



DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS ONLINE, IN SOCIETY AND BUSINESS

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Gummersbach, Germany

Abstract

TOPICS

Human rights – digital rights

The concept of human and civil rights is a modern phenomenon, part of the architecture of post-world war II, however the essence of human rights, more precisely fundamental individual rights have evolved throughout centuries. The fight for individual rights was very much interlinked with the struggle for a liberal worldview and democratic order.

The UN designed a universal rule-based legal system for safeguarding human rights (HR) worldwide. This international framework was augmented by various regional instruments and mechanisms to monitor their implementation. But one should not forget that HR are not abstract, they are not artificially designed highbrow words set forth in international documents, but basic fundamental rights are there everywhere. They affect our everyday life and being sensitive to them and protecting them is not something abstract and intangible. Defending HR is not an exclusive task for lawyers and activists, but it is, and should be, a concern for all. Effective protection of human rights needs a true commitment from civil society, the business sphere, and governmental agencies.

However, we cannot ignore the fact that beyond the traditional HR protection frameworks there is an urgent need to focus on protecting and promoting HR in our accelerated, digitalized world. What happens to our fundamental rights when they go online? Past years have shown us how much we rely on technology to connect, learn, organize, and live our lives. Technical developments pose serious challenges to HR as we know it. We are now at an intersection of HR and technologies. And the future of our fundamental rights will very much depend on how we employ new technologies without compromising (curtailing) our hard-won basic rights.

The first part of the seminar will focus on the essence of human rights and the concept of digital rights. The intimate relationship between the protection of HR and the concept of rule of law will also be discussed. We will look at the threats (e.g., the price of being wired or the business model of surveillance giants), and benefits (e.g., blockchain technologies as tools for ensuring basic rights) of technological developments in the protection and promotion of HR.

Advanced algorithms and artificial intelligence technologies have the potential to generate substantial benefits, but simultaneously they profoundly impact the values associated with the rule of law and the

enjoyment of fundamental rights. Respect for such values and rights will very much depend on the ethical use of AI systems. In the course of the seminar, participants will have the opportunity to discuss this topical and fundamental issue.

Business and HR

Beyond the traditional human rights focus on state accountability there has been an urgency to examine the responsibility of non-state actors as well, such as multinational enterprises, transnational corporations, tech-giants, etc. There is an evolving tendency that businesses need to adhere to international standards to ensure that their operations are human rights compliant. To prevent HR violations, businesses tend to include corporate social responsibility and human rights due diligence measures into their business schemes.

The diverse activities of businesses affect not just their customers, employees, consumers and contractors along their supply chains, but often also entire communities and the environment. So, the emerging question is

who ultimately is responsible for human rights abuses at the supply chain? Do we need tougher laws to ensure business compliance with HR? Is policing companies ultimately the role of governments?

The role of civil society in protecting HR

On a societal level the significance of the role and committed work of civil society organizations in the protection and advancement of human rights is beyond doubt. Civil society actors review government's commitments to HR, conduct investigations, raise public awareness, sensitize citizens to HR abuses and nonetheless disseminate information concerning human rights issues.

Civic organizations function as watchdogs not only on governmental activities but also on the activities of big tech corporations that dominate social media, the so called "Surveillance Giants". They play an extremely important role in raising awareness of harms that the business model of big tech companies may cause.

Furthermore, civil society actors have a crucial role to play in ensuring a human rights-based approach in the development and use of technology and online platforms and protecting human rights online.

The seminar will also address the challenges that civil society organizations face, especially in hostile environments. Many states used and misused emergency situations and emergency lawmaking to target civil society organizations critical towards disproportional governmental measures.

TARGET GROUP

The seminar is targeted at young liberal politicians, policy makers, representatives from NGO's or business companies, who have a capacity to influence HR sensitive policies and would benefit from a greater awareness of the importance of HR. Participants should have a strong interest in HR and digital rights. Having a solid foundation in the human rights field is an advantage.

METHODOLOGY

The seminar is participant oriented and based on methods enhancing participation. The seminar provides the participants with a platform for active exchange of knowledge and experiences. There is no formal teaching. However, there will be some input by the moderators and external experts from the field.

OBJECTIVES

To expand knowledge of human and digital rights, to generate greater awareness of i) the special relationship between rule of law and HR and digital rights, ii) the threats and benefits of technological developments in the protection of human rights iii) the role of civil society actors in defending and advancing human rights and the serious challenges they face by doing so iv) the urgency for businesses to respect human rights in their business operation. A further aim of the seminar is to encourage participants to find appropriate and implementable solutions to the problems and challenges raised in the course of the seminar that are in line with liberal principles.

Facilitators



Enikő Gal

Is a lawyer by profession and after a few years working in the business field, she focused more and more on human rights. Enikő graduated from Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Law (Budapest), holds a Master of Law in human rights from the Central European University. She is in the final semester of her PhD studies at the faculty of Law, Budapest. She has been facilitating seminars and workshops as a free-lance consultant for the Friedrich Naumann Foundation on various subjects, including human rights, rule of law, secularism, migration and digital rights. She also holds a diploma in integrative coaching from Grow Group, Budapest. She is a mother of three children and currently works as a free-lance facilitator and coach.



Hussam Erhayel

The Executive Director of the International Federation of Liberal Youth and former Jordan Projects Coordinator at the Friedrich-Naumann Foundation for Freedom. Graduated from the German Jordanian University and currently studying Public Administration at the Hertie School in Berlin. Through his 8+ years of work experience in Political Education, Erhayel designed, lead, and co-facilitated several seminars and conferences, including seminars on Networking, NGO management and the Foundations of the Open Society at the International Academy for Leadership (IAF).

The Foundation

We, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, promote individual liberty, free and open societies and free markets in Germany and throughout the world. To us freedom is the guiding principle in policy making. We believe that free and open societies are the only societies that allow human beings to decide for themselves what is best, to develop their full potential and to pursue their dreams. This is what we mean when we claim to value human dignity. And it is freedom that produces prosperity. Together with our counterparts – who all share a similar set of values – we support initiatives in Germany and abroad that serve to enhance respect for the rule of law, private property and human rights, that foster tolerance and that strengthen economic freedom rights and democracy.

The programmes of the Foundation's International Academy for Leadership (IAF) form an integral part of our international work and offer Liberals from all parts of the world opportunities to engage in dialogue, an exchange of ideas, networking and cooperation. We aim to inspire.

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Theodor-Heuss-Straße 26
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