

The Social Practice of Human Rights: Charting the Frontiers of Research and Advocacy

Hosted by the University of Dayton
October 3-5, 2013

Confirmed Keynote Addresses by:

- Juan Mendez, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and formerly of Human Rights Watch and the International Center for Transitional Justice
- Alex de Waal, Executive Director of the World Peace Federation at the Fletcher School, Tufts University

CALL FOR PAPERS

Since the passage of the Universal Declaration sixty-five years ago, the idea of human rights has undergone a dramatic evolution: from rhetorical flourish to institutional embrace, from moral ascendancy to mainstream status. The human rights community—its scholars, practitioners, advocates, and organizations—constitutes an integral component of international society and regards itself as the standard bearer of normative behavior. Development and humanitarian organizations converge around a rights-based approach to their work. Multinational corporations are increasingly sensitive to the human rights impacts of their operations, and philanthropic foundations shape human rights initiatives around the globe. Broad consensus preordains human rights actors as virtuous and their calling honorable, but cultivates a certainty about mission that can inhibit introspection, and prioritizes, rather than challenges, prevailing assumptions. Seeking a more profound impact, the human rights community is positioned to transcend its good intentions, account for its actions, and navigate the demands of implementing universal values in a complex world. Academic research plays a key role in this respect.

It has now been fifteen years since the research program in Transnational Advocacy Networks began to shape a generation of scholars and scholarship. After two decades of debates over definitions, origins, and foundations, this area of study focuses on the pragmatic side of human rights and proposes models and categories to capture changing dynamics in the sphere of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). As the literature in this area grows richer and more robust, the academy is at an auspicious moment to convene around this theme and examine the *social practice of human rights*: to expose human rights to a degree of self-reflection appropriate to its resources, reach, and prominence. Previously, critical analysis directed at human rights originated among antagonists; this new direction in research provides space for constructive critique to come from within the community. The “social practice of human rights” focuses attention on advocacy and NGOs by exploring the expressions of human rights in the context of those actors tasked with translating abstract moral values into concrete matter.

Submissions pertaining to this topic may address questions that include, but are not limited to:

- What issues constitute human rights issues? Who decides and on what basis?
- What criteria should be applied to validate new rights claims? Is “human rights” always the best means of framing broad objectives of social justice?

- How has the emergence of new actors redefined human rights engagement?
- What determines best practices in advocacy? What calculations are involved in selecting targets and venues? How do organizational structure and resources impact strategy?
- How can advocates avoid unintended consequences? What standards of accountability apply to human rights actors?
- How do NGOs address systemic causes of violations and confront future challenges?
- What is the relationship between human rights, humanitarianism, development, and environmentalism?
- Can activists utilize social media to foster communities of solidarity? What effects do atrocity photographs in visual culture have on representations of distant suffering?
- What is the place of art, music, and language in affecting and transmitting human rights ideas? How do articulations of cultural rights take shape?
- What ethical demands and principles of conduct govern human rights organizations?

To Apply

Please submit a title, 250-word abstract, keywords, institutional affiliation, and contact information to humanrights@udayton.edu.

Deadline for submissions: March 1, 2013

Notification of acceptance: May 1, 2013

Submissions of individual papers, as well as complete panels, roundtables, workshops and practitioner presentations, are welcome; the conference will utilize a mixed format. Interdisciplinary work and scholar-practitioner collaboration is strongly encouraged.

Conveners plan to publish a selection of conference proceedings in either an edited volume or special journal issue.

Travel support for graduate students and emerging scholars may become available.

For more information:

- Email Joel R. Pruce: humanrights@udayton.edu
- Visit the website: <http://go.udayton.edu/humanrightsconference>
- Follow on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/udhumanrights>
- Join on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/UDHumanRights>

About the Conference

The University of Dayton Human Rights Program has been a center of programming, education, and dialogue since 1998, and is currently embarking on a new direction in applied research focused on advocacy, structural causes of human rights violations, and transformative solutions. This conference is the academic component of a campus-wide initiative taking place in the fall of 2013, revolving around the theme of human rights and the arts.

Please circulate to networks, departments, colleagues, students, and interested parties.