

## Welcome to our Spring 2020 HRC Newsletter.

This edition of our newsletter is released as the full impact of COVID-19 remains largely unknown. What we do know, however, is that the pandemic poses one of the most profound challenges we have ever been confronted by. COVID-19 has been wrongly described as indiscriminate. We know that, while everyone is vulnerable, those whose human rights are typically most in need of protection are also those most exposed to the medical, economic, political and social harms which COVID-19 entails. The pandemic poses a great many challenges for the global protection of human rights and new challenges will most likely emerge in its aftermath. The global human rights community will have a vital role to play in the post-COVID age.

As one of the world's foremost academic centres for human rights, the University of Essex's HRC aims to make its presence felt, in the months and years ahead, in the rebuilding and reshaping of the global human rights project. As items in this newsletter will demonstrate, we quickly responded to the pandemic by developing and supporting projects and initiatives that address some of the most immediate human rights issues which COVID-19 has raised. These are early days and we will continue to prioritise our efforts to ensure that human rights do not become another victim of the pandemic. However difficult it may be to remember, there was a world before the pandemic. In providing a comprehensive account of the HRC community's activities since our last newsletter, this edition also includes many items which have little or no bearing upon the pandemic, but which, nevertheless, illustrate just how remarkable and energetic the Essex human rights community is.

As this newsletter will amply illustrate, our community has been extremely active over the past seven months. An effective newsletter should be as concise as possible and we have attempted to stick to that adage here. Thus, we apologise to those members of our community whose activities we have not been able to feature here. I trust that what this edition does serve to remind us all of us what an incredible and unique institution the Essex Human Rights Centre is and why that is so important now. Never allow your passion for human rights to wane: the world will need human rights more than ever in the months and years ahead.

***Dr Andrew Fagan, Director, Human Rights Centre***



Dr Andrew Fagan

## Exceptional Work of HRC Co-Deputy Director in his UN Special Rapporteur Mandate



Dr Ahmed Shaheed

Essex University has a long and proud tradition of supporting UN Special Rapporteurs in the exercise of their mandates. Our current example of this is [Dr Ahmed Shaheed, Co-Deputy Director of the HRC and the current UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief](#). Since our previous newsletter, Ahmed has tackled two global human rights challenges: antisemitism and gender inequality. Antisemitism has been on the rise for many years. Many Jewish communities consider themselves as feeling more vulnerable to attack than at any time since the end of the Second World War and the Holocaust. Ahmed's contributions to tackling antisemitism have taken many forms, including responding to petitions and complaints from victims of antisemitism, making numerous contributions to high-level panels and discussions, and to producing a global [report](#) on antisemitism, which he presented to the UN General Assembly in October 2019. He subsequently gave evidence to a US congressional hearing on antisemitism in Washington, DC in January. After Ahmed's appearance before Congress, 106 bipartisan members of Congress wrote to the UN Secretary General requesting the implementation of one of Ahmed's recommendations to appoint a senior-level leader in the Executive Office of the Secretary General tasked with monitoring antisemitism, which has now been acted upon by the UN Secretary General. Ahmed also reiterated his call for active measures to combat antisemitism through the first-ever [joint statement](#) by the UN Special Procedures mandates to mark the International Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January this year. Most recently, Ahmed issued a [statement](#) urging States to address the rise in antisemitic hate speech since the outbreak of COVID-19.

Ahmed has also been heavily engaged in tackling gender inequality in the context of religion or belief. He has chosen to highlight the plight of women, girls and gender diverse persons, in part, because of the negative impacts many are suffering as a result of rising political and religious campaigns, which invoke claims of religious freedom in order to roll back gender equality. He produced a thematic [report](#) on gender equality, which he presented to the UN Human Rights Council in March 2020. Ahmed's report was based upon extensive interviews and was supported by critical desk research provided by current HRC students. Drawing upon the IHRL framework, Ahmed's report makes clear that religious beliefs cannot be invoked as a legitimate justification for violence or discrimination against women, girls or LGBT+ people. It also drew attention to the obligation of States to guarantee to everyone, including women, girls and LGBT+ persons, an equal right to freedom of religion or belief. Over 60 states spoke on the report in the debate in the Human Rights Council. The report has been widely cited by advocates and academics seeking to ensure the universality of human rights, see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

## Under New Management: The HRC's New Core Team and New Advisory Board

From January 1<sup>st</sup> 2020, the HRC has a new core management team. [Dr Andrew Fagan](#) replaced Professor Lorna McGregor as the Director of the HRC, after Lorna's successful six-year occupancy of this highly demanding role. Andrew quickly appointed a team of [three Co-Deputy Directors](#); Jude Bueno de Mesquita, Dr Aoife Duffy and Dr Ahmed Shaheed. Together the HRC management team has produced a highly ambitious core vision and strategy, which sets out the key priorities of the HRC over the course of the next three years. The HRC core vision and strategy focuses upon three particular areas: education, external partnerships, and research. We are presently formulating specific key priorities for each of these areas. The HRC's efforts will inevitably be significantly affected by COVID-19, but the management team are resolved to achieve as many of our objectives as we can during these difficult times.

In addition to the core team, the management of the HRC is also supported by a newly established HRC Advisory Board, comprising over 20 staff and students, drawn from across the HRC community. The Advisory Board provides consultative advice and support to the core team as it seeks to deliver the HRC's vision and core strategy.

## Remarkable Legal Success of HRC Member, Professor Clara Sandoval

Professor Clara Sandoval, HRC member, former interim HRC Director and Essex MA alumna has helped win a landmark judgment at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, (IACtHR) supporting the human rights of LGBTI people across the continent. Clara has been litigating for over ten years on behalf of Azul Rojas Marín, a transgender woman, who, in February 2008, was beaten, stripped naked and subjected to torture and rape by Peruvian police in. Rojas Marín (who at that time self-identified as a gay man and now self-identifies as a woman) was arrested arbitrarily. Throughout the process, the police officers made derogatory remarks about her sexual orientation.

On 6<sup>th</sup> April, [The Inter-American Court of Human Rights](#), the ultimate authority on human rights in the Americas, [found Peru responsible for torture and sexual violence against an LGBTI person](#). It is the first time in its history that the Inter-American Court has considered a case of discriminatory torture. The Court found Peru responsible for the violation of a range of rights in relation to Rojas Marín, in breach of its obligations to respect and ensure those rights without discrimination. Peru was also found responsible for the violation of the right to personal integrity of Rojas Marín's mother, who died in 2017. On learning of the ruling, Azul Rojas Marín said: "I am very grateful to all the people who have made this possible. I have no words to describe how I feel. I thank God above all. After all that I have been through, finally a court believes me.

I only wish I could have been able to share this joy with my mother, who was always alongside me in my efforts to report the crime and find justice."

## HRC Clinic Students Complete Another Highly Successful Year in Support of Human Rights Global Organisations

The [Human Rights Clinic](#) is an outstanding component of the Essex HRC community. Under the Directorship of Dr. Patricia Palacios Zuloaga and Deputy Director Dr Koldo Casla, the Clinic provides an invaluable opportunity for our students to engage directly with practical human rights work, through supporting a number of projects with a range of human rights organisations.

The Clinic has completed another year in its efforts to support its partners' advocacy of human rights around the world, albeit, more recently, in extraordinary circumstances. During this academic year, the clinic partnered with [Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights](#), [the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief](#) Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, [Harm Reduction International](#), [UNAIDS](#), [Trial International](#) and [The Law Society of England and Wales](#). The Clinic has also continued its partnership with Rule of Law and Conflict (RULAC), classifying contemporary situations of violence around the world. Students have also been supporting Reprieve on advocacy for death row prisoners.

Finally, the [Digital Verification Unit](#) has continued its impactful Investigative work. Unfortunately, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, it had to finish its projects and produce reports earlier than expected. We are proud of how our teams worked hard to adjust to the new challenges posed by the pandemic and that they were able to deliver project outputs early.



Professor Clara Sandoval with Azul Rojas Marín in Barranquilla (Colombia), where the Inter-American Court of Human Rights held its very first hearing on 27 August 2019.



## HRC Commemorates International Tolerance Day

As an annual feature to promote inclusion and respect for diversity, the HRC held its inaugural event to mark the International Day for Tolerance on 13<sup>th</sup> of November 2019. Speakers included Sir Malcolm Evans, Professor at [University of Bristol](#), Professor Paul Hunt, currently the Chair of [the New Zealand Human Rights Commission](#), Simona Cruciani, Political Affairs Officer at the [UN Office for Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect](#), Dr Ruth Anne Lenga, [University College London](#), and Andrew Copson, [President of Humanists International](#).

The session was moderated by Dr Ahmed Shaheed. Sir Malcolm spoke of the relationship between freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression while Simona Cruciani outlined the UN Secretary General's global strategy to combat hate speech, for which she is the UN's focal point. Andrew Copson provided a humanist perspective on tolerance and pluralism, while Ruth Anne Lenga spoke about the importance of education in combating antisemitism. Professor Hunt highlighted the importance of drawing on a holistic approach to human rights and noted the role of respect and solidarity in advancing respect for human rights. The podcast of this discussion can be found [here](#).

In another effort to tackle religious intolerance, Dr Shaheed joined Professor Sir Malcolm Evans, and Dr Naz Ghanea (Oxford University) in making an appeal for inclusivity in governmental responses to tackling rising religious intolerance. In a [Foreword](#) they penned for the UK All Party Parliamentary Group on International Freedom of Religion or Belief, published in November 2019, they welcomed the various steps being taken to combat rising global religious intolerance but cautioned against selective approaches which they believe would feed into xenophobic discourses. Quoting from an earlier letter from the trio published in The Sunday [Telegraph](#) on 10 February 2019, they reiterated: *"Seeking to protect some from persecution necessarily requires seeking to protect all from persecution."*

## HRC Fellow Elected Leader of the UK's Labour Party

Long-standing HRC Fellow and human rights lawyer, [Sir Keir Starmer](#) has been elected as [the new Leader](#) of the Labour Party and becomes the Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition Party. Prior to becoming a Member of Parliament in 2015, Sir Keir was a prominent human rights lawyer. He was called to the bar in 1987, became a Queen's Counsel in 2002, and was joint head of Doughty Street Chambers. Acting in several appeals to the Privy Council for defendants who had been sentenced to death in Caribbean countries, his legal submissions led to the abolition of the mandatory death penalty in those countries. He has worked with lawyers in African countries towards the same end. In 2005 he persuaded the House of Lords that evidence obtained by torture should be inadmissible in court. While the HRC remains entirely independent of any party-political affiliation, we very much hope that, under Sir Keir's leadership, the Labour Party will redouble its support for human rights in the UK and the wider world.



**Human Rights and Global Challenges contributors:  
Dr Ahmed Shaheed, Dr Andrew Fagan, Dr Katya Alkhateeb, and Marc Limon, Executive Director of Universal Rights Group**

## HRC Celebrates Human Rights Day

Each year the HRC celebrates Human Rights Week with a series of events that brings together students and staff from across faculties. This year's Human Rights Day, 11<sup>th</sup> December, was commemorated with a special panel event titled *Human Rights and Global Challenges* with Marc Limon, the Executive Director of the *Universal Rights Group (URG)*, the HRC's Dr Andrew Fagan and Dr Ahmed Shaheed, and moderated by Dr Katya Alkhateeb. Marc Limon began the session by setting out the emerging climate change challenge within a human rights framework. Dr Fagan then addressed the intellectual and academic criticisms of human rights and the vital need for the global human rights community to prioritise social rights in the global fight against systemic socio-economic inequality. Dr Shaheed concluded the discussion by reflecting on the opportunities and challenges to human rights in mobilising faith-based actors to advance human rights, and on the lessons learned from recent engagements between religious actors and human rights.

## HRC Events Impacted by COVID-19

A number of planned HRC events have been impacted by COVID-19.

In March, we had planned to celebrate the life and work of our deceased and deeply missed HRC "Founding Parent", Professor Kevin Boyle, by means of a book launch for a new publication, *Are You With Me? Kevin Boyle and the Rise of the Human Rights Movement*, on Kevin's outstanding contribution to human rights, written by former CNN correspondent, Mike Chinoy. We are now committed to rescheduling the event in late **October/early November 2020. More details to follow.**

The student-organized 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Human Rights in Asia was also affected by the pandemic. Originally planned for late March, the conference team is now planning to deliver the event in an online, interactive format, comprising a series of talks by the invited speakers. Please stay tuned. We will let everyone know when a new date has been set.

We are also planning to hold our **HRC Annual Lecture** as an online, webinar presentation, as an alternative to the on-campus event we had planned for mid-June. This year's invited speaker is *Karima Bennouna*, the current UN Special Rapporteur in the field of Cultural Rights. **More details to follow.**

Unfortunately, we have been forced to cancel this year's HRC Summer School, which had been scheduled to take place in early July. Our Summer School will return in 2021 in a new and bold format. More details will be released in due course.

## HRC Reaches Out to its “Mafia”

Our alumni comprise the single largest constituent of the HRC’s global community, numbering some 2500 former Undergraduate, MA, LLM and Ph.D. students. Many of our alumni are to be found defending human rights across the globe and in a bewildering range of capacities and organizations. Perhaps in recognition of the highly supportive connections and allegiances many of our alumni have formed, they have become affectionately known in the wider human rights world as the “Essex Mafia”. The HRC is immensely proud of our “Mafia” and we are redoubling our efforts to reach out to them in order to involve them in our activities and events more extensively. In recent months we have reenergised the Essex Human Rights Alumni Association Facebook [page](#), by regularly posting news items and HRC blog and podcast publications, which have attracted a great deal of interest. Alongside the university’s Alumni Relations Office, the HRC is also introducing a new Essex Alumni Mentoring Scheme, which enables some of our alumni to serve as mentors for current Essex human rights students. Finally, we are also proud to highlight the outstanding accomplishments of many of our alumni, such as that of the 2017 LLM graduate, [Lilia Petroysan](#), who has been shortlisted in the British Council’s Annual Alumni of the Year Awards. We will let you know how Lilia (the only woman to be shortlisted) gets on in the final.



2020, British Council Annual Alumni of the Year Awards, nominee, Lilia Petroysan

## HRC Community Continues to Grow

Essex boasts arguably the single largest university-based human rights community in the world. In addition to our existing students and our alumni, we also draw heavily upon the support of our HRC [Members](#) and HRC [Fellows](#). The former comprise Essex academics with research and teaching interests in human rights and who are found within 11 separate academic departments, while the latter comprise human rights defenders, experts and practitioners who are external to the university. We are particularly pleased to announce that we have recruited new Members from some academic departments not routinely associated with human rights: Economics and the Essex Business School. [Sonia Bhalotra](#) is our newest HRC Member and Professor of Economics. She is presently the Co-Investigator on the highly successful ESRC Project on [Human Rights, Big Data and Technology](#), based within the Human Rights Centre in the Law department. She is also Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences and the Centre for Economic Policy Research. Sonia’s research focuses on the areas of health, gender and political economy. Another very recent addition to our HRC Members is [Professor Peter Bloom](#) from the Essex Business School. Peter’s research critically explores the radical possibilities of technology for redefining and transforming contemporary work and society. It focuses on better understanding the human aspects of organisational existence and the potential for constructing more empowering cultural paradigms for organising the economy and politics. Specifically, his research reveals the strong relationship between economic marketisation and political authoritarianism, the “dark side” of workplace empowerment discourses and the role of technology for changing organisations and processes of organising.

We are also delighted to announce new additions to our cohort of HRC Fellows. Peter Tibber is a recently retired UK diplomat who served as the UK’s Ambassador to Colombia, Sudan and (interim) Kenya. In a diplomatic career spanning three decades, Peter also served in Pakistan, Mexico, Germany, France and Turkey. He has particular interests in development, security and human rights. Peter is particularly keen to contribute to the HRC’s developing relationships with human rights bodies in Latin America and in supporting the HRC’s student training and employability initiatives. We have also newly been joined by Sally Shaw, who is the Director of Firstsite, Colchester’s premier site for public arts and culture. Sally became Firstsite’s Director in April 2016. Prior to that she was the Head of the Programme at Modern Art Oxford, Deputy Head of Culture for the Mayor of London and Senior Curator at Art on the Underground. As an HRC Fellow, we look forward to further strengthening the HRC’s plans to bring human rights into the local arts and cultural spaces, and thereby reach communities of people we have not typically engaged with previously.



## HRC Supports University's Holocaust Memorial Week

The HRC contributed to several important events as part of the university's [Holocaust Memorial Week](#) in late January. HRC Director, Dr Andrew Fagan, chaired a post-screening discussion of [Prosecuting Evil](#), a documentary dedicated to the life of Ben Ferencz, the last surviving Nuremberg trial prosecutor, who has dedicated his long life to the cause of law and justice. Co-Deputy Director, Dr Ahmed Shaheed joined a panel discussion of academics and representatives from the Union of Jewish Students and the university's Jewish Society on contemporary antisemitism. Finally, HRC Member, Professor Lars Waldorf, presented a lecture and led a discussion on Remembering Rwanda's Victims.

## HRC Goes to the Theatre (well, almost!)

As part of our commitment to establishing novel ways of promoting human rights amongst new sections of society, the HRC is developing a series of partnerships with several local arts and culture organisations. These include: Colchester's premier public arts space, [Firstsite](#), the [Mercury Theatre](#), and a local theatre production company, [The Packing Shed Company](#).

Several representatives of the HRC, including HRC Senior Research Officer, Dr Katya Alkhateeb, 2019 MA graduate, Carla Boulos, and HRC Member, Dr Gus Waschefort were due to contribute to an after-show discussion in late March, but this was unfortunately cancelled due to COVID-19. The show is a production of Henry Naylor's *Borders*. It's about a celebrated war photographer and a young Syrian, six months pregnant, on an ageing fishing boat in the Mediterranean, sinking fast under the weight of refugees. Through two alternating monologues, *Borders* provides an urgent, moving and occasionally hilarious commentary on one of the great crises of our time. Despite this unavoidable disappointment, we are planning to contribute to other productions and shows when they resume.

## Breathing Renewed Life into the HRC Doctoral Affiliates Network

Several years ago, we established the Doctoral Affiliates Network as an interdisciplinary forum in which Essex Ph.D. students with a research interest in human rights could regularly convene in a series of workshops, discussion groups, and career enhancement activities. After a period of relative inactivity, the HRC has reenergised the Doctoral Affiliates Network, which now numbers almost 30 doctoral students from across three separate faculties. Inevitably, the planned activities of the Network have been significantly affected by COVID-19. However, we plan to continue organising online events to foster interdisciplinary dialogue and exchanges. We view our Doctoral Affiliates as having an indispensable contribution to make to the development of the HRC's research community. **If you are an Essex Ph.D. student and would like to learn more about the Network, please email our Senior Research Officer, [Dr Katya Alkhateeb](#) to learn more.**

## New Initiative Highlighting the Expertise of HRC Members

In conjunction with Stephen Matthews of the university's Communications and External Relations Office, the HRC has begun proactively publicising the remarkable expertise of our HRC Members. The initiative involves a series of multi-media encounters, consisting of short, filmed interviews or audio recordings of highlighted HRC Members, which are then posted upon our dedicated HRC website Members' page.

The first colleague to be highlighted was Professor [Natasha Lindstaedt](#) of the Government Department. The next HRC Members due to be highlighted include, Professor Paul Bou-Habib (Government), Dr Nicolas Geeraert, (Psychology), Dr Carla Ferstman, and Dr Emily Jones (both School of Law) With such a large community of academics, this initiative is designed to promote a greater knowledge and understanding of the specific expertise and interests of all of our Members in an effective, engaging format.

## HRC Support for Nazanin Zaghari Ratcliffe

Orchestrated by HRC member Dr Carla Ferstman, Richard Ratcliffe, the husband of Nazanin Zaghari Ratcliffe spoke to HRC staff and students in October 2019. Nazanin has been arbitrarily detained in Iran since April 2016. Richard provided an update on efforts to secure Nazanin's release. He also spoke about the important contribution our students within the Human Rights Clinic have made through preparing a submission presented to the UN Human Rights Council as it conducted its Universal Periodic Review of Iran.

The submission focused upon the continuing violation of Nazanin's human rights and those of other dual or foreign nationals unjustly detained in Iran. [see: <http://en.cshr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2019/04/CHSR-IHRDC-UPR-submission-detention-of-foreign-and-dual-nationals.pdf>]

Immediately after Richard's talk, and with the support of the HRC, a special one-night showing of the acclaimed theatre production *Nazanin's Story* was performed on campus, at the university's Lakeside Theatre.



Dr Carla Ferstman & Richard Ratcliffe speak to the HRC staff & students

## HRC Forms New High-Level Geneva Partnership

As the global human rights community responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, the HRC and Essex Human Rights, Big Data and Technology project have partnered with the [Permanent Mission of Denmark](#), the [Permanent Mission of Netherlands](#) and the [Permanent Mission of Norway](#) to the UN in Geneva, [Universal Rights Group](#), [Geneva Academy](#), [Geneva Rights Platform](#), [World Jewish Congress](#), [The United Nations Population Fund \(UNFPA\)](#), [Ferney-Voltaire](#) and [Geneva Internet Platform](#) to provide a new Webinar/Webchat discussion forum entitled [RightOn](#). RightOn provides a regular series of publicly accessible webinars which explore an exciting range of topical human rights issues, including many of those raised by COVID-19. HRC Director, Dr Andrew Fagan, contributed to the very first [RightOn webinar](#) on the subject of fake news, freedom of expression and COVID-19. HRC Member, Professor Geoff Gilbert will be contributing to the RightOn webinar on May 20, which will focus on COVID-19 and humanitarian crises.



## The HRC Launches New Podcast: RightsCast

In September 2019, the HRC created a new podcast series, which we have dubbed, [RightsCast](#). RightsCast applies a human rights lens to current events in an effort to better understand them, to discuss key and emerging issues, and to explore how to achieve social change. The series strives to keep the topics under discussion, and the voices discussing them, as diverse as possible, taking a firmly, inter-disciplinary approach to human rights. RightsCast offers a new forum for different voices both on campus and from around the world. Separate episodes so far have discussed the limits of consent as per [R v Brown](#), explored the intricacies of conflict-related investigations, and discussed the role of human rights in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. **If you would like to get involved, to propose an interviewee, or a topic, please do not hesitate to get in touch with Dr [Daragh Murray](#) or [Esme Marshall](#).** They would love to hear from you! The process is not overly complicated. The RightsCast team take care of the preparation and technical sides, and so participation typically involves discussing a few questions in advance and then the time it takes to record (usually less than an hour). In the meantime, please do follow us and share the series among your networks.



## Exciting Changes to The Human Rights Centre's [HRC's Blog](#)



Pauline Canham, Student Editor, HRC's Blog

In keeping with a long-established practice of many prominent academic blogs and law school reviews across the globe, the HRC decided in January of this year to establish a Student Editor and Student Editorial Team to support the delivery of our HRC Blog. We are delighted to announce that the new Student Editor is Pauline Canham, who leads a team comprising six current LLM and MA human rights students: Amita Dhiman, Julia Kedziorek, Alana Meier, Amith Narayan, Lauren Ng, and Bethany Webb-Strong. The Student Editorial team quickly met the challenges which producing a world-class academic blog entails and have, in recent weeks in particular, overseen the delivery of a series of superb postings, which have explored a variety of important human rights issues raised by COVID-19.

The Blog's Student Editor, Pauline Canham, is currently studying for our MA in Human Rights and Cultural Diversity and came to Essex from the world of broadcasting where she spent the last 20 years working on major change projects. In her role as Internal Communications and Change Executive, Pauline worked on a number of high-profile projects at the BBC, including the W1 Project where she managed the internal communications strategy for the transfer of Global News operations to the New Broadcasting House in Central London. More recently, she spent 6 years in Qatar, managing the migration, change and communications for a major workplace transformation program at Al Jazeera Media Network in Qatar, which included the relaunch of their Arabic Channel. Pauline has travelled extensively throughout the Middle East, including a unique opportunity to visit Yemen in 2014, just a few months before the start of the war. Commenting upon the opportunity she and the editorial team have embraced, Pauline said, "I was delighted to have the opportunity to edit the Human Rights Centre Blog, especially at a time when the voices of the most vulnerable around the world are being drowned out by the rhetoric of right-wing populism.

Working with such a brilliant young team of student editorial assistants from different backgrounds has been truly inspiring and I really feel the job of the HRC Blog is to tell stories that put the 'human' front and centre of human rights. It is critically important that those of us who care deeply about these issues shout loudly, using every platform available to highlight injustices and violations, where we see them, and protect our freedoms from

incremental erosion." Amongst a succession of superb blog postings addressing many human rights dimensions to COVID-19 is a commissioned piece from Martha Spurrier, Director of Liberty, titled "[A Public Health Crisis and a Crisis of Rights](#)", which critically analyses the UK Government's Emergency Powers Act. The blog is always seeking new submissions. For more information on how to submit a piece, please contact [Pauline Canham](#) or [Dr Katya Alkhateeb](#). In the meantime, please follow us and share our blogs among your networks.

## HRC Promoting Greater Understanding of Human Rights in Japan

In a recent Ipsos Mori Global Human Rights [Survey](#), the population of Japan were revealed to be one of the least supportive of human rights. This may come as a surprise to some, but sadly not to those who are familiar with some of Japan's more pressing human rights challenges. Essex University has been engaged in ongoing efforts to support sections of the human rights community in Japan, particularly by means of promoting human rights education.

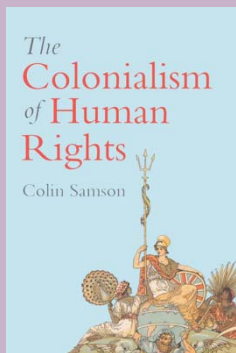
We are actively seeking to develop academic partnerships with the University of Tokyo, Soka University, Aoyama Gakuin University, and the Japanese Bar Association. In support of our ongoing engagement with Japan, HRC Fellow, Dr Sanae Fujita, recently returned to her native Japan for several weeks, presenting human rights lectures at 15 different universities across the country, to large audiences. Sanae also spoke about human rights at 8 public events.

In addition to discussing key aspects of international human rights law, Sanae repeatedly raised the country's ongoing, challenging issues of media freedom, hate speech, gender inequality and poverty.

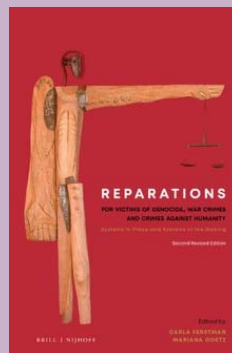


HRC Fellow, Dr Sanae Fujita

## HRC Members' New Books - Highlights



**Professor Colin Samson, *The Colonialism of Human Rights: Ongoing Hypocrisies of Western Liberalism, Polity, 2020.***



**Dr Carla Ferstman, *Reparations for Victims of Genocide, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity Systems in Place and Systems in the Making (Second, Revised Edition, Brill 2020)***

Well-established HRC Member and Professor of Sociology, Colin Samson exemplifies the HRC's commitment to the pursuit of constructively critical engagements with some of the failings of human rights in his new book: [\*The Colonialism of Human Rights: Ongoing Hypocrisies of Western Liberalism\*](#) (Polity, 2020).

Colin's book addresses an urgent question; namely, do so-called universal human rights apply to indigenous, formerly enslaved and colonised peoples? Colin brings human rights into conversation with the histories and afterlives of Western colonialism and slavery.

He examines the paradox that the nations that credit themselves with formulating universal human rights were colonial powers, settler colonists and sponsors of enslavement. He points out that many liberal theorists supported colonialism and slavery, and analyses how this illiberalism plays out today in selective, often racist processes of recognition and enforcement of human rights.

To reveal the continuities between colonial histories and contemporary events, Colin connects British, French and American *colonial theories* and practice to the notion of non-universal human rights. Vivid illustrations and case studies of racial exceptions to human rights are drawn from the afterlives of the enslaved and colonised, as well as recent events such as American police killings of black people, the treatment of Algerian *harkis* in France, the Windrush scandal in Britain, and the militarized suppression of the Standing Rock Water Protectors movement. Advocating for reparative justice and indigenising law, Colin presents a powerful argument that such events are not a failure of liberalism, so much as an inbuilt racial dynamic of it.

HRC Member and Senior Lecturer in the School of Law, Dr Carla Ferstman, examines multi-disciplinary approaches to the evolving field of reparations in her recently revised, co-edited book: [\*Reparations for Victims of Genocide, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity Systems in Place and Systems in the Making \(Second, Revised Edition, Brill, 2020\)\*](#) Along with her co-editor, Marianna Goetz (Founder Director of Rights for Peace and former Deputy Director of REDRESS) Dr Ferstman has brought together an impressive collection of contributors in seeking to provide a comprehensive and highly authoritative revised volume in an important area of human rights theory and practice. The book includes studies of the challenges that confront many victims in their pursuit of justice through securing reparations in many different contexts.

## HRC Members' Research into Transitional Justice



**Professor Lars Waldorf**

[Professor Lars Waldorf](#), School of Law and HRC Member, has received a grant from the Global Challenges Research Fund, GCRF@Essex, to support the development of a new research project looking at how the right to information can help promote accountable and inclusive provision of reparations and social assistance to conflict-affected populations. Under this grant, an Essex research team, comprising Professor Waldorf, Professor Clara Sandoval, and PhD student Helena-Ulrike Marambio, will co-organise workshops in Colombia and Sri Lanka, with the support of local partner organisations. Professor Waldorf also made a successful bid to GCRF@Essex for a Visiting Fellowship, in order to bring the Sri Lankan artist and academic [Pushpakanthan Pakkiyarajah](#) to the university. During his Fellowship, Pushpakanthan will present his art on disappearances, terrorism, and “wounded landscapes,” placing it in ‘conversation’ with similarly themed art within the Essex Collection of Art from Latin America. The Fellowship will further enhance Essex’s reputation for linking transitional justice with the arts.

## HRC Supports the Work of Leading UK Human Rights Organisation

In March, HRC Director, Dr Andrew Fagan was invited by the renowned civil liberties organisation, [Liberty](#), to speak to their senior management and staff on the subject of social rights, and the importance of the UK human rights community confronting socio-economic inequality here at ‘home’ in the United Kingdom. Andrew has also contributed a chapter in a forthcoming report on social rights in the UK, which Liberty are producing as part of their efforts to engage in the struggle against domestic socio-economic inequality. HRC Member, Dr Koldo Casla has also contributed to the report, which Liberty will be releasing soon. The HRC will be continuing to collaborate with Liberty as the organisation seeks to develop their social rights work.

## HRC Director's Appointment as Visiting Professor at [University of Lyon \(III\)](#)

In November 2019, prior to assuming the position of HRC Director, Dr Andrew Fagan spent a fortnight serving as a Visiting Professor at the University of Lyon's Institute for Comparative Law. Andrew presented a series of Master Classes on the interdisciplinary of human rights to a group of students enrolled upon Lyon's LLM in European Human Rights Law. The HRC is currently in discussion with colleagues at Lyon towards developing a joint human rights LLM.

## HRC Members Promote Greater Understanding of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law amongst the Military and State Officials

Professor Noam Lubell, School of Law and HRC Member, has been involved in a number of high-level events and conferences in the area of the law of armed conflict. In April, Noam delivered a presentation at a NATO workshop, examining the legal challenges raised by military uses of artificial intelligence in combat operations. In late 2019, Noam also led a presentation on the challenges of new technology, at a UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office conference, marking the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Geneva Conventions.



**HRC Founding Member,  
Professor Françoise Hampson**

HRC Founding Member, Professor Françoise Hampson has also been involved in a large number of activities and engagements, in support of human rights and humanitarian law. Amongst a busy schedule of engagements, Françoise delivered a presentation to a high-level panel on Climate Change and Conflict at the Inaugural London Conference on International Law organised by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Chatham House.

She also appeared before The Third Committee of the UN General Assembly, as a member of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Burundi; presented a paper at the University of Paris II and the French Red Cross Conference, marking the 70th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. Finally, Françoise presented an Oral Statement of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Burundi to the UN Human Rights Council.

The HRC's strength in the fields of the law of armed conflict and humanitarian law are also further illustrated by the career of HRC Fellow, Charles Garraway.



**HRC Fellow, Charles Garraway (CBE)**

Charles Garraway served for thirty years as a legal officer in the British Army Legal Services, initially as a criminal prosecutor but latterly as an adviser in the law of armed conflict and operational law. He worked for the British Red Cross from 2007 to 2011 and now works as an independent consultant. He was appointed a Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 2002 and received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Essex in 2012. In 2018 Charles was appointed as a member of the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen and continues to be a member for the year 2019.

The mandate of the Group of Experts was, inter alia, to “carry out a comprehensive examination of all alleged violations and abuses of international human rights and other appropriate and applicable fields of international law committed by all parties to the conflict since September 2014, including possible gender dimensions of such violations”. On 3 September 2019, The Group of Experts submitted their Second Report to the UN Human Rights Council through the High Commissioner for Human Rights. This was accompanied by a Conference Room Paper of greater length which expanded upon the evidence and methods of analysis used to produce the Report.

These documents can be found on the website of the Group at

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/YemenGEE/Pages/Index.aspx>

## Student Events and Activities

Undergraduate, Masters and Doctoral students make a vital contribution to the activities of the HRC during the course of an academic year. Many of our students devote precious time away from their demanding studies to organise important student-led activities and events on campus. Below we highlight just a sample of the inspiring efforts our students have made to promoting the cause of human rights.



Bethany Webb-Strong, Eloise Martin, Freya Cave, Ewa Gartbarz and other STAR members fundraising & leading the Craft & Conversation Club on Tuesday mornings.

### Essex Student Action for Refugees (STAR)

On joining the Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex this year, LLM student Bethany Webb-Strong, re-established a society called Student Action for Refugees (STAR). Essex STAR are part of a nationwide [STAR](#) movement which mobilises compassionate and energetic students to fundraise, campaign and volunteer to help welcome refugees to the UK. This year has been hugely rewarding and Essex STAR has [celebrated](#) many successes. Bethany says, “we have raised over £500 for STAR national and held campaign events to raise awareness about Human Rights Day and International Women’s Day.” STAR was also proud to be part of the campaign in petitioning the university to apply for [Sanctuary](#) status.

In the event that Essex is granted Sanctuary status, two refugee students will be offered postgraduate scholarships in the next academic year. STAR also launched its first volunteer project this term, partnering with [Refugee Action Colchester](#) to provide a Craft and Conversation Club on Tuesday mornings. This is a women’s only session which offers a safe space for refugees and asylum seekers in the community to practice their English and build connections.

Essex STAR is composed of students across the university but has received most of its support from students in the Law School and Human Rights Centre.

Beth states, “It has been so rewarding to see the STAR society grow during this year and to be able to have a real impact both upon the student experience at Essex and on the lives of refugees and asylum seekers in our community.”

Currently Essex STAR is recruiting for a president and committee members for the next academic year, if you are interested in getting involved please contact [Bethany](#), [Essex STAR](#), or [STAR FB](#).

### Chalking of the Steps

Each year on Human Rights Day, 10<sup>th</sup> December, members of the [Human Rights Society](#) and HRC continue a now long-established tradition of chalking the Articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights onto the steps between Squares 3 and 4 at the Colchester Campus, thereby physically reaffirming the university’s support for human rights. The practice is intended to symbolise the need to continually reaffirm support for human rights. Separate UDHR Articles are inscribed in many different native languages, further demonstrating the multinational character of the HRC community at Essex.



Members of the Human Rights Society after chalking steps on Human Rights Day, December 10, 2019



## News from the HRC's Hubs, Networks and Projects

The HRC provides a forum for supporting and enhancing the research activities of a range of Essex-based interdisciplinary hubs, networks and projects, which are collectively engaged in the theory and practice of human rights. Some of these projects are financed by large research council funds or other external funding sources, while others receive financial and administrative support from the HRC. Our hubs, networks and projects are an integral and essential component of the HRC's interdisciplinary research environment and culture.

### The Armed Conflict and Crisis Hub

The Essex Armed Conflict and Acute Crisis Hub is led by HRC Member, Professor Noam Lubell. The Hub brings together researchers and external partners working in the field of armed conflict and acute humanitarian crisis. The Hub has been very busy in recent months, including organising a film screening series and the regular convening of a Conflict Café. The *International Humanitarian Law film screenings*, led by Professor Lubell, take place on a regular basis throughout the year, with the showing of a film or documentary (dealing with conflict and acute crisis situations) being followed by discussion of the humanitarian law issues raised therein. *The Conflict Café*, led by Claire Simmons and Dr. Katya Alkhateeb, is an informal space to discuss current and emerging themes of armed conflict, as seen in the news or other sources of information students may come across. It provides a platform for students to connect what they are learning in class with real life situations and enables them to exchange views with their peers regarding how the law applies in today's armed conflicts. The Café aims to foster a cross-disciplinary dialogue and includes students who are working on issues relating to armed conflict. Unfortunately, the screenings and the café are currently on hold due to the pandemic, details will be published where when the initiatives return.

### Release of Important New Guidelines for the Law of Armed Conflict at UN General Assembly's Commissions

An outstanding highlight of the Hub's activities has been the release of [important guidelines](#) at the UN General Assembly's First and Sixth Commissions last October. The guidelines are the result of a five-year research project in partnership with the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), authored by: Essex's Professor Noam Lubell, [Jelena Pejic](#), Senior Legal Adviser at the ICRC, and [Claire Simmons](#), a Researcher at Essex Human Rights Centre and PhD candidate in the School of Law. The Guidelines are set to become the international benchmark for effective investigations into violations of international humanitarian law in all conflicts around the world. Being sensitive to the differences that characterise domestic legal and investigative systems, they identify practical and legal issues that may arise in such investigations or that should be considered beforehand. Their overarching aim is "to provide practical assistance by setting out a general framework for investigations in armed conflict and, where relevant, the corresponding international principles and standards".



Professor Noam Lubell addressing the New York Diplomatic Community. Image: Geneva Academy

## Seeking to Uphold Legal Accountability for UK Military Operations in Iraq

The Conflict Hub has also been engaging with the widely acknowledged issue concerning alleged abuses and violations of the law of armed conflict perpetrated by UK military personnel in Iraq. Dr Carla Ferstman has been actively engaged in this area of the Hub's work. In October 2019, she participated in an event at the Humanity Hub, in The Hague, Netherlands. Entitled, [Fighting Double Standards before the ICC: Torture by UK Forces in Iraq](#), the event involved expert panellists presenting legal arguments in support of the International Criminal Court investigating allegations of torture by UK military personnel in Iraq. Dr Ferstman was also subsequently interviewed on the same theme by the investigative journalist team Asymmetrical Haircuts. For more on this, you can access the podcast: "Double Standards," [here](#).

## The Essex Autonomy Project (EAP)

The Essex Autonomy Project is a research and knowledge-exchange initiative funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The project aims to clarify the ideal of self-determination in history, theory and practice, both for its own sake and to guide public policy makers and frontline professionals in dealing with the complex issues surrounding mental competence, and the capacity of vulnerable individuals to make decisions for themselves. The EAP has been engaged with numerous projects and activities in recent months. It continues to contribute to the Wellcome-funded Mental Health and Justice Project (<http://mhj.org.uk>) and to support the ongoing review of the Mental Health Act in Scotland.

Despite the effects of COVID-19, the EAP is delighted to announce that it is proceeding with its annual **Summer School, which will take place between the 20 – 24 July**. It will be a wholly **online programme and will be free to all participants**. Confirmed speakers include an alumnus of the very first EAP Summer School, who was recently elected to UK Parliament, in addition to researchers and policy makers working on supported decision-making and compliance with the UN Convention for the Rights of People with Disabilities from the UK, Germany and Japan. **Details about registration for the Summer School can be found on the EAP website: <http://autonomy.essex.ac.uk>.**

## EAP Researchers Support COVID-19 UK Public Policy Development and Training

The key focus of the Essex Autonomy Project's recent engagements has been upon the response to COVID-19. The virus raises a great many ethical and legal challenges for a variety of public bodies in the front-line of fighting the virus. EAP researchers, who include senior professors from Philosophy, the School of Law, and project officers and Undergraduate Interns, have been contributing vitally important and practically urgent research and technical support to some of those public bodies. Specifically, the EAP is contributing its expertise to two key areas. In cooperation with the National Mental Capacity Forum (NMCF), the EAP is hosting a series of three webinars for frontline professionals who are struggling with clinical, ethical and legal challenges associated with administering the Mental Capacity Act, whilst also ensuring adequate respect for the human rights of persons with impaired decision-making capacity, in the context of the pandemic. The first webinar was held on 1<sup>st</sup> April, and reached capacity registration of 500 participants, making it the largest single EAP-hosted event in the ten-year history of the project. A second was held on 28<sup>th</sup> April, focussing, inter alia, on issues around deprivation of liberty in care home settings. **A third EAP-hosted webinar will be held on 3rd June 2020. Further information about the webinars is available on the EAP's newly established COVID-19 page: <http://autonomy.essex.ac.uk/covid-19>.**

In addition to its work with the NMCF, the EAP has been working closely with its sister project, [the Ethics of Powerlessness Project](#) (EoP), to provide research based, crucial support to NHS Ethics Committees and policy makers who are facing profoundly challenging situations where demand for emergency medical care threatens to exceed the available supply. The EAP and EoP teams have produced a report surveying bioethical and human rights considerations in situations of [triage](#). The report is available at: <http://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.34046.74567>.

## Essex Business and Human Rights Project (EBHR)

The Essex Business and Human Rights Project (EBHR) is led by Professor Sheldon Leader, Dr Tara Van Ho and Dr Anil Yilmaz-Vastardis. The EBHR undertakes a wide range of research and practice-based activities, which address the insistence that commercial enterprises comply with international human rights standards. It encourages dialogue across multiple disciplines, from law to social, and even the natural, sciences. EBHR aims to foster research and to bring the results of that research to bear on practical problems, working on national and international issues and collaborating with partners across the world.

### EBHR Hosts a series of Important Events and Seminars

Over the past few months, EBHR has hosted and contributed to several important meetings and forums. In September 2019, around 100 scholars came to Essex for [the Global Business and Human Rights Scholars Association Annual Conference](#) – the world's largest academic organisation dedicated to business and human rights.



EBHR hosting the Global Business and Human Rights Scholars Association at the University of Essex, September 2019



Dr Tara Van Ho at the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights

EBHR also hosted a side event at the [UN Forum on Business and Human Rights](#). At the Forum, EBHR's panel brought together academics and non-governmental organisations to discuss business and human rights in armed conflict. This panel, along with earlier reports from EBHR and scholarship from its members, will feed into a report by the UN Working Group on business and human rights. During the Forum, Dr Tara Van Ho additionally [presented](#) at an unofficial side event hosted by Amnesty International and ECCHR on the relationship between the Arms Trade Treaty and business and human rights.

### EBHR Joins a New Partnership: the International Economic Law Collective

During this academic year, EBHR has partnered with many other UK and European universities to establish a network of scholars critically engaged with international economic law, the [IEL Collective](#). The Collective held its opening [conference](#) at the University of Warwick in November 2019. With EBHR's support, the Collective has also developed a series of [IEL Collective Conversations](#), which will address how international economic law intersects with human rights and public policy during the COVID-19 crisis.



## Essex Transitional Justice Network (ETJN)

The Essex Transitional Justice Network brings together people from the University of Essex and collaborators from the UK and abroad. ETJN explores issues faced by societies that are undergoing fundamental socio-political change, notably the transition from a repressive to a democratic or constitutional regime, or, from a state of civil war and unrest to peace and prosperity. ETJN's approach is transdisciplinary and broad, looking not only at traditional topics of transitional justice (such as criminal justice, reparations, vetting, or truth and reconciliation), but also at wider and previously neglected issues (such as poverty and development, and informal justice mechanisms). The core aim of the ETJN is to provide a platform for researchers, practitioners, and decision-makers to better understand transitional justice and thereby to improve the situation on the ground. ETJN engages in research activities, teaching, and consultancy, and welcome collaboration and requests for advice from across the globe.

### ETJN Accompanies VC to Colombia and Hosts Series of Important Events and Seminars

Members of the ETJN have been engaged in a number of activities and events since September 2019, including accompanying the university's Vice Chancellor, Professor Anthony Forster and other Essex academics on a recent [trip](#) to Colombia. Conducted under the auspices of the Global Challenges Research Fund ([GCRF](#)) [scheme](#), senior ETJN Professors, Sabine Michalowski, Clara Sandoval and Lars Waldorf, held a series of meetings with academic and non-academic bodies in the aim of developing research and impactful collaborations and partnerships.

### The principal activities of the ETJN over the past six months have consisted of several important events and seminars.

At Essex, in January, the ETJN organized a panel discussion which focused on "Reflections on Litigating Transitional Justice Issues," and consisted of Dr. Carla Ferstman, Professor Sabine Michalowski, Professor Clara Sandoval and Alejandro Jimenez, Director of Litigation at [Dejusticia](#). Alejandro is also an International Academic Fellow in the School of Law and an expert in the practice of transitional justice. The panel was chaired by HRC Member, Professor Lars Waldorf.



Alejandro Jimenez, Professor Clara Sandoval, Dr Carla Ferstman, Professor Sabine Michalowski & Professor Lars Waldorf during the panel on "Reflections on Litigating Transitional Justice Issues"

In late January, and in conjunction with the Essex Armed Conflict & Crisis Hub, the ETJN screened the documentary film, *After Trujillo*, that examines how Dominicans navigate the memory politics and architectural ruins of the former dictatorship. HRC Member, Professor Lars Waldorf moderated a Q&A session with the two filmmakers: Dr Lisa Blackmore, Senior Lecturer in Art History at Essex, and Jorge Dominguez Dubuc, a Venezuelan visual artist.

In February, as part of the Human Rights Centre Speaker series, the ETJN hosted a seminar on Economic and Other Third Party Actors in the Colombian Special Jurisdiction for Peace with Professor Sabine Michalowski and Mr. Andres Contreras, a legal scholar at the University of Rosario (Colombia) and [GCRF@Essex](#) Fellow at the School of Law.

Also in February, the ETJN, together with Embrace Dialogue, and the University College, London's Institute of the Americas, co-hosted a panel discussion at UCL entitled *Taking Stock of the Participation of Third Parties in the Special Jurisdiction for Peace in Colombia*.



Professor Lars Waldorf, Mr. Andres Contreras & Professor Sabine Michalowski

## Human Rights Local

The HRC enjoys a global reputation for our contributions to the protection of human rights beyond the UK. In the past few years, however, we have also sought to make an equally large impact on the domestic human rights front. There are many reasons why we have prioritised the development of our local engagement work. First and foremost, we are responding to the increasing erosion of human rights which have accompanied austerity and growing socio-economic inequalities “at home” amongst increasing numbers of people in many of our local communities. Our Human Rights Local project has quickly established a number of significant relationships with local authorities, community organisations, arts and cultural bodies, local religious figures, and local people themselves through the campaigning groups who represent them. We are also working closely with the School of Law’s Law Clinic and aim to develop locally-focused projects within the HRC’s Human Rights Clinic. The work of our Human Rights Local project has been significantly impacted by COVID-19. Prior to the outbreak of the pandemic in the UK, we produced an HRC podcast which brought together Dr Andrew Fagan (HRC), Lucy Davies (School of Law, Law Clinic), and local Unite, trade union, Community activist, Rebecca Rocket to discuss the importance of human rights to local communities. The same group of people also explored these challenges further in a panel discussion dedicated to human rights at home as part of the HRC’s Human Rights Week events, in December. We have also been holding regular organisational meetings with senior figures within Colchester Borough Council, Colchester’s Firstsite and Mercury Theatre arts bodies, and providing technical advice to several local campaign groups.

## New Project Lead for Human Rights Local

Human Rights Local has a new Project Lead as Dr Koldo Casla replaces Dr Andrew Fagan as the Lead on the HRC’s local community human rights activities. Koldo, an MA alumnus of the HRC, returned to Essex University in December 2019 as a Lecturer in the School of Law. He has a wealth of experience of working on domestic human rights projects, with particular expertise in the area of social rights and combatting socio-economic inequality. Between 2016 and 2019, he was the Policy Director of [Just Fair](#), an organisation that researches and advocates for economic and social rights in the UK. He has also worked as an independent researcher on health, housing and education in Spain for Amnesty International. Koldo was the Chief of Staff of the Human Rights Commissioner of the Basque Country (“[Ararteko](#)”), Spain, between 2011 and 2013. He is a Trustee of [HEAR](#), London’s Human Rights and Equalities Network. In commenting on the importance of assuming the Lead for the HRC’s local outreach project, Koldo said; “Essex is known worldwide for our leading research and policy work on international human rights. *Human Rights Local* intends to bring that expertise and reputation closer to the ground. Learning from [experiences in the UK and internationally](#), we are determined to make human rights locally relevant for people living in and near Colchester. Using international law as a reference, the project takes the needs of the community and language that makes sense locally as the starting points of human rights advocacy. I am honoured and very excited to be called to lead this project to make a difference on people’s lives ‘where universal human rights begin, in small places, close to home’, as Eleanor Roosevelt put it.” We know that COVID-19 disproportionately impacts many of the most vulnerable amongst the local community, the frail, elderly, the disabled, women and ethnic minorities. The work of the HRC, and Human Rights Local in particular, that we undertake in the local community will be, in the coming months and years, a vital element of what we do.



Human Rights Local, new Project Lead, Dr Koldo Casla

Koldo’s recent contribution to [Public Services Future](#) was released in April 2020, a collective volume edited by the Fabian Society and the Federation of European Progressive Studies on the future of public services. In his chapter, Koldo reminds us that, “while the Human Rights Act 1998 is very important, most economic and social rights are not covered by it.” Koldo gives four concrete policy examples (housing, health, social security and work) where enhancing economic and social rights in UK law would make a clear difference on social services.

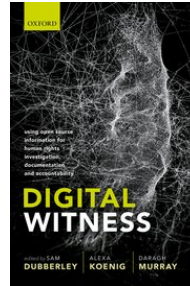
Dr Koldo Casla’s chapter can be found in *Public Service Futures: Welfare States in the Digital Age*, The Fabian Society, 2020



## Human Rights and Big Data Project (HRBDT)

The ESRC Human Rights Big Data and Technology Project (HRBDT), led by Professor Lorna McGregor, researches the human rights implications of design, development and deployment of data analytics and new and emerging technologies, and makes proposals for how they should be regulated and governed.

## Book



Sam Dubberley, Dr Alexa Koenig, and Dr Daragh Murray, *editors*, *Digital Witness: Using Open Source Information for Human Rights Investigation, Documentation, and Accountability* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

## HRBDT Advancing Human Rights in the Age of AI and the Digital Society

In the last six months the HRBDT's multidisciplinary team has delivered over 30 keynote and panel presentations across the world, as well as organised expert meetings with its global partners. These have included: co-organising an expert meeting on business and human rights and access to a remedy in Seoul, South Korea, with Human Asia, the UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and Korea University; an expert meeting in London on misinformation and human rights with [the Carter Center](#) and [OHCHR](#); and an expert meeting on taking a human rights based-approach to open source investigations with the [Human Rights Center at UC Berkeley](#).

Sam Dubberley, a research consultant of the HRBDT and Special Adviser in the Crisis Response team at Amnesty International, and Dr Daragh Murray, a Senior Lecturer at the School of Law and a co-investigators in HRBDT, along with Dr Alexa Koenig, the executive Director of the Human Rights Center at UC Berkeley, recently published their edited collection: '[Digital Witness: Using Open Source Information for Human Rights Investigation, Documentation, and Accountability](#)' (OUP, 2020). This book was considered a first of its kind as it teaches the methods and best-practice of using open source information for human rights investigations. It also offers a comprehensive range of topics, including the discovery and preservation of data, and ethical considerations, to provide readers with the cutting-edge skills needed to work in an increasingly digitised and information-saturated environment.



Members of the HRBDT jointly organise and participate in the 12th Asia Human Rights Forum: Human Rights, Business and Technology - An Evolving Agenda, Seoul, October 2019

## **The Economic and Social Rights Academic Network UK and Ireland (ESRAN-UKI)**

ESRAN-UKI is a network of more than 150 scholars working across the UK and Ireland on economic and social rights issues. ESRAN-UKI supports research exchange and networking among scholars working in this rapidly evolving field. ESRAN-UKI is presently led by Judith Bueno de Mesquita, the Co-Deputy Director of the HRC; Essex has been the coordinating institution for the ESRAN-UKI network since December 2018.

### **ESRAN-UKI hosts an International Workshop on “Covid-19 and Economic and Social Rights: Domestic and Global Perspectives”**

Following the cancellation of the most recently planned workshop at the University of Liverpool due to the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020, ESRAN-UKI convened an online, thematic workshop entitled *Covid-19 and economic and social rights: domestic and global perspectives*. The workshop was attended by 37 experts. It provided an opportunity for leading scholars, practitioners and postgraduate research students to present and receive feedback on work in progress, as well as learn about responses to the crisis from a variety of global, regional and national bodies.

## **COMING UP**

Our next HRC Newsletter will be published in September. No doubt, a great many changes will occur to our world between now and then. Here are some initiatives which we know we will be working on over the next few months.

**Joint School of Law/HRC Online COVID-19 Publication**  
HRC Member Dr Carla Ferstman and HRC Director Dr Andrew Fagan are co-editing an online publication which examines a wide range of human rights and legal issues raised by COVID-19. The project was initiated by Carla and draws upon expertise across the School of Law and HRC. We aim to publish this important publication this Summer.

### **Dr Ahmed Shaheed’s Annual Report to the UN General Assembly**

HRC Co-Deputy Director and current UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief will be presenting his annual report to the UN General Assembly later this year. His report will highlight an emerging area of his mandate, which explicitly engages with the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 Agenda. Specifically, Ahmed is engaging with the essential role religion and belief has to play in supporting SDG 16, which is concerned with peace, justice and inclusive societies. We will have more on this in our Autumn Newsletter in September.

**HRC Annual Lecture - Just a reminder that we intend to hold our HRC Annual Lecture as a webinar at a date in June, yet to be confirmed.**

### **Developing Further Partnerships**

The HRC is committed to proactively developing formal partnerships with a range of human rights bodies and organisations in the months ahead, as we all seek to reaffirm our commitment to the global protection of human rights in these deeply challenging times. We will be releasing details of these initiatives in due course. Remember to follow our twitter @EssexHRC and subsequent HRC news releases.

*Acknowledgements* – Thank you to all of the members of our HRC community who contributed to our requests for news items and updates. Special thanks are also due to Dr Katya Alkhateeb (Senior Research Officer, HRC) and Dr Julia Firmin for the invaluable support they provided in producing this edition of our newsletter. Thank you to Catherine Gentry for making this publication possible under difficult circumstances.