

# 7<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL ASIA AND HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCE 2015

(15<sup>th</sup> March 2015, University of Essex)

## Democracy and Human Rights in Asia: Progressing or Retreating?

### Final Report



## INTRODUCTION TO THE CONFERENCE



Since 2009 the “Asia and Human Rights” conference has been annually organized by a team of LL.M and M.A human rights students to discuss current human rights practices, challenges and perspectives in the region. Supported by the Human Rights Centre as an important way to raise awareness of issues that are not always in the news, the conference has become a platform to exchange ideas on a wide range of issues related to human rights in Asia.

Recognizing the importance of the conference being held every year, this year (2015) we have formed an enthusiastic group of eleven students to work on the organization of the conference. The conference was structured around the question: “Democracy & human rights in Asia: progressing or retreating?”

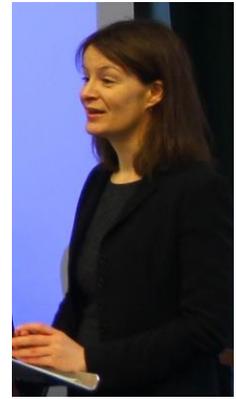
Underlying this general question is the issue of how to assess and read current events in Asia. For example, are current events in Hong Kong a sign of progress for human rights and democracy in Asia (groups of individuals fighting for their civil and political rights)? Or, on the contrary, is it a sign of retreat (the fact that they are not being allowed to directly elect their representatives)? The conference was structured around three panels:

1) 'Asian values: cultural relativism vs universalism'; 2) Democracy and human rights in Asia, how far are civil and political rights progressing in Asia? and 3) Transitional justice in Asia, assessing in particular Timor Leste, Nepal and the situation in Sri Lanka.

Conference participants included legal practitioners, academics, activists and students. The discussions were lively and focused on academically under-represented issues. They encouraged the exchange of views and gave international perspectives on human rights in Asia.



The 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Asia Conference was officially opened with the welcome speech of **Ms Lorna McGregor, Director of the Human Rights Centre**. Important and inspiring, every year the Conference looks at core and important issues in Asia, the most populated region in the world. A region often neglected in human rights studies. Students every year bring their own expertise and organize the event. The speech mentioned the students that helped to organize it, with support of Paul Hunt and Sanae Fujita and thanked the people that came from outside Colchester for the event.



➤ **Panel Discussion 1: 'Asian Values: Cultural Relativism vs Universalism'**

**Speakers:**

- Professor Michael Freeman
- Anubhav Tiwari (LLM Postgraduate Student)
- Teppei Ono (LLM Postgraduate Student)
- Raabia Abuzer Shams (LLM Postgraduate Student)



This session was moderated by Sayamon Srisompetch. Sayamon began the panel by explaining that there is often a reluctance to adopt human rights values in Asia as they are often described western. The panel examined whether human rights are universal or a western imposition. This question is very important when implementing democracy in Asia.

➤ **Professor Michael Freeman**



Professor Freeman gave a broad account of his understanding of the concept of Asian values. He explained that Asia has enormous religious, social, political and cultural diversity, with traditional and modern values coexisting. With this much diversity, it was difficult to have a unitary concept of what Asian values are understood to mean, and there is no clear agreement even among Asian governments. Nevertheless, when speaking about 'Asian values' it is generally understood as a challenge to the Western dominant interpretation of human rights at the United Nations that developed in the 1990s. It is suggested that this happened during a period in which some Asian countries experienced economic success. Asia was presented with idealized values, while the West was presented through a very negative perspective, due to crime, violence and drugs. People emphasized the conflict between very idealistic views of Asia v. the problems of the West.

These values have been criticized as a product of the ideology of some rather authoritarian Asian governments – based mainly in modernization and economic development. During this development, often there were violations of traditional values of their society, such as the culture of indigenous peoples and their traditional values. Population values were violated by the values

of some governments that were considered as Asian values. These values can revolve around ideas such as community rather than individualism, the common good rather than individual rights, respect for authority rather than the assertion of individuality, social discipline rather than personal freedom and preference to consensus rather than conflict. However, Professor Freeman challenged whether this was something specifically 'Asian' as they were similar to very conservative western values.

Professor Freeman also discussed, more broadly, the topic of cultural relativism vs universalism. He explained that cultural relativism is a term that is much more used than defined. Cultural relativism is a western theory, created by a German philosopher, called Franz Boas. He explained that there are two problems with using the perspective of cultural relativism when implementing human rights. The first is an internal problem - if every culture has to be respected, the same would apply to Nazi Germany and if it was an exception, there might be other exceptions around the world. The second is internal to the idea - cultural relativism is intended to be a critique of imperialism. However, this does not work, because if all cultures are valid in their own terms, imperialist cultures need to be considered as valid as well. To criticize imperialism, there need to be universal values, and not relativism. One of the main functions of human rights is to protect the most vulnerable cultures around the world. Universalism exists in international law, in several legal instruments, such as the UNDHR. Furthermore, international law respects cultural diversity on condition that it does not violate the fundamental rights of every individual: a world in which human rights were universally respected would be a world of great cultural diversity, in which most existing culture practices would flourish.



➤ **Anubhav Tiwari**

Anubhav gave a presentation titled 'The Role of Caste-based Politics in Retreating or Progressing Human Rights of Dalits in India'. This was centered around the question of whether democracy has promoted or not the rights of Dalits, a caste-based minority numbering 160 million in India. The presentation commenced with a description of the caste system in Hindu society and the context of the Dalits who are considered outcasts. Further, through history they have been subjected to degrading social practices leading to grave human rights violations which are continuing till date.

The Constitution of India came as a glimmer of hope for Dalits progressing the ideals of equality and democracy. However, democracy today is allegedly deepening the caste system in people's minds due to its exploitation by political



parties who encourage people to vote on the basis of caste. They are accused repeatedly of exploiting the caste system to gain votes and once they form governments taking no concrete actions to improve the situation of Dalits on the ground in India. This is even when other factors such as education, urbanisation, inter-caste marriages, etc, are undermining this pervasive division in society. In this context, the question remains, whether democracy has actually progressed human rights of Dalits in a society which is still largely driven by caste stratifications and contempt towards the lower castes. **(PowerPoint presentation is attached: Annex A)**

➤ ***Tepei Ono***



Tepei gave a talk on the problems he has experienced as an attorney of the Japan Legal Support Centre, in which he provided legal services to inmates on death row. He explained that 80.3% of Japanese were in favour of the death penalty. In Tepei's opinion, this was due to the fact that the government severely restricts access to inmates, so the average person is not aware of the inhumane treatment they receive. For example, inmates can only be visited by a maximum of 5 people. These are usually relatives, so journalists, NGOs, politicians etc cannot visit them. Furthermore, letters from inmates are heavily censored. He gave an example of a letter sent by an inmate to his daughter in which most of the text was blacked out. Tepei concluded that it was not possible to encourage public debate around the death penalty and treatment of inmates when there was no

actual knowledge of the treatment. Despite the fact that the global standard on the treatment of inmates has been developing continuously, the practice in Japanese prisons has not changed in the past decades. Democracy in Japanese prisons had not progressed during that time, and it is the role of lawyers and human rights activists to challenge the legality of outdated practices and break down the barriers of secrecy. **(PowerPoint presentation is attached: Annex B)**

➤ ***Raabia Abuzer Shams***

Raabia discussed the discourse about Islam and the idea that it is incompatible with democracy. She gave a background to various Islamic approaches to democracy and the notion of cultural relativism, explaining that the Muslim approach is diverse. Muslim jurists fall into three groups: 1) those who reject democracy and secularism. 2) those who try to introduce the true tenets of Islam into the existing political system 3) those who call for re-interpreting the religion to fit the present day. Human rights and democracy, even in Muslim countries, includes diverse cultural and religious elements. Both human rights and culture can co-exist. She explained that critics expect Muslim countries to follow the exact pattern that European countries did in setting up their democracies. However, this will not occur in the same way. For example, the State is explicitly provided for in Islam. Furthermore, there are political reasons, for example, after the decline of their Golden Age, political rulers in several Muslim countries blamed Western idea of rights and democracy and made claims of returning to Shaaria in order to gain popular support from the masses. This was a political, not religious, issue – a way of winning over the masses and gaining political momentum. Raabia also gave examples in which Muslim countries adopted a number of democratic practices before other countries that are generally perceived as more



‘democratic’. For instance, universal suffrage in Turkey was adopted in 1934, a full decade before France.

She concluded that the citizens of the Arab world first requires a change from the ground up in the way their religion is approached and instituted socially, politically and economically. Second, the Arab world needs egalitarian economic development that seeks to build a strong middle class. Third, the Arab world needs time. It took centuries for the Western world to free itself from the bondages of religious ignorance and the divine right of kings. But it won’t take centuries for Arab states as they do not need to wait for the concurrent advances in social, physical, and political sciences that paved the way for the industrial revolution and the information age. Fourth, it is not enough, in the long term, for a country to have just economic development, like Saudi Arabia, or just elections, like (for a period) in Egypt and Iraq. Without balanced development, extremism in even one of civil society, general population, and government will, left unchecked, colour the other two. **(Paper presentation is attached: Annex C)**



### Afternoon Session

➤ **Panel Discussion 2: Democracy and human rights in Asia, how far are civil and political rights progressing in Asia?**

**Speakers:**

- Hazel Galang (Amnesty International)
- Dr. Sanae Fujita
- Nalini Elumalai (LLM Postgraduate Student and Human Rights Activist)
- Jane Aileen Tedjasaputra (LLM Postgraduate Student and Human Rights Activist)



This session was moderated by Gulnoza Janibekova. Gulnoza began the panel by explaining that there are serious problems related to civil and political rights in Asia. The panel examined the issues related to civil and political rights by referring to some case studies from Asian countries.

➤ *Hazel Galang*



In her presentation, Ms. Galang-Folli focused on freedom of opinion and expression in the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore.

Freedom of expression is guaranteed under Article III Section 4 of the Philippines' Bill of Rights. The Philippine constitution supports freedom of expression and press. However, libel is a criminal offense under the penal code which can punish journalists with prison terms and large fines. Although people do not generally get arrested at protests, the Philippines is also home to the single most deadly attack on journalists and media workers. The Maguindanao massacre is an incident that occurred in Maguindanao, when over 50 people, including about 33 journalists and media workers were ambushed and murdered as they were covering an election-related story. Up to now, there has been no perpetrator convicted. Protests grew after the massacre, including by the widows of the journalists. The longer the trial goes on, the longer the widows are in danger. Already, eight witnesses in the trial have been killed. So while people are free to speak with the media, this is the violent reality of freedom of expression in the Philippines.

While in Malaysia, freedom of expression is barred through the Sedition Act of 1948. The Sedition Act does not comply with international human rights law and violates the right to freedom of expression, enshrined in the UNDHR (Art. 19), and guaranteed in Malaysia's Constitution (Art. 10). A crackdown started in August 2014, using the Sedition Act to investigate, charge and imprison human rights defenders, opposition politicians, a journalist, academics and students. At least 3 people were convicted in 2014, 16 were charged and 29 investigated, creating a chilling effect on freedom of speech. So far in 2015, 12 have been investigated for sedition, 1 charged and 1 convicted. Although freedom of expression is provided under Article 14 of Singapore's constitution, Singapore's leaders have in the past sued or settled out of court with several foreign media publications including The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg and The Economist for alleged defamatory remarks. The Singaporean government has also used defamation suits to silence an opposition politician, who was bankrupted by the legal costs. In 2014, for the first time an ordinary person -a blogger- has faced such action. In May 2014 the Prime Minister sued blogger Roy Ngerng Yi Leng for defamation. Ngerng allegedly accused the PM of "criminal misappropriation" of public retirement funds in his blog. Despite a retraction and a public apology, plus the offer of damages, the PM called for a summary judgment on the case in July. Ngerng was dismissed from his job with a public hospital in June. In view of financially ruinous outcomes from previous suits against critics, Ngerng turned to



crowd funding to finance his legal defense. In November, the Prime Minister won the defamation case. **(PowerPoint presentation is attached: Annex D)**

➤ **Dr. Sanae Fujita**

Dr Fujita discussed “Freedom of Information and Expression in Japan: Secrecy Law, Fukushima and Hate Speech”. Asia is the most populated region in the world, but unlike other regions, there is no regional human rights mechanism in Asia. In addition, the rate of ratification of optional protocols, establishing complaints mechanisms, is lower than other regions. For example, although Japan ratified most of the major human rights treaties, none of the optional protocols are ratified. Individual complaint mechanisms cannot be used for human rights violations by Japan.

In recent years, freedom of information is under serious threat in Japan. In the autumn of 2013, the Japanese Government drafted the Secrecy Bill without proper consultation with experts and civil society organizations. The contents of the bill were against Article 19 of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights warned the Government. Nevertheless, the Bill was adopted quickly after six weeks of discussion in the Japanese Diet on 6 December 2013. People in Japan understand that the previous war was caused by secrecy and deception by the Government and worry that the Secrecy Law will cause the same mistake, especially because the current Japanese Administration is aiming to change the Pacifist Constitution and is engaging in historical revisionism. .



Pressure on the media by the Government is also increasing and the rank of Japan in the index of freedom of journalism dropped from 11 in 2010 to 61 in 2015. For example, TV commentators critical of the Government have been fired. Information about the Fukushima nuclear accident is not properly disclosed. The Government is misleading people by advertisements which encourages people to eat Fukushima products. It was also critical of cartoons which describe health problems in Fukushima. Additionally, in recent years, hate speech, especially to Japanese Koreans is growing in intensity but no law prohibits it. **(PowerPoint presentation is attached: Annex E)**



➤ **Nalini Elumalai**

Nalini presented a paper on ‘Freedom of Assembly and Freedom of Expression in the context of Elections in Asia: Malaysia as a case study’. She highlighted that FOA and FOE are fundamental rights that have always been violated and more violations are common prior, during and post elections. She added that elections are being misused by States in Asia. They take away rights and participation of people by invoking threats and fear. This is a non-democratic approach with a predictable outcome. On the question of “Are democracy and human rights progressing in Asia and Malaysia?” she stated that the trend shows it is going backwards and becoming more repressive and limiting democratic space. She ended with some positive points, stating that the more people are oppressed the more awareness is spreading among the people to call for democracy, human rights and good governance. **(PowerPoint presentation is attached: Annex F)**



➤ **Jane Tedjaseputra**

Jane Tedjaseputra began her presentation on the organizational structure of ASEAN, explaining that ASEAN is divided into three pillars: political-security in which the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) is located; economic; and social-cultural which include the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC).



The AICHR was established in 2009 by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers. It consists of 10 representatives from 10 member countries. It is a consultative body, and does not have any mandate to receive or to deal with human rights complaints. Most of the ASEAN member states sending representatives have no human rights background, and their appointment did not involve civil society participation.

Another human rights commission is the ACWC, which consists of 20 representatives. Each ASEAN member country sends 2 representatives for women and children respectively. The ACWC was established in 2010. One of the reasons behind its establishment is that all ASEAN member states are parties to CEDAW and CRC, the only two international human rights instruments which all members have ratified.

The other human rights mechanism existing in ASEAN is the ASEAN Committee on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (ACMW) which is a committee established under the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers. Since it is a committee, it is more secretive in its work. Civil society in several countries of ASEAN does not even know who the committee member from their country is.

One of the AICHR’s mandates is to develop a human rights declaration as a framework for an ASEAN human rights convention. Through a long process of drafting, ASEAN has adopted the

ASEAN Human Rights Declaration on 18 November 2012. The process was not without criticism from civil society and the international community due to its lack of transparency and participation. The Declaration, however, succeeded in adopting civil and political rights.

Despite the Declaration and established mechanisms, ASEAN is still silent on violation of civil and political rights in its member states' territory, apparently following the non-interference principle. Many cases have been submitted to the AICHR yet there has been no response, such as in relation to the Maguindanao massacre; the murder of Udin Bernas, a journalist from Indonesia; migrant workers cases, etc. **(PowerPoint presentation is attached: Annex G)**



### **Evening session**

#### ➤ **Panel Discussion 3: Transitional justice in Asia**

Speakers:

- Prof. Han Dorussen (Essex)
- Kanak Dixit (Well-known journalist and civil rights activist and he is also editor of the *Himal Southasia* - via skype call)
- Alex Wilks (International Bar Association Human Rights Institution- IBAHRI)

This session was moderated by Olivia Scholari and the panel mainly discussed transitional justice in a few selected countries like Timor-Leste, Sri Lanka and Nepal.



➤ **Prof. Han Dorussen**

Prof Han covered the process that happened after the peacekeepers left the UN and also Transitional Justice in Timor-Leste. Timor-Leste was a Portuguese colony until 1974 before being occupied by Indonesia from 1975 until 1999. Over the period of occupation by Indonesia, East Timorese suffered from human rights violations such as displacement, sexual violence, torture and more than 100,000 people died due to the conflict.



After that, in 1999-2012, the UN became involved with Timor-Leste's situation under the 1999 referendum. A survey of security perceptions, and the role of the UN, in 2013 shows that, overall, the UN had a positive impact on development. 63% of Timorese thought that national security had improved over last three years and they trusted in local mechanisms more. However, Dili and Ermera are the cities which experienced less improvement. Unfortunately the military and police continue to abuse human rights. For example, they regularly beat up people who are in their custody. Therefore, Dorussen suggested that calls for more justice and security is still important for local people. **(PowerPoint presentation is attached: Annex H)**

➤ **Mr. Kanak Dixit**

Mr. Dixit started his speech with insights into the crimes committed during the war in Nepal that ended in 2006. He also briefly navigated the audience through the Nepalese people's movements and inquiry commissions that were formed between 1990 and 2006. What the Nepalese people were inquiring and seeking was 'truth', which was misguided according to Mr. Dixit. He further talked about the involvement of the United Nations that attempted to bring 'transitional justice' into the Nepalese discourse, and about the passing of a bill in 2010 to build a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) mechanism. Concluding his speech, Mr. Dixit said that transitional justice in Nepal today is being implemented as 'transitional injustice'. However, he expressed positive hopes for the future of Nepal, as the Supreme Court of Nepal has been strong and collaborated well with the victims, and is developing a positive Nepalese jurisprudence.



## ➤ Alex Wilks

Alex Wilks, International Bar Association's Programme lawyer, explained the transitional justice situation in Sri Lanka. After Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948 and passed the 1956 Sinhala Only Act, which entrenched Sihalisation and cracked down on the Tamil minority, the State faced an internal conflict with roots in ethnic discrimination. The former Sri Lankan government violated human rights during the civil war, for example, enforced disappearances, journalists murdered, lawyers attacked, seized control of courts, suffocating civil society and increasing militarisation.

### **Constitutional reforms**

Rajapaksa, the former president, systematically interfered with independent institutions. The Constitutional Council's 17th Amendment for example was mandated to appoint senior judges and important institutions such as the Electoral, Police and Human Rights Commissions. Furthermore, the former government transferred political power to the central government by drafting the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment is being drafted by the newly elected government and will increase the democratic foundations and safeguard the independence of institutions which will play a prominent role in the transitional justice process.



### **Truth and justice**

Rajapakse denied any involvement in the military's activities, which violated human rights. Furthermore, the former government set up the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission to monitor and investigate the causes of the failure of the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement. The Commission was not independent but under the military control. The government must embark on the highly-sensitive task of addressing truth and justice for victims of the atrocities.

The new government has already pledged a domestic investigation which will require further changes to the legal framework. It also confirmed that even though UN investigators would not be participating in any inquiry, their technical advice and assistance would be welcomed. Their assistance will be extremely important in ensuring the credibility of any domestic investigation.

### **Prosecution and Justice**

Sri Lankan domestic laws contain some exceptions, which open an opportunity for authorities to abuse their power and violate human rights. For example, the Sri Lankan constitution contains an exception to retroactivity in respect of 'any act which was at the time it was committed, was criminal according to general principles of law recognized by the community of nations'.

Moreover, given the Attorney-General's inability to effectively investigate or prosecute any serious human rights violations to date and the consequential lack of



public trust in the Attorney-General, the government should establish an independent, special prosecutor's office with a clear mandate and prosecutorial strategy, and provide it with proper resources and technical expertise.

## Reparations

Despite the end of conflict, Tamil families still cannot return to their land due to the land acquisition by Sri Lankan army and paramilitary groups. Therefore, the government has to deal not only with reparations for human rights violations but also land rights issues. The experience of Colombia is a good example for reparations. **Conclusion**

The new government faces many challenges in its transitional justice program, including political reconciliation, resettlement of IDPs and land restitution, truth-telling and accountability. As the Government seeks to rebuild trust, it will become increasingly important to ensure that it communicates and engages with all sectors of Sri Lankan society on its transitional justice and reform initiatives. This will require time and patience. It will have to meet both the urgent demand for truth and justice that has been denied for too long for victims of its bloody conflict, and the need for incremental, strategic reform in a process that is transparent and inclusive. If it can achieve this, then Sri Lanka at last has a genuine opportunity to achieve an enduring, sustainable peace.

*(Paper presentation attached: Annex I)*



## ➤ Concluding Remarks by Prof. Paul Hunt



In his closing remarks, Professor Paul Hunt conveyed his appreciation to everyone who had organised and participated in the event. Firstly he thanked the Human Rights Centre for their financial support which he said had been very important and is hugely appreciated. In the same context, he thanked the Centre's director, Lorna McGregor, for her important support and finding time on the morning of Mothers' Day to open the event. He also thanked the Law School administrative staff, Mandy Gray and Wendy Hubbard, for their guidance and patience. Professor Hunt also expressed his gratitude to visiting speakers and visiting participants in particular Hazel Galang, Alex Wilks and Kanak Dixit as well as Professor Han Dorussen and Professor Michael Freeman for sharing their time, wisdom and passion with the participants.

In addition, he expressed thanks to Essex’s “indigenous” speakers, in particular, those students who spoke during the day. He said that they had all shown wonderful personal insight across a wide range of issues, and he was really impressed. Professor Hunt also thanked all of the participants for making time in their busy schedules and for asking many sharp questions. This year’s event attracted more participants than any previous Human Rights in Asia event so he thanked them all for contributing to the success of the occasion.

Professor Hunt congratulated the organising committee whose members he described as having been very self-reliant and a wonderful cosmopolitan group to work with. He said they had delivered a terrific international and Asian day. Special acknowledgement was given to the chair person, Nalini, who conducted the role of chairperson with great skill.

In his closing remarks, Professor Hunt expressed special thanks to Dr. Sanae Fujita, who had been “an invisible hand” behind each of the seven annual events. Professor Hunt recalled that when Dr Fujita first arrived at Essex as an LLM student, she rarely spoke and when she did, it was hard to hear her as she spoke with great diffidence. But now, he said, she is a skilful and passionate orator, as demonstrated in her presentation that day. Professor Hunt congratulated everyone on making the day such a great success.

**(2014/2015 Organizing Team)**



**\*(Photos credit to Dr. Sanae Fujita and Sarina Kidd)**

# Acknowledgement

The organizing committee of 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Asia and Human Rights Conference would like take this opportunity to wish our heartfelt appreciation and congratulations to everyone who made this conference very successful. Firstly, the team would like to thank Dr. Sanae Fujita and Prof. Paul Hunt for all the assistance, advice and support to the team. Secondly, we would like to convey our appreciation to the Human Rights Centre and Law Department for their kind assistance throughout the preparation of the conference. Finally, our thanks and gratitude to all our volunteers and to all those attended from Essex as well from other Universities..

We hope the discourse on Asia will continue for many years to come and hopefully a module on Asia and Human Rights will be considered to be added as part of the LLM or MA courses.

Thank You.

## 2014/2015 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Asia and Human Rights Conference Organizing team

1. Nalini Elumalai (Chairperson)
2. Raabia Abuzer Shams (Dep. Chair)
3. Jane Tedjasaputra (Treasurer)
4. Anubhav Tiwari
5. Gulnoza Janibekova
6. Helen Heekyung Nam
7. Olivia Scholari
8. Sarina Kidd
9. Sayamon Srisompetch
10. Teppei Ono
11. Zizi Khalipha Zondani

### (Advisors)

Prof. Paul Hunt

Dr. Sanae Fujita



## SPEAKERS BIOGRAPHIES

### **Prof. Michael Freeman**

He is an Emeritus Professor in the Department of Government, University of Essex. He is author of *Human Rights: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, and many academic journal articles on the history, theory and practice of human rights, including the debates about human rights and 'Asian Values'. He has recently contributed a chapter on 'Universalism of Human Rights and Cultural Relativism' to the *Routledge Handbook of International Human Rights Law*, edited by Scott Sheeran and Sir Nigel Rodley. He was a co-founder of the University of Essex Human Rights Centre as an interdisciplinary centre, and its Deputy Director and Director of the MA in The Theory and Practice of Human Rights for several years. He is a former Chair of the Human Rights Research Committee of the International Political Science Association, and a former Chairperson of the British Section of Amnesty International.

### **Kanak Dixit**

Kanak Mani Dixit is a journalist and civil rights activist. He is editor of the *Himal Southasian* regional review magazine, as well as publisher of the Nepali language weekly *Himal Khabarpatrika*. He has degrees in Law (Delhi University), International Relations and Journalism (Columbia University). He has been a journalist since 1971, and worked in the United Nations Secretariat between 1982 and 1990. Lately, he has been engaged in civil rights activism for the restoration of peace and democracy in Nepal.

**Himal Southasian** was begun as a Himalayan magazine 25 years ago, and transforming into a Southasian periodical in 1996. Since then, through the pages of the magazine, Dixit has been engaged in the quest to define the Southasian space and identity. He is also a political commentator on Nepal affairs, writing in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, *Nepali Times*, *Kantipur* and (as a columnist) *The Kathmandu Post*.

### **Hazel Galang-Folli**

Hazel Galang-Folli is Amnesty International's country specialist and socio-political analysis lead on the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei. She has written two reports on human rights violations in the context of armed conflict and recently published the report *Above the Law* on accountability for police torture in the Philippines. She is a project manager in Amnesty International's Stop Torture Global Campaign and works on a wide range of human rights issues including torture; exploitation of migrants; the death penalty; enforced disappearances; extrajudicial executions including of journalists; and violations on freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

### **Prof. Han Dorussen**

Professor Han Dorussen is Professor in the Department of Government at the University of Essex and member of the Michael Nicholson Centre of Conflict and

Cooperation and the Transitional Justice Network. His current research interests include the relationship between trade, policy convergence in the EU, and the peacekeeping and the governance of post-conflict societies. He has a particular interest in Timor Leste where he has done fieldwork to examine the perception of security following the departure of UN peacekeepers. Prof. Han Dorussen received his MA in political science from the University of Nijmegen and his PhD in government from the University of Texas at Austin. He has lectured at NTNU-Trondheim (Norway), University of Konstanz (Germany), and University of Kobe (Japan).

### **Alex Wilks (International Bar Association Human Rights Institution- IBAHRI)**

Alex is a UK-qualified lawyer and has experience in domestic and international human rights litigation. He has been a parliamentary legal officer in the UK House of Lords, advising on human rights issues and international law and, between 2007–2008, was the IBA legal specialist in Afghanistan where he worked to establish Afghanistan's first national bar association. At the IBAHRI, Alex covers the Latin American region and projects in Afghanistan, Bahrain, East Timor, Hungary, Libya, and Sri Lanka. He also leads on monitoring and evaluation and impact assessment for IBAHRI activities. Alex speaks French, Portuguese and Spanish and has an LL.M in International Human Rights Law from the University of Essex, UK.

### **Dr. Sanae Fujita**

She is an Associate Fellow of the Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex, and has been an adviser for the annual student-led Human Rights in Asia conference since the first year it was organised. Previously at Essex, she taught the postgraduate course entitled 'Human Rights in the Asia-Pacific Region' as a module director. Her areas of research are human rights and development, with a particular focus on the activities of International Financial Institutions. She teaches her area of expertise regularly both in the UK and Japan. She holds a PhD in Law and an LL.M in International Human Rights Law from the University of Essex as well as an MA in International Development from Nagoya University, Japan.

### **Nalini Elumalai**

She is pursuing LL.M in International Human Rights Law in Essex and she is from Malaysia. In 2006, after she graduated, she joined as a full time Activist in SUARAM, a leading human rights NGO in Malaysia, which has campaigned for better human rights conditions and an end to arbitrary detention in Malaysia. She has also represented Malaysian Civil Societies on numerous occasions in national and international level on a wide range of human rights issues, including freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, labour issues, housing, indigenous peoples and arbitrary detention.

### **Anubhav D. Tiwari**

He is pursuing LL.M International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law at the University of Essex and is from India. He has previously interned with human rights organisations in India and as part of these worked for Dalit's criminal justice. He has also been part of campaigns/projects for migrant workers from Bangladesh in the State of Bengal, India.

### **Jane Aileen Tedjaseputra**

She has a Bachelor in Laws from Catholic University of Atma Jaya Jakarta. As an assistant Public Interest Lawyer at the Jakarta Legal Aid Institute, she worked on cases related to freedom of religion, labor rights, right to water, eviction and violence against women. Former employee at the National Commission on Violence against Women (Komnas Perempuan) and the Indonesian Human Rights Working group (HRWG).

### **Teppei Ono**

He is a Japanese qualified lawyer. He is a staff attorney of Japan Legal Support Centre which is a legal aid organization fully funded by the government. Under the agreement between the Japan Federation of Bar Associations and the University of Essex, he is studying International Human Rights Law at the University of Essex.

### **Raabia Abuzer Shams**

She has B.A. LL.B (Hons.) from Chanakya National Law University, India, where most of her work and research focused on issues surrounding child rights and personal laws. Former legal intern at the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights and Prayas Juvenile Aid Centre. Former legal researcher at the Centre for Child and the Law at NLSIU, Bangalore, India.

## **Moderators**

### **Sayamon Srisompetch**

Sayamon is a student of LL.M. International Human Rights Law at University of Essex. In 2013, she graduated LL.B. International Law at Chulalongkorn University and she is a member of the Lawyers Council of Thailand. Prior to study at University of Essex, she was an intern at Mekong Migration Network (MMN) and DLA Piper (Thailand) Limited in Thailand.

### **Gulnoza Janibekova**

Miss Gulnaza pursuing human rights studies in University of Essex. She is from Turkmenistan.

### **Olivia Solari Yrigoyen**

Miss Olivia studied her undergrad in Sciences Po Paris, BA in Latin American Politics and Master in Public policy with a focus on Human Rights. She is pursuing LLM in International Human Rights and humanitarian law in University of Essex.