



Global face-to-face meeting of the
Swiss Development Cooperation's
Conflict and Human Rights Network

Wednesday, June 19, 2019

**United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights
Kate Gilmore**

Welcome to Palais Wilson - a truly a Swiss treasure and a moving symbol of Geneva as home to the international human rights system.

Thank you so much for the privilege of this conversation for which the High Commissioner sends her best wishes and warmest greetings.

You are our host country, one of our most important investors and one of our greatest supporters.

You have backed us when you could have chosen to do otherwise. You have stood with us when others have turned away. And you have supported us despite perhaps misgivings at times as to the impact we deliver. We owe deep thanks to the people of Switzerland for that commitment and for their generosity.

We don't take it for granted - we simply can't afford to. For today it seems, in this world of change, even longstanding friends of human rights struggle to stand up for the universal values for which two world wars were fought; values that are the foundation of the modern world and which have served it powerfully for more than 70 years.

It's not that all that has changed makes things worse.

- Millions have been lifted out of poverty;
- Far fewer women's lives are lost now when giving life and far more children survive their first months now to thrive too in their early years;
- Far more of us are living much longer and dying much later.

That there are alive today more people than ever before, is the fruit of these - humankind's greatest achievements.

What's more,

- Racism has been denounced in law for the scourge that is and has always been!
- Torture has been criminalized, even if it implemented unevenly and unreliably;
- The death penalty has been eroded and moratoria and abolition now more clearly the norm;
- International law has broadened and deepened, meaning that the ideals of universal rights have now meaning that is more tangible, more practical and more relevant - despite opposition.

It's good news for innovation and for equality of opportunity that more of us are living elsewhere than where we were born and good news for infrastructure efficiency that most of us now live in urban settings.

But the report card of our progress is also a troubled one:

Yes, generation of **capital** is at an all-time peak, but never before in human history has wealth been so intensely concentrated in the hands of so few.

\$2 trillion are lost each year to corruption - more than ten times the amount going to ODA - **official development assistance** - and cash enough to wipe out hunger, eradicate malaria, provide basic education to all children and bridge the global infrastructure gap.

Unsustainable consumption by the global West has not met anything like the same degree of scrutiny that **fertility rates** in global South have and yet that consumption - which is now aspired to by people the world over - has placed the very **planet** itself at risk - introducing

what is unsustainable and perhaps irreversible strain, warming, depleting, draining, destabilizing, ...

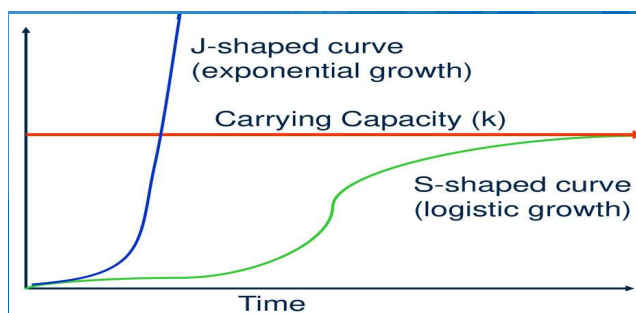
Both **protracted conflicts** and **sudden-onset humanitarian crises** inflict immeasurable suffering on millions, hitting hardest those with the least - leading to the situation today where more **people are on the move** than since WWII with the average period of time spent as a refugee now exceeding 20 years.

The world's **youth population** today - the largest ever in human history by number and percentage - are concentrated in less developed nations, enjoying fewest options and having least stake in the world as it is. Millions with access only to lower quality education specifically at secondary levels, languishing under high unemployment rates, locked outside formal decision making, still thanks to handheld multimedia streaming devices, they are the first generation to see - en masse for themselves - exactly what the *over privileged-under privileged* divide looks like. Never before in human history have the poor and marginalized been so enabled to gaze upon the wealthy and powerful in real time, over such distances, in such detail and on such a scale; prompting what some have heralded as an emerging "*youthquake*" - a term selected by Oxford Dictionaries to be 2017's word of the year.

And yet the world's population is also aging. In Europe by 2050, for every **100 persons of working age** there will be **53 who are aged 65 or older** - almost double the number today (29). Yet in Africa? By 2050, there will be only 11 people over 65 for every 100 people of working age, as compared to **eight** today.

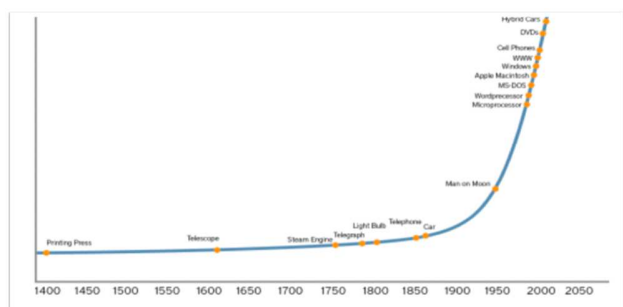
Neither our parents nor our professors nor our politicians predicted policy pivots reduced to a tweet; silk roads redrawn as “one belt one road”; trade routes made virtual too; the personal no longer merely the private; the local made more digital and somehow less geographical nor that distance between us would be contracted by a so called social media which is just so anti-social - sparks of data thrown out into cyberspace, flashing around the world a speed of light.

Climate heating; erosion of species; destruction of natural habitat; insatiable consumption, rampant anti-microbial resistance: all are recent high speed changes and all are driving likely irreversible transformation of our natural, human and our artificial worlds.



This is unprecedented change. It is perfect *J curve* change, slow at the start, but now exponential with still no end in sight.

Change of this pace and acceleration inevitably is a story of disruption, unfamiliarity and uncertainty. It swirls around us leaving us dazed and at times overwhelmed; even our governance systems born in the aftermath of grave disruptions of global conflict and disaster - the UN, the Bretton Woods instruments, the multilateral infrastructure - are under pressure.



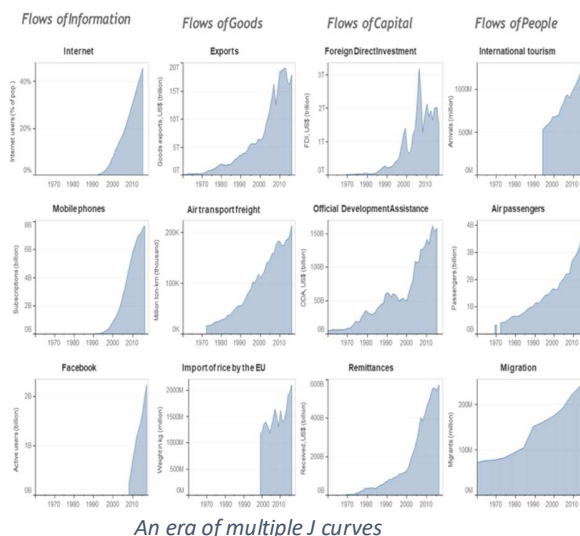
Example of J curve change – Technology over time

And for people themselves? This multi-dimensional, interconnected fast paced “no-end in sight” change feels not merely unfamiliar, but is for many of us, frightening and even fundamentally unfair - something being done to us and not something that we have done.

Steady gradual pace, logical change accompanied our species for millennia. But there has been more change in the last hundred years than in the hundreds of hundred years before. And more change in this generation than in any single generation before! As - any student of management would confirm - many human beings react very badly to change and specifically to change that we do not see as being to our own advantage.

Change at such scale, pace and consequence would be tough under any circumstances but recall that, added into this swirling mix,

are the impacts of major global shocks, of specific note from a human rights’ standpoints, being the global shocks of 9/11 and its aftermath AND of the 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath.



The consequences and footprints of the cruel, dehumanizing, now multiple acts of terror crimes perpetrated around the world following hot on the tails of our response to 9/11 are coupled now with the consequences and footprints of the callous, dehumanizing impunity afforded to those responsible for the global financial bubbles burst.

These impacts/legacies - our policies in response to such crises - are combining to drive us further away from, rather than closer towards, more equal development in larger freedom for all, promised to us by the architects of post WW11 multi-lateral system.

Indeed, the toxic policy twins - which have dominated our landscapes since 9/11 and the financial crisis - namely **hyper-securitization** and **deep-public purse austerity** have significantly eroded human dignity: Hyper securitization doing to civil and political rights what deep-purse austerity has done to economic and social rights.

This public policy cocktail - when mixed in with the dynamics of rapid J curve change, has served to rust away public trust in public institutions and public leadership, just when trust-worthy and trust earning institutions and leadership are most needed.

Yes, malicious action by non-state actors is a primary root cause of this situation - the repeated callous cruelty of extremist groups. But so too is the rapacious callous greed of extremist capital-capturing, tax-evading individuals and enterprises.

And now, what's more, thanks to global dynamics, both groups of actors in large part now lie beyond the reach of the nation state, neither being containable within the sovereign power of a single nation, even though their actions - extremist violence and extremist greed - has left no population untouched; even though their price of their shared currencies of fear and pain is felt at every electoral ballot box.

Last year, the Edelman Global Trust survey results revealed - in their words - a "shattering" erosion of public trust.

El País expressed it thus: *“The rule of law, the democratic system and even the market economy are in doubt”*. The system is not just being challenged - the system is no longer working - not as people need it to.

It is these upheavals - geopolitical, technological, environmental, economic and societal - that have helped spawn the space once again for populist, nativist, nationalistic moments.

But all the populist wall-building in the world, all the xenophobic hardening of borders and all the fantasist pedaling of one nations' superiority over all others; all the eroding of the instruments of multilateralism - those policies are not cures; there are symptoms of what it is that must be cured.

People are anxious, and some are deeply resentful. Nations are struggling with the reality of what they cannot manage alone. The international system is struggling with the reality that it lacks the authority, credibility and enforceability to manage global dynamics.

So, how are we to use human rights to help address this? How can we best position human rights in a world of rapid change for which our institutions and leaders are ill equipped and our decision-making poorly designed? How are we to use rights to better secure ourselves as a human family: in larger freedom; governed by more resilient inclusive democracies; adjudicated by sturdier justice; rooted in more sustainable economies; on a more nourished, less depleted planet so that millions after us too can enjoy more sustainable peace?

If human rights are to play a central role tomorrow, worthy of the universal values and principles that it enshrined yesterday, then the

human rights project - those of us who promote it, defend it, administer it, must face up today to a number of challenges - asking of it and of ourselves - deep and challenging questions:

- **ARE WE READY TO STAND UP FOR MORE SECURITY, WITHOUT MORE SECURITIZATION?**

Securitization of our daily existence has escalated to the point where the very pillars of democratic society - civil society space; pluralistic and principled press; an independent judiciary; an impartial academy; free and fair elections - are under attack; under attack even by those elected democratically; under attack as - and I quote political leaders, as “enemies of the people”, as “potential terrorists”, as “impure”.

Attacks on civil society space; hyper surveillance invading our privacy; arbitrary arrests and detention; torture, unfair trials, summary executions: securitization is spreading an infrastructure of distrust that is warping our place within and access to the public domain. Today, even civil society’s humanitarian action is attacked - even criminalized.

In many places, these policy-offspring of terror and of the war against it, are driving a stake into the very heart of democratic progress. Yet in many countries, our daily personal security - on the streets, in public places and in the home - has not benefited from all this, while the of the powerful still largely enjoy relative impunity for their crimes - be they high priest of church or culture or commerce. The #metoo movement is evidence that wrongly, some security matters more than others. But for public trust building and for more just societies, it is

insecurities *quotidian* that must be addressed more authoritatively, more convincingly.

Appalling as their strong-arm tactics are, the Philippine government's lethal indiscriminate violence, and Brazil's promise of the same, are speaking for their populations (or large segments anyway) directly to the daily **indignities of personal insecurity** - which human rights "norm making" has largely neglected. As a result, the sources of much broader security threats - both state and non-state actors i.e. organized crime, criminal gangs, human traffickers, corrupt officials - have been largely left outside the human rights apparatus. This must be corrected.

Yet, part of a larger more inclusive and sustainable solution, lies with material security!

- **ARE WE READY TO STAND UP FOR MORE EQUALITY WITHIN AND BETWEEN COUNTRIES?**

The recovery from the 2008 financial crisis could hardly have been less equal. The measures taken subsequently cut away at ordinary people's standards of living, left wealth more concentrated in the hands of fewer than ever before in human history and prepared fertile ground in which the seeds for an illogical and afactual resentment of 'others' could be sown - resent of "those coming to take our jobs", "to rob us of our social security", "to strip us of our identity". It has resulted in a shameful, dehumanizing and perverse manufacture of new scape goats globally - migrants and Muslims.

We all witness the fury that the publics of the global north have directed at their governments for not fulfilling their side of the social contract - for not delivering progress and personal advancement, generation on generation. But beyond-however, inequality means something different: it means outright poverty. And beyond the global north, poverty is young young young! The median age of all the world's poorest countries is less than 20; the youngest being Uganda and Niger with median ages of 15! The world's richest countries on the other hand have populations whose median age is far closer to 50. (Incidentally, but worth noting the average age globally of a member of parliament is 53.)

This now **age contoured, mal-distribution of global wealth** is largely uncontested. No governance mechanism, within and between countries, has put in place (or arguably, can put in place on their own) the necessary controls over the massive financial flows into "booming offshore" zones or can prevent the tax evasion that has become so common place or address rampant cross-border corruption.

And the actors responsible for this conduct that only deepens inequalities, those benefiting from them: markets, banks, investors, tax evaders big businesses - again lie still largely outside the human rights apparatus.

- **ARE WE READY TO STAND UP FOR TRUTH, FACT AND EVIDENCE IN THE FACE OF POLITICALLY MOTIVATED DISTORTIONS AND LIES?**

Fake news, election manipulation, one member state intentionally trolling another; public lies told as if public truths by public leaders: unsurprisingly these have had a profound effect on the public confidence

in our strained systems of governance and frankly, public confidence in truth has emerged as a major casualty.

Thanks to such as the erosion of independent and professional media; media concentration and media monopoly; counter-terrorism's newly granted tolerance if not outright permission for attacks against journalists - it seems many of us are now left unable to distinguish between what is real news and fake; unable even to care about which is which.

In the meantime, the big data companies (Google, Facebook etc) have accrued functions - from cartography to surveillance - that previously were exclusively the domain of the state. And, as the growth of digital currencies show, new technologies are poised to replace other functions once the unique provenance of the nation state.

Yet, these indignities - those of privacy invasion, of cyber bullying, of lack of control over one's own digital identity - are yet to benefit from strong attention by the human rights framework and system.

And the actors behind this digital revolution - and benefiting from it - once again, are not yet caught within the human rights accountability web while the conduct, accountability and consequences of big data firms and media monopolies - are still largely outside the human rights apparatus.

- **ARE WE READY TO STAND UP FOR CIVIL SOCIETY?**

When government is under strain and the media no longer serving as reliable watchdog, civil society is still providing: providing schools, health services, and providing participation and voice; providing solidarity and

driving human scale innovation too. Perhaps that is why populists on taking office, are so quick to invest such time and energy on constraining civic space.

Indeed, all over the globe civil society is facing an unprecedented clampdown in the form of legal and administrative barriers, as governments impose new status-registration regimes; frustrate CSOs' means of receiving foreign funding; impose administrative frustrations on access to bank accounts, premises and legal standing. IN recent years, some ninety-eight countries have passed laws further restricting civil society space, often under the pretext of countering terrorism and addressing security concerns.

Further, between 2015 to 2017, more than a thousand HRDs were killed in 61 countries, while the death toll of environmental HRDs rose 400% between 2002 and 2017.

The indignities of such attacks on our right to public participation; on our access to public space; on our compassion; on our solidarity; on our voice and choice - are not confined to the national level. Civil society actors and their participation are also under greater pressure in the context of international relations even at the UN.

Yet the benefits of vibrant, pluralistic, unimpeded civil society are not imprisoned by national boundaries - they accrue to us all. Few scientific, literary, artistic, technological or indeed political breakthroughs - and even fewer acts of courageous compassion - would ever have occurred were it not for civic activism and exercise of civic freedoms. When those rights are weakened or dismantled, democracy itself is imperiled.

We must enable the state to stand with and for people ... people as rights holders. It means the human rights ecosystem must ratchet up global and national protection for civil society, for human rights defenders, and broaden and diversify interaction with civil society organisations.

- **ARE WE READY TO STAND UP FOR HUMAN CONNECTION RATHER THAN HUMAN CONTEST?**

In the face of change of such magnitude, of J curve change - people are rummaging around to find new ideals to believe in in new times. Populists are offering false answers - sowing division; inflaming and instrumentalizing new and ancient hatreds. And politicians, economists, industrialists, and the media have induced us to take as a given, extreme individualism and competition between us. A world view that pits us against each other, encourages us to fear and mistrust each other - changing our perception of ourselves and of others and, in turn, changing how we behave. Ironically, sadly, wrongly, human rights has often been credited - blamed - at least in popular discourse, for this individualism.

It is not enough to challenge these perverse narratives; we have to replace them. Replace them with the truer story of how most people in fact are socially-minded, are empathetic and altruistic; of how most people would much prefer to live in a world in which everyone is treated with respect and decency.

In fact, the urge to cooperate is hard-wired into our brains as human beings - among mammals, humans are the supreme cooperator.

We must amplify the story of human beings “astonishing capacity for compassion and for acts of altruism”.

In the hyper-legalization of human rights perhaps have we lost sight of the fact that, more than a set of treaties and legal norms, human rights are about our interconnections and our interdependence - universal moral claims about the intrinsic value of every human being. In this no north nor south east or west, right or left - but the humane or the inhumane

The Foreign Minister of Sweden Margot Wahlstrom tells a story - “A grandfather says to his grandchild: “There is a battle between two wolves inside me. One is evil; he is arrogance, ego, lies and despair. The other is good; he is peace, compassion, truth and hope. This battle is inside us all.” The grandchild asks: “Which wolf wins?” The grandfather replies: “The one you feed.”

Who within ourselves are we feeding?

- **WE MUST REINVENT LEADERSHIP FOR THE WORLD AS IT WILL BE.**

This ultimately is all about the question of change leadership - leadership in a world of change.

To complete what others have called this “dangerously, unfinished globalisation project”, our systems of global and local governance must be reinvented - reinvigorated to lead and shape a more authentic human rights-based “fit” suitable for era of global finance, big data, extreme inequality, hyper securitization, mass migration and ecological upheaval.

Diplomat economist John Kenneth Galbraith, said greatness in leadership is “the willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety

of their people in their time.” Leadership of a nervous people in fearful times is a courageous business.

This world of change is daunting - unknowable - shrouded in uncertainty. It demands much. It demands much of human rights, of us and specifically of those who would lead us - much more than holding on to and applying power and authority.

It demands communication of hope - not our hope but theirs. And from us it demands not just hope, but courage - not their courage but ours. And it calls for not just courage but principles - a courageous adherence to enduring principles of human rights for us all.

If we don't know where we are going, or how we are going to get there, then let's at least know who we are and for what we stand up.

“We must not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief; but do justly now, love mercy now, walk humbly now; we are not obligated to complete the work but neither are we free to abandon it.” (The Talmud)