechanisms, including the African Union, the OAS, and the Council of Europe. And human rights norms are enforced directly or incorporated by domestic law into numerous national legal systems.

While human rights by definition are conceived as universal, the proliferation of human rights norms and mechanisms at the global and regional levels raises significant potential for

substantive incoherence and overlap, resource duplication and redundancy of effort, confusion and fatigue within the human rights system. On the other hand, the diverse instruments and fora also offer opportunities as “laboratories of experimentation” in the development of legal and procedural best practices, opportunities for development and reinforcement of new norms, and opportunities for mutual reinforcement of the actions of other mechanisms.

In light of the rich development of human rights standards and oversight mechanisms in the seventy years since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the human rights “system” is confronting an important challenge: How to better develop the substantive, communicative and institutional relationships – or *connectivity* – among our human rights instruments and institutions, and with States and civil society, among others? How can we ensure that the patchwork of our current human rights instruments and mechanisms functions as a larger cohesive whole, in order to reduce redundancy, better reinforce mutual efforts, close gaps in human rights monitoring and accountability, enhance the capacity for norm enunciation and internalization, and ultimately to maximize the impact of a human rights system of limited resources on real conditions, faced by real people? How can we ensure greater connectivity among the multifarious components, to help them actually function as a *system*?

To explore these issues, the panels of the conference will highlight different aspects of connectivity, focusing on the question how the mechanisms deal with them and in which ways they are and could contribute to international debates.

A first panel will share insights on the specific nature, technicalities and political dimensions of peer review mechanisms and treaty-based accountability bodies. Lessons drawn from research on the functioning and impact of Treaty Bodies, Universal Periodic Review, but also the Trade Policy Review Mechanisms of the World Trade Organization (another peer review mechanism) will set the scene for the debates of the day.

The second and third panels will discuss how the Geneva-based UN HR mechanisms are contributing to international policy development and global debates, highlighting as examples their contribution to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), and the way these mechanisms help enhancing civic space and address the challenges of reprisals against those informing and collaborating with them.

The concluding session of the conference will take a comparative look on universal and regional human rights mechanisms’ role in law making. What is the impact of conventions, resolutions, general comments in the creation of IHRL? And how is this “law-making” connected with national and regional developments?

For more details on the individual panels, please see separate panel concept notes.

During lunch-break, a “meeting space” will offer the opportunity for the co-sponsors of the sessions to display their materials and present their organizations.