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MAGAZINE



Global Campus of Human Rights

In this edition: interviews to Olof Skook, Ivana Jelić, Michael O'Flaherty | "Authoring Justice" stories by Anonymous, Lien Arits, Mattia Bastianelli Gambini, Saugat Pokharel | An Unconventional Conference hosted by GC Caucasus | Alumni in Athens | EMA visit to Kosovo | 6th edition of the GC Policy Observatory | Right Livelihood in Santa Cruz | The new Venice Statement



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Editorial

MANFRED NOWAK

Secretary General
of the Global Campus
of Human Rights

The 13th GC Magazine provides an excellent overview of the broad variety of Global Campus activities during the first half of 2024. A highlight was the **4th High-Level Venice Conference on the Global State of Human Rights**, organized together with our partner Right Livelihood around our project “Reconceptualizing Exile” and dedicated to the shrinking space for human rights defenders in an increasingly hostile environment in many parts of our contemporary world. It brought together human rights defenders from Asia, the Arab world, Russia, Africa and Latin America, who continue their human rights work in exile with the support of the Global Campus and Right Livelihood, as well as high level participants from the UN, including the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders Mary Lawlor, the OSCE, including the Director of ODIHR Matteo Mecacci, the Council of Europe and the EU, artists and our GC academic community. Following the 2023 Venice Statement: Towards a New Era for Human Rights, and together with the human rights defenders attending the conference, we reflected on their lived experiences and the wider conference discussions in our 2024 Venice Statement on “Reconceptualising Exile for Human Rights Defenders at Risk”, which you can also find in this GC Magazine.

Elisa Aquino and her team at the Communications Department used this conference for **interviews with Michael O’Flaherty**, former Director of the FRA in Vienna and recently appointed Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, and **Olof Skoog**, the successor of Eamon Gilmore as EU Special Representative for Human Rights. Michael has been a close friend of the Global Campus for many years. He took up his new function at a time when the common values of the Council of Eu-

rope – human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law – are threatened by Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, a backsliding of democracy caused by the rise of populism and extremism in a growing number of European States, the long-term crisis of the European asylum and migration policies and a lack of respect for the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. It is, therefore, refreshing to hear him talk about the resilience of the Council of Europe on the occasion of its 75th anniversary and that he had left our High-Level Venice Conference “re-energised and with a reinvigorated sense of purpose”.

While Michael deals with the situation of human rights within the member States of the Council of Europe, the mandate of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights relates to human rights as a foreign policy tool outside the EU. **The Global Campus and its regional hubs are, therefore, looking forward to a close cooperation with Olof Skoog, who is convinced that “nobody does more for human rights in the world than the European Union, financially and politically”.** However, he also stressed that “we need to be more rigorous in applying high human rights standards at home to be a credible human rights force on the global scene”.

Another interview was conducted with **Ivana Jelić**, judge from Montenegro at the European Court of Human Rights, who participated in our CEDU training course on the jurisprudence of the European Court in April and calls it a “court of hope”. She is particularly hopeful about the role of the Court in climate justice litigations by applying the European Convention as a living instrument to be interpreted in accordance with present day challenges.

This GC Magazine dedicates much space to **“Authoring Justice”, a new online course on story telling for change with award winning author Andrew Leon Hanna**. Students in this online course followed video lectures and five live webinars with a diverse group

of international literary leaders. This is also a unique opportunity for prospective non-fiction writers. As Angela Melchiorre, Head of our E-Learning Department, remarked, **“telling the stories of unsung heroes is an inspiring and effective way to remind us that human rights and justice have to be nurtured, protected, and conquered every single day”**. Some of these short pieces (“capstones”) are covered in this edition, others will be published in the next one.

Other events organized by the GC Headquarters during the first half of this year and covered by the present GC Magazine include the following:

- **EMA Study Visit to Kosovo**, organized like every year by Marijana Grandits (**19-26 January**). In more than 60 different visits and discussions with high level politicians, artists, international and non-governmental organisations, more than 100 students from Venice and Vienna were introduced to the practical aspects of human rights field work and continuing political challenges in a post-conflict society. As always, the Kosovo field trip was the highlight of the first semester of EMA.
- Kick-off of the new EU-funded **“Climate Justice and Human Rights Education” project at the Moldova State University (1 March)**, organized by Adriano Remiddi, Head of the Capacity Development Unit, in cooperation with GC Caucasus with the aim of setting up an interdisciplinary Lab on Climate Justice and Human Rights between the Faculties of Law and Biology.
- **Conference “Inclusion through Art”**, organized by GC Caucasus in cooperation with the Global Campus HQ, Right Livelihood and Swedish Share Music & Performing Arts at Yerevan State University (**6-8 March**). This conference explored the nexus of art, human rights, children’s rights, disability rights, and inclusion. It brought together artists, including composer and human rights educator Nigel Osbourne and theatre performer Alessandro Lenzi, RL Laureates, the Child Leadership Team of Armenia, and the GC community. It followed the Children’s Rights Regional Officers’ (CRROs) Strategic Planning Workshop “Looking into the Next Five-Year Cycle of the Global Campus – Right Livelihood Cooperation” at Yerevan State University (4-6 March), organized by Barbara Strasser, Head of our Children’s Rights Department, and Mariam Muradyan, CRRO at GC Caucasus.
- Participation of GCHQ staff, students and alumni in the **“Fundamental Rights Forum”**, organized by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) in Vienna (**11-12 March**). Thanks to our close cooperation with the FRA, representatives of the GC participated in various high-level panel debates and workshops on topical issues such as the climate crisis, digitalisation, artificial intelligence, the shrinking civic space, economic inequality and armed conflicts. As with former directors Morten Kjaerum and Michael O’Flaherty, the GC will continue to closely cooperate with the current director Sirpa Rautio.
- **GC Alumni Conference on “Climate Justice and the Rights of Future Generations”**, organized in Athens by a taskforce consisting of seven alumni from our GC regions under the lead of Manuela Pegoraro, Head of Academic Partnerships, and Hazem Mizyed, Alumni Coordinator (**17-19 April**). This in-person conference further strengthened the collaboration of our alumni across the different regions of the GC.
- **“1st European Cross-Regional School in Climate Justice and Human Rights”**, organized by Adriano Remiddi, Head of our Capacity Development Unit, in close cooperation with Moldova State University and GC Caucasus in Burcuta, close to Chisinau (**20-25 May**). Bringing together students, human rights defenders and civil servants from Moldova and the

EU enlargement countries, it aimed at facilitating a green transition in these countries.

- **International Student Conference on “Just Transition”**, organized by the OSCE Academy in Bishkek (Anja Mihr) and the GCHQ (Manuela Pegoraro and Tijana Bauer) in Kyrgyzstan (**17-21 June**). This was a unique event taking place in Bishkek and the breath-taking mountain lake of Issyk Kul, in which students and professors from all eight regional Master programmes of the GC participated by presenting and discussing regional perspectives on truth, justice, reconciliation and just transition. In light of the present challenges around the world, transition did not only cover examples of just transition from dictatorships and armed conflicts to more democratic and peaceful societies, but also the gradual transition from democracies via “illiberal democracies” to dictatorships and wars. This student conference was followed by in person meetings of the GC Council

and the Academic Affairs Committee in Bishkek (21-22 June).

These are just a few examples of the rich diversity of current GC activities. Other important events, such as the Annual Nelson Mandela Moot Court, organized by the University of Pretoria in Geneva, the current Summer School on Cinema, Human Rights and Advocacy organized by the Project and Trainings Department (Alberta Rocca) in Venice or recent events of the Capacity Development Unit in Timor Leste illustrate the dedication of our community to strengthen human rights and human rights education in times of global challenges.

Let me close this editorial by mentioning also that on 21 May, **our President Veronica Gomez and I had the pleasure and honour of receiving, on behalf of the Global Campus, the prestigious “North-South Prize” of the Council of Europe** by the President of Portugal and the President of the Portuguese Parliament in the beautiful historical Senate Chamber of the Parliament in Lisboa.

Interviews



Olof Skoog

EU Special Representative

The Press Office had the opportunity to interview the EU Special Representative for Human Rights Olof Skoog about his recent appointment and his priorities for the years to come.

Congratulations on your appointment as a new EU Special Representative for Human Rights. Could you share with us your views on your goals and objectives assuming this important role? What are your priorities in addressing the current global human rights and democracy challenges?

Thank you. As you know, my mandate encompasses all human rights as well as international humanitarian law and international criminal justice everywhere in the world except the EU. My mandate is an honour but it is also a great challenge in its scope. I can easily spend all my time focusing only on major crises which have been looming far and close. It is clear that I need to calibrate and prioritize my activities and my methods of work.

First of all, I will be reminding everybody that we as the EU need to keep human rights at the centre of our foreign policy agenda as our strategic offer to other countries and their people. Human rights are not a choice, they

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During my visit to Venice, I was impressed by Global Campus students and alumni, by the faculty and by the pace of growth of your academic network. And I must add that my own office benefits from this growing and vibrant community in a very concrete way. We offer one internship post every year to a fresh Global Campus graduate. I am looking forward to welcome another alumna or alumnus in my team early next year!

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are embedded in what we are as a foreign policy actor. I plan to spend more political energy on countries where we have leverage and where there is inclination to move in the right direction. We should be always ready to assist other countries' in their human rights journey and share experiences from our own travel. I plan to work on our human rights narrative and on our tone, in particular with countries of the so-called Global South. Sometimes, our message is right but needs to be repackaged. I am also looking at longer term and more sustained engagement, starting with getting a “foot in the door” with the most difficult countries. Last but not least, I wish to rely on and work closely with international institutions, such as the UN and its agencies and mechanisms. They have legitimacy, authority, impartiality and expertise. We need them to build bridges and depoliticize human rights debates between countries. I also believe that we need to better link our bilateral cooperation with multilateral discussions in New York and Geneva.

In your opinion what are the most important challenges and topics in the Human Rights agenda of the EU external relations?

One of the key issues I have identified during my first months as EUSR is bringing coherence to the EU's human rights action

and connecting our internal and external policies. Nobody does more for human rights in the world than the European Union, financially and politically. However, we are sometimes fragmented and disjointed. Sometimes, we work in silos. And we need to be more rigorous in applying high human rights standards at home to be a credible human rights force on the global scene. We need to “connect these dots”.

Among the most important topics and challenges, I want to point out new technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, business activity as well as the climate change and environmental issues at large. These are new areas shaping the human rights agenda of our times. The EU has been and will continue to be a frontrunner in all these areas, advocating for a human rights-based and human-centric approach.

What is the added value for the EU to continue being a long time partner of the Global Campus of Human Rights network?

The EU has been a proud partner and supporter of the Global Campus since its conception. Investing in future human rights practitioners - be they academics, civil society advocates, or public officials - is an investment in resilience against growing attacks on international human rights law

and multilateral institutions underpinning it. It is also an investment in peace, security and development for human rights are the best prevention and the safest road to prosperity. During my visit to Venice, I was impressed by Global Campus students and alumni, by the faculty and by the pace of growth of your academic network. And I must add that my own office benefits from this growing and vibrant community in a very concrete way. We offer one internship post every year to a fresh Global Campus graduate. I am looking forward to welcome another alumna or

alumnus in my team early next year!

Could you give a personal message to students, professors, alumni, partners and staff of the Global Campus of Human Rights?

I wish you all to keep up and nurture a passion for human rights, which is arguably the most important ingredient for sustaining the relevance of human rights across the world and making human rights tangible and universal public goods for everyone, everywhere.

Ivana Jelić

Judge of the European Court of Human Rights

The Press Office had the occasion to interview the Judge of the European Court of Human Rights Ivana Jelić during our CEDU training course that took place in our Venice Headquarters from 11-14 April 2024.

What role can the European Court of Human Rights play in a context where human rights are continuously under threat?

As an international regional court of human rights, the ECtHR is a corrective judicial mechanism, which protects human rights and freedoms enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and

the Protocols thereto by establishing if the national courts correctly or wrongly applied European human rights legal standards. It is not the fourth instance court, but the court which respects principle of subsidiarity emphasizing that national courts bear primary responsibility in applying European human rights standards. The Strasbourg Court is often the last judicial instance at broader European level where the individuals can seek the justice.

This is actually the court of hope. And, as such, it goes under continuous challenges also because human rights are under continuous threat. The latest decisions and a judgment on climate change influence on enjoyment on human rights bring a self-explanatory argument regarding the importance and actuality of the Court and its approach that the ECHR should be interpreted in accordance with the present-day conditions, invoking the

application of a living instrument doctrine.

What are the landmark judgments that the European Court has decided on in the last few years? What may be future ones that are currently under discussion?

During last three years the Court decided in Grand Chamber on very important cases regarding the allegations on serious human rights violations and found violation in most of them. I would certainly like to say that those are a/m so-called climate change cases decided in 2024 - Carême v. France (dec.) [GC], no. 7189/21, Duarte Agostinho and Others v. Portugal and 32 Others (dec.) [GC], no. 39371/20, Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz and Others v. Switzerland [GC], no. 53600/20. However, there are more land mark cases regarding different human rights, such as: Yüksel Yalçınkaya v. Türkiye, no. 15669/20, decided in 2023, regarding conviction for membership of a terrorist organization based decisively on the use of an encrypted messaging application; Fedotova and Others v. Russia, no. 40792/10 and 2 others regarding absence in Russian law of any possibility of legal recognition for same-sex relationship, regardless of the form such recognition might take; H.F. and Others v. France, nos. 24384/19 and 44234/20 regarding lack of review with safeguards against arbitrariness for refusal to repatriate nationals held with their young children in Kurd-run camps after the fall of “Islamic



State” they had joined; Kavala v. Türkiye, no. 28749/18 which is the second judgment in an infringement procedure for failure to abide by Court’s final judgment explicitly indicating the need for an applicant’s immediate release; Grzęda v. Poland, no. 43572/18 regarding the democratic backsliding in the rule of law in Poland, treating the applicability to premature termination, after legislative reform, of a judge’s term of office as a member of the National Council of the Judiciary, as well as a lack of judicial review.

In your opinion, what is the importance of professional training for lawyers in the field of fundamental rights? What is so essential about the approach used in Global

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Campus courses that allows to integrate the Convention within the national judicial systems?

The most important is that professional trainings in the human rights protection are regular and that their curricula are up to date. I would like to command the Global Campus courses inclusive approach in terms of including practitioners to train and be trained. It is highly appreciated that the GC includes European human rights judges in those trainings, with an emphasis on the recent ECtHR caselaw. Tandem lecturing is also very crucial for dynamics and interaction.

Can you leave a message to the Global Campus of Human Rights community?

Keep doing education on international legal standards in human rights protection, as well as dissemination of human rights culture and democratic values, as they belong to all and serve to all!

Michael O'Flaherty

Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

The Press Office had the occasion to interview the new Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Michael O'Flaherty about his responsibilities and his priorities for the years to come.

Congratulations on your appointment as a new Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights. Could you share with us your views on your goals and objectives assuming this important role?

First, I seek to embed concern for human

rights in the response to the great issues of the moment. A second priority of mine is standing up for the most marginalised people in our societies, those pushed to the edges and often overlooked, such as Roma and Travellers, people in occupied and disputed territories, the elderly, and person with disabilities. A third priority of mine is to support human rights defenders and civil society. Fourth, it is crucial to retain and exploit the capacity to engage quickly with urgent human rights situations.

I look at how to deploy strategically the toolbox at the disposal of the Commissioner to engage human rights challenges in an agile and flexible way and through law- and evidence-based claims. I am committed to vigorous engagement with the members



states to ensure better respect for human rights. While being scrupulously independent, I will strengthen partnerships and cooperation.

Which are the main challenges and topics to be addressed regarding human rights and democracy?

First, the challenges are enormous, with copycat human rights violations, from the treatment of migrants to the pressure put on civil society. Of course, there have always been human rights violations but the extent to which states are willing to walk away from them is corrosive.

We are observing how the erosion of the rule of law creates conditions whereby border guards can push back migrants with next to no accountability or where human rights defenders and civil society actors are under increasing pressure for standing up for human rights. We observe growing distrust in public institutions and dissatisfaction with the state of democracy as well as a growing perception among people that their rights are not respected in a context of growing inequalities.

Another challenging dimension is the role of

disinformation amplified through social media and the use of artificial intelligence. If you add the primordial challenge that is Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine - a deliberate war against the modern rights-based Europe, the urgent need to catch up with the fast-evolving artificial intelligence systems and the potential for an unjust energy transition, we hit at the foundations.

In this context, we must be ever vigilant to protect our societies and their institutions by defending the interconnected trio of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. We must wake up to what is at stake, and as we do, we must never forget how much has been achieved. It is a case of standing up and protecting the only universally agreed roadmap to honour human dignity.

This brings me to my second point. We are in a moment of great opportunity with a resilient Council of Europe in its 75th year and my own Office celebrating its 25th year. These milestones present us with moments to renew and reinvest.

What motivates you as a new Commissioner to continue being a partner of the Global



We, who work in human rights, are also about negotiating a pathway from the ordinary day experience of our lives to the great principles of dignity, freedom, and justice.



Campus of Human Rights? What does the institution you are representing hope to achieve through the continued support to our rapidly growing academic network in the coming years?

Partnerships are essential to my work as Commissioner and the Global Campus, as an academic hub and network, plays a central role in promoting deep understanding of the issues we face. The convenings organised by the Global Campus, such as the High-Level Human Rights Conference, provide invaluable opportunities to meet with a wide range of human rights actors and with human rights defenders from around the globe. Participating gives me the opportunity to listen to their stories. I have left this year's edition re-energised and with a reinvigorated sense of purpose. Together, as a human rights community, we can make a difference.

Could you give a personal message to students, professors, alumni, partners and staff of the Global Campus of Human Rights?

I would like to repeat the message I delivered to the 2018/2019 Graduation Ceremony of the European Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation and Inauguration of the 2019/2020 Academic Year.

And that is: be the guardians of human rights so together we go forth to live in times of hope. At the time, I offered a metaphor that was based on the work that Sean Scully presented

at the Biennale. He had created a sculpture - a 10-meter-high multi-coloured tower made of interlocking pieces weaving it - that rose over ten metres under the dome of the Basilica San Giorgio Maggiore.

The explanation mentioned that the artist was inspired by the biblical story of Jacob's Ladder: a ladder serving as a conduit between the world we inhabit and the one that lies beyond, the high divinity. It is a path along which you negotiate the movement from one world to the other. I thought that this is an interesting metaphor to transpose in human rights terms.

We, who work in human rights, are also about negotiating a pathway from the ordinary day experience of our lives to the great principles of dignity, freedom, and justice.

All of us as guardians of the pathway have clear functions.

First, we must protect the pathway. We must protect the ladder of human rights because it is under threat from so many different directions.

Second, we must keep fixing the ladder because it is not perfect and it needs to be constantly fixed, adjusted and repaired to be meaningful for our lived experience.

Third, we must strengthen its foundations.

And most importantly of all, we must make sure that it is accessible. Everybody, regardless of race, sexual orientation, gender, nationality must have the access and the possibility to climb the ladder.

Authoring Justice Capstone Projects

This year, the Global Campus of Human Rights debuted an exciting new online course called “Authoring Justice.” The course focuses on how to write powerful narrative nonfiction works about issues of human rights and social justice – using storytelling to touch the hearts and minds of readers, affecting change around the world. This first iteration included lessons from award-winning authors and human rights leaders, including Professor Andrew Leon Hanna (the main lecturer), Justice Albie Sachs, Casey Gerald, Kao Kalia Yang, Jemma Neville, and Joel Rickett.

The inaugural cohort of students are human rights advocates, lawyers, professors, and researchers from across the globe with a wide range of focus areas – from peace mediation in Ukraine to equitable access to technology in Nepal and beyond. The following pages feature a few selected examples of the students’ “Capstone Projects,” which were designed to be either standalone long-form works or components of books they are now beginning to write.

Little Stories of the Big Steppe

Anonymous

“Oh, Mommy, pleaaase,” was the final appeal of my baby sister.

Mom gave it another thought and, given that all three of us were all over her, the only choice she felt she had was to surrender. Blissfully, we started jumping up and left and right while our Mom went to her coat, took all the money she had in its pockets and – after looking at the contents of her palm for a moment – put the coat on, told us to behave, and left.

From the entrance door, we rushed to the window overlooking our front yard, and only from that window was the shop visible – standing proudly on a tiny hill. At that moment I was to report to my two younger siblings on Mom’s journey to that only shop in the village.

So I go, “She’s halfway through.” They unanimously scream “Yaay!”

That reporting duty of mine was due to me being the only one of the three tall enough to reach the window. Well, with a bit of windowsill support, while those two didn’t reach even the windowsill.

“And now? Where is she now?”, they asked impatiently while jerking my hand jumpingly. I say, “She’s entering the shop!” My baby brother dropped to the floor under the weight of happiness his tiny heart was overjoyed with.

“Tell us everything you see!” my sister commanded.

“I will”, was my response.

“And now, and now? Has she exited yet?”

My jumping heart was so joyous that I’m not sure my reporting duty was being carried out sufficiently. But gosh, even a split second-long delay would upset those two, so I pulled my free-spirited philosophical self back together and said that Mom was still in the store.

My baby brother got up and, with all the seriousness of the matter, stated that that was due to the difficulty of choice. A huge smile appeared on his face when he added, “Maybe Mommy will get us something in addition to the cookies!” They both started jumping again, while I was jumping in my heart just imagining it was true.

“She’s out!” I screamed. The euphoria that came upon us filled the entire room – perhaps, the whole tiny house we lived in.

“Do you see what she has in her hands?” my brother asked.

“She is carrying a bag”, I responded.

“Is it big?” my sister continued.

“It is big,” was my response after careful examination of the bag’s size thanks to what I thought back then was my magical skill of zooming in.

“Can you see what’s inside?” one of them inquired. And while I was thinking how to respond, Mom opened our wooden gate and entered. We three rushed to the entrance door and started applauding in unison when she opened it.

“What did you get us, Mommy?” we asked altogether. And instead of answering she just stretched her arm toward us and gave us the bag. We gladly took it and rushed to the kitchen, turned left, and entered our teeny-tiny living room. The sofa was implicitly chosen as our place for landing. As soon as we reached it, we put the bag onto it, carefully opened it, and saw the cookies. What a blissful sight that was! We asked Mom to divide them for us and right after she did, we each grabbed one and started savouring it, looking at each other with the happiest sparks in our eyes.

* * *

It was not before I got into my adulthood that I could fully embrace and appreciate how difficult it was for our parents to provide for us back in the 90s in Ukraine.

The country had just gained its independence. “Splendid!”, you’d say, right? And it was! However, the people of Ukraine quickly realized that the country was left in economic ruins after decades of Soviet rule, with an urgent need to relaunch itself... and little strength to do so.

This is how the decade that became quite idiomatic came about. In the 2000s up until 2014, you would hear from many something like, “Are they trying to send us back into the 90s?” – where 90s would stand for dark, hungry, volatile, and uncertain times.

Truth be told, this is not how we, then children, felt. But thinking back to our parents with full-time jobs from dawn ‘till dusk – for which neither of them was paid for years – and having to provide for the three of us... it never ceases to break my heart.

Those were the times of temporary currency, inflation, devaluation, and other terms only economists use confidently. Those were the times that if you get luck and get paid your monthly salary, sometimes the only thing you could afford buying would be a box of matches.

Speaking of matches: they were quite necessary, during long and regular blackouts, which lasted for years. I remember doing my homework by candlelight while the world outside our tiny window was immersed in complete darkness. Those evenings by candlelight must have left a lasting effect on me, as even in the present times, I never fail to appreciate the evening city lights. They turn me into a little girl in awe admiring their beauty.

My family comes from the northwest of the country. After the Chernobyl disaster, our village fell into one of the radioactive contamination zones, which forced us to move all the way to the south of the country, just a few dozen kilometres up the Crimean Peninsula. Some doctor advised such a move to my mom, saying that the sea breeze will heal her children. And we did move, however, the sea breeze became the seas’ breeze, in plural, as we started living between

the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov.

I clearly remember my first day at school: my classmates didn't understand me, and it felt quite lonely during the recesses. It wasn't because they were mean; it was because their language was surzhyk, a mixture of Ukrainian and Russian, while I spoke Ukrainian with a few Belarusian words. Now I know they were Belarusian, but back then I was confident they were Polish.

Step by step – or better, recess after recess – we started understanding each other's 'language' so to say. The school programme was in Ukrainian, though, but maybe their challenge with understanding me was the fact that we were first graders, and they simply didn't hear much of Ukrainian before, or at least not enough to develop an ear for it.

In the South of Ukraine, we have steppe. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as:

1. one of the vast usually level and treeless tracts in southeastern Europe or Asia
2. arid land with xerophilous vegetation found usually in regions of extreme temperature range and loess soil.

Our Steppe in the Kherson region definitely falls into the above categories: it's vast with blistering hot summers and sometimes harsh winters. It's not exactly treeless, however, due to human presence and perseverance. It's rather an oasis.

But most importantly, it smells like Home – home, where you always want to come back: be it to lick your wounds, be it to celebrate life. By pure accident or a game of fate, if you wish, the Steppe got forever engraved in my heart and soul.

Historically serving also as a home for numerous tribes like Sarmatians, Scythians, and Goths, to name a few, our Steppe is free in spirit and vast in nature. A reliable irrigation system made it possible to grow amazingly sweet fruit and juicy vegetables, providing for its people.

Our Steppe became part of my identity, the indispensable one. Its first winters, however, were a tad challenging.

* * *

Mom dressed us up: a few pairs of pants, a few sweaters, heavy scarves, headscarves and on top of them went our winter hats, then coats with gloves attached to a string. God knows how many pairs of socks, boots. And having achieved that, she put us out of the door, asking us to be careful.

I immediately put myself between my sister and brother, took their hands and we started the journey to their kindergarten. Just to help you imagine: the distance from our home to the kindergarten was a few hundred meters, but sometimes it felt like a mission impossible, and that was one of those days.

The wind got so wild that instead of walking, we were running – and not out of our own free will. It was blowing into our backs so strongly that the only thing that saved us from being blown away was my school backpack filled with heavy textbooks, copybooks, pens, and crayons.

So runningly we reached the kindergarten and I felt relieved that half of my mission that morning was accomplished. But right after the 'pew' moment came a question: how in the world was I going to make it in the opposite direction, having to fight against the wind this time? And this time without those two little balancing kettlebells I happened to have left in the kindergarten!

Somehow, I got to the kindergarten's gate and slowly proceeded one-on-one against the wind in my face, hugging every lamppost and tree on my way – at the end of that journey they felt like my best friends.

That day I didn't get 'gone with the wind' – but I was close. And that was the day when little me fully comprehended the difference between my former home's climate and the new home's climate – the Steppe's climate.

* * *

When we moved into our new home, our neighbours from all sides came to meet us. One evening our 'left' neighbour came over and, when he found out where we were from, he took us to his barn and gave us a watermelon he preserved from the summer. Watermelon in February! We, the kids, were delighted!

A watermelon back from where we were from was a very rare treat, and apparently knowing that our kind and generous new neighbour exclaimed, "You will have plenty of those here in summer!" In that moment, in our eyes, our new neighbour looked like Saint Nicolas to us, a younger version, though, than the one usually portrayed in children's books.

We couldn't believe our luck and rushed back home to have the watermelon. Sadly, the watermelon aged inside, but the image of it got engraved into our memory forever. Now we were in the Watermelon Land! Think about that for a minute!

* * *

To make ends meet, our parents had a huge vegetable garden. There were plenty of fruit trees for jams and jellies, as well as chickens, ducks, geese, and pigs. Since no one had any money, people bartered, exchanging goods and services. Even salesmen who eventually ended up visiting the village, offering some typology of goods and knowing that nobody would have any money to pay them, often asked the price in chickens.

I remember one day a sort of tiny van came and stopped next to the shop – the only shop in the village – so passers-by would stop and ask what that family was offering. Needless to say, the news about parrots reached the school in very little time, and all the children instead of heading home, ran to the place to see real parrots. I wasn't an exception and in my own timid way approached the van and started staring at the parrots, admiring them.

They were fascinating: light blue and light green, and there were so many of them! As I was standing there with my friend, the lady said, "They are budgies. You can get one for two hens or one rooster."

We thanked the lady and headed home, thinking that there was no way whatsoever that we would

ever get our respective parents to pay such a high price for a parrot. We also discussed that a bird for bird price does actually make sense, for parrots are birds and so are chickens, just bigger and heavier, and with less flying experience.

My friend, however, unlike me, had grandparents living in our village, so we decided to ask her grandma for help. The negotiations lasted for what felt like a couple of hours, and finally the grandma gave in, adding though, "I'll give you a rooster, forget about two hens!"

Fair enough, we thought. Overwhelmed with joy, we waited outside their household for the rooster. He came in a potato sack, and we headed back to the village center.

Home is where I planted my Akidene. About love, migration and freedom of movement

Lien Arits

Me: "Boobs, I imagine you're too busy packing or coping now to have a call. So I just want to tell you that I am so happy this day has come that you can go get 'em. Your freedom and human right to be a citizen.

At what time is your flight tomorrow? Also, more important, whenever I can help you with anything remotely, just give me a call. Promise?

I love you!"

- Ziyad: "Hey love, thank you. I don't think I want to sleep, my flight is early morning but I also don't see the benefit of talking about it at this point as I don't want to delve into how I'm feeling maybe this is why we all forget momentarily how things feel after they're done - we actively avoid acknowledging them..."

I met Boobs, my nickname for Ziyad¹, during my studies in Human Rights and Democratisation in the Arab World, at the Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth.

During a school trip to Chouf, a mountainous area south-east of Beirut, where the largest forest of the magic Cedars of Lebanon provides for clean air above the clouds, Ziyad gave me their shirt when they noticed me shivering from the cold. We had talked a couple of seconds earlier. And now they gave me their shirt? I was surprised by their sweetness. Without a word, I accepted the checked shirt, brown and gray, smelling like a sporty, gender neutral, deodorant. I felt seen by the gesture.

The smell of the pine leaves reminded me of those rituals the priest used to do with incense, when my parents still used to take me to church. I felt small, in that new environment. Surrounded by twenty-some classmates from South Africa to the USA, from Gaza to Barcelona, all strangers, shyly searching for a connection, an invite to a small talk. Above the clouds, in that forest, Ziyad and I planted a seed that would soon develop into a friendship across borders.

I moved to Beirut in the summer of 2021, in between two suffocating covid-pandemic lockdowns, bored of friends and family in my little established life, house and career on track. I left on my

way to chase my dream of studying in 'the Middle-East', trying to grasp what makes Arabs flee to Europe. I know they flee from war, political conflict or economic hardship, of course. But, why Europe, full of racism? Is it the proximity, or the fact that Europe generally speaking has higher-income economies? And, how severe should a livelihood become for one to leave home in ways entailing the risk of dying on the way, knowing that the destination country will not welcome you as a child who falls in the arms of their parents after being bullied at school. Rather the opposite. Why do you try to make it to a destination community that will bully you?

Many evenings we spent discussing this dilemma among friends, while sipping Almaza, the Lebanese pils beer, and having late night *kaak u jibneh*, a typical Lebanese type of bread with melted cheese inside, delivered to Ziyad's door. (It works for breakfast, or as a late night snack.)

Ziyad doesn't have the identification papers that allow you to enter Europe. Their mother is Lebanese, their father is Armenian-Syrian. They don't have Lebanese citizenship, as Lebanese mothers may not pass their nationality on to their children, according to Lebanese nationality law². Ziyad's father missed his citizenship documents to transfer them to his children, for which Ziyad did not have any citizen's rights in Lebanon and is classified as 'stateless'. Because of this law, an estimated amount of 27.000 people are stateless, although they were born in Lebanon.

Today, July 6 2024, he is on his way to get Armenian citizenship. After 27 years of waiting, to avoid military service in Armenia, he took his first plane trip with a *laissez-passer*, a document for stateless people to travel across internal and external borders. He is on his way to finally see his human right to citizenship and freedom of movement realized. Once he will have the Armenian passport, we will discuss again this dilemma of staying or leaving Lebanon.

Like we do over and over again. Like I also do with my other friends from Lebanon, such as Mariya.

* * *

Me: "Kifik?"

- Mariya: *Habibi ana mniha*
I miss you. How's everything? And Joe is he better?

All is good. In my free time now I'm working on a project together with fellow alumni of the master's in Lebanon, on climate justice. It keeps me going and feeling useful in this fuckedup world. I have to admit I'm having a hard time allowing myself 'to enjoy life in a Western way, ya3ne by going out for drinks, party, and other privileged things.'

- *Wow the project sounds interesting! any help needed in data analytics lmk. I can understand your standpoint, but don't punish yourself, you are here in this western world for a reason. Advocate for what you believe in but also be gentle with yourself, and give yourself a hug everyday.*

It is always good to check in with Mariya. She is the type of friend that fills me with energy and confidence, she feels me from a distance, although we don't hear each other often. She says that is because my star sign is Gemini, and all important people in her life are Gemini, like her sister and her mother. I think it is because we share a sensitivity towards injustice.

Mariya moved to Portugal nine months after we had met, in November 2021, in Akkar, the rough utmost northern part of Lebanon, connecting the country with its neighbor Syria, whose remote villages pass on a smell of bonfires to their visitors who venture into the red zone border-area³ to absorb the overwhelming autumn colors. She sat next to me on the bus that drove us from Dawra, Beirut to Akkar, a six hour drive. Mariya and I bonded over fresh dates that she brought and generously shared with me, while we discovered our common passion for studying and reflection. That passion for knowledge drove her to migrate to Lisbon for a Master's in Data driven Marketing Intelligence. (Isn't that funny? I moved to her home to find more knowledge. She would go look for more knowledge in Europe). But fairly, it was also the urge to build stability in life that pushed her away from Lebanon, to Portugal.

I just called Mariya, a video call.

"Are you coming?" she asked me, to Lebanon she meant.

She knew we had our appointment at the local migration office yesterday. By asking that question, she was actually, indirectly, asking "did he get his papers"?

"Yes. He did! Our family reunion application has been accepted."

Tears started rolling down her cheeks when I told her he is safe and freed from worries about his residence permit for the coming five years. He is free to move again, across borders. Meanwhile, my tear-stained face was being passed around among Mariya's extended family, gathered in the kitchen of her mother's house in Ghazir, half an hour drive from Beirut, almost 400 meters above sea-level. A classic Sunday afternoon ritual among Lebanese Christians.

"So you can come to Lebanon this summer?", she asked once again, this time more convincing.

Should we? I really want to. But what with the war...

She assured me "the war (between Hezbollah and the IDF) will not happen in summer, Israel cannot afford two fronts and neither can the US, especially not before their elections.

Heartwarmed by her empathy, I told Mariya I felt like calling her rather than someone from my family or Belgian friends. We had informed several among them over a Whatsapp message: 'Joe got his papers!', which provoked loads of emojis associated with happiness. But, you likely reply with tears - happy tears - if you have been through the process yourself. The process of proving - that you are a couple, waiting - for an email with a file number, doubting - if you've given enough details about your intimate relationship, and hoping - for the best, or just for an honest officer at the foreigners affairs desk who will grant you the right to be with your family. In Belgium, 32,710 third-country nationals received a residence permit for family reasons for the first time in 2021, the year Joe and I met⁴. 32,710 times tears rolling down the cheeks of at least two people, be it happy tears or tears of stress relief. Little did we know back then.

Ziyad and Mariya are only two of the majority of young people in Lebanon trying to leave the country, resulting in a brain drain. As the Arab Youth Survey showed, more than 3 out of 4 of the youth between 18 and 24 wanted to emigrate⁵. And things in Lebanon only got worse since then. According to the Beirut-based Information International research center the number of

Lebanese emigrants soared from 17,721 in 2020 to 79,134 in 2021, an increase of 450%⁶.

They take planes with their brains. They leave their hearts behind, in between the *tabbouleh* cut with devotion by their mothers, and the Friday night *shawarma*, from now on only enjoyed by those friends who remain behind.

* * *

Joe⁷: "My mom will plant your akidene⁸ tree in front of the house today 😊"

- Me: heyyyyyy 😊

It's so nice that you have a tree that you planted in Lebanon
It means so much to me

- To me too. 3njad
It's beautiful

Joe, my love and partner, was not one of those who are wanting or trying to leave when I met him. No single brain cell in his head considered moving abroad. And he was not alone.

There are other young people determined to stay. Almost one out of four among those between 18 and 24 years old. Although that sounds like a sad minority, many among them are determined to make Lebanon a better place. They start their own business, buy a piece of land to grow their own crops, or stick to the family tradition of cultivating olive trees. Although even the latter is becoming very hard, due to the 'Israeli Defense Force' who send white phosphorus, an incendiary weapon, across the border to the South of Lebanon, destroying not only the trees but also causing soil infertility for decades. They make that simple life just impossible. I hate them.

Thoughts and conversations on the role of the occupier will return in this book, when I reflect on the situation in which Lebanon finds itself today and since the civil war from 1975 and 1990, in which Joe's father had to defend himself against Syrian troops trying to conquer Zahle, Joe's hometown. The same civil war that involved Palestinians from Lebanon. It might sound complicated if you have no prior knowledge about the 'Middle-East'. I will try my best to give you new insights, based on my little knowledge and experience.

But first back to when I met Joe, my love and partner. He had a stubborn wish to stay, which made me fall in love. He made me see the beauty of life in Lebanon. On our first date, I felt butterflies in my stomach, not only for him but also for the country he called 'home'.

It was Joe's long black hair and dark eyes, lit by the stage light of the concert in Ballroom Blitz, near the shore of Beirut port, that caught my attention. (And his cute dance moves, *akid*⁹.) He noticed me, but was too shy to close the gap between us on the dance floor. I did not give up. At the end of the evening, after a lot of encouragement from his friends, he asked me for my name and phone number. That is where our love story started.

Little did Joe and I know that night about our future together, while dancing to the Arab rap texts

of The Synaptik (السينابتيك) - that I couldn't get a word of. I was dancing for the first time again since 2020, when covid-measures in Belgium prevented people from sweating on dancefloors. I even went back to the farm where my parents raised me, in a remote area in the North-East of the Limburg province. Joe was dancing for the first time since 2020 too. His hometown friends, all from the Beqaa valley, were celebrating that Joe had reached the liberating feeling he felt that night. He had overcome more challenging obstacles than some curfews and public gathering restrictions. In Lebanon covid was a minor issue in the midst of a popular uprising (*thawra*¹⁰) and a financial crisis ignited by a corrupt government.

* * *

¹ Ziad is a pseudonym used to protect the individual's identity for safety reasons.

² <https://sirenassociates.com/country/lebanon/statelessness-a-human-rights-not-political-issue-in-lebanon/>

³ According to the Belgian Foreign Affairs Office, the border area between Lebanon and Syria should be avoided under all circumstances.

⁴ https://www.myria.be/files/Cijfers_Recht_op_een_gezinsleven_2023.pdf

⁵ <https://beirutpoliticalreview.org/publications/f/youth-unemployment-and-migration-in-lebanon>

⁶ <https://themedialine.org/top-stories/stricken-lebanon-endures-3rd-exodus-as-its-people-flee-disaster/>

⁷ Joe is a pseudonym used to protect the individual's identity for safety reasons.

⁸ Akidene is the Arabic name for a loquat tree. It gives my favorite fruits to be found in Lebanon.

⁹ Akid is Arabic for 'of course'.

¹⁰ The civil protests, popularly known as 'thawra', had started in Lebanon on October 17th 2019.

Try

Mattia Bastianelli Gambini

The familiar smell of mud and wet grass fills her nostrils, as Dorotea tries to inhale all the oxygen she can and stand up. Her mind is already projected onto the next action, but her vision is blurry from the hit and obstructed by one of her blonde curls that the mud and sweat have fixed to her face. Her knee aches – a token of the battles fought on less-than-ideal rugby pitches throughout Italy. Doesn't matter. After all, she's the captain of Romagna RFC, one of the only two women rugby XV's team in Emilia-Romagna, and they're playing on their home soil, in Cesena. She just can't afford to appear lazy.

Dorotea is a relentless rugby player. She's always looking for her next job on the field. After a pass, a tackle, a ruck, her experienced ice blue eyes will automatically begin scanning for information that allows her to plan her next move. Maybe there's a weak link in the defense line that her team can exploit. Or maybe she will notice that the opponent winger is screaming for the ball out wide. If you have presence of mind, that's what you always do. But when you play at home, something changes within. It's a sort of adrenaline rush that makes you more competitive, determined, fierce. You've got to stand your ground and defend your home from the 'barbarians' that want to invade it.

And so Dorotea musters every fiber in her body and stands up again, covered in dirt. It must be one of the last actions of the game and Romagna must make it count – the score is not in their favor. "I want the ball! Pass it!" Possessed by a hidden, aggressive side of her that only surfaces on a rugby field, she screams for the ball as her forward pack (the first eight players of the team, usually the heavier and stronger individuals) are carrying it inside the defensive line. On this chilly Sunday in February, the team hasn't been good in keeping possession of the ball for more than three or four phases: "Get it out, Luzia!" can be heard before the ball is lost under the pile of players that forms every time a player is tackled.

Dorotea is ready to receive the ball. As she sees it spinning out of the hands of her teammate towards her, time slows down. Her hands are reaching for the ball and her heart is pumping faster: in her freedom to express herself, a lucid euphoria pervades her and hunts away any fear to drop the ball down. The ball slips through her fingers and hits her chest, but she still manages to adjust it and turn around to pass it again. It's a good pass that meets her teammate running at an angle, but the defensive line has had time to push forward and the collision is imminent. A thud accompanied by the sound of compressed air being forcefully exhaled announces the physicality of the game. It's chaotic bodies in motion, wrestling, struggling for every inch, until the white odd-shaped ball squeezes out of the hands of the girl in the beautiful Romagna's daunting black jersey. Thick yet slightly elastic, it is made to withstand pushing and pulling. The number on the back lacks a name because it is not designed for a specific person, thus it often doesn't fit perfectly and players like Dorotea must tuck it in their shorts. In rugby, you don't own a jersey. The jersey owns you.

The ball is lost forward. Dorotea dives onto it, but it's more of a natural reflex at this point. She knows that once the ball is lost forwards, the possession goes to the other team. As she stands up she hears 3 whistles.

It's over.

* * *

This time they won't be singing the victory song 'Romagna Mia' in front of the stands, but for them it's still important to go and thank their small audience regardless of the score. After all, "they are the engine of it all," as Dorotea is telling me, sitting at a table outside of one of our favorite cafes in San Marino. She puts down her exuberant sunglasses and lights up a cigarette.

"Those few supporters that keep showing up, the most attached to us, they give us a motive to keep pushing through... knowing you're not doing it just for yourself. It's not enough, but it's a stimulus."

Though she's usually reserved, Dorotea appreciates her family being there to support her. The adrenaline and tension disappear – at least momentarily – when they hug after a game and she can be off to address the team with a clearer mind.

When I wear the red Romagna jersey (there are at least 2), my view of the stands is different. I have the privilege of playing for the men's team of Romagna and, being a childhood friend of Dorotea, we often compare our experiences. It's not uncommon for a Romagna male rugby player to see red and yellow smoke emanating from the stands at the end of a game, only for it to clear out and reveal an almost packed stadium (albeit a very small one) cheering, chanting, and some even preparing 'Asado'. Dorotea doesn't have to squint her eyes to find the faces of her loved ones in the stands, nor is she distracted by the smell of grilled sausages as she's playing.

While the amount of spectators is not the sole measure to assess a sport-category in its entirety, it can be a good indicator of the attention it can harness and the investments it receives. We cannot think that the amount of people that show up to watch a game depends solely on how spectacular it is. The low visibility of women's rugby in this region is a symptom of larger issues. "People can't see us, we are not enough." Dorotea knows strength is in numbers and numbers are a big factor in rugby.

It's a complex sport that requires a large and diverse pool of players with different competencies on the field. Each team has fifteen players on the pitch, plus seven or eight on the bench, and these are the bare minimum for a team that wants to compete. You need even more to get through the season. Romagna used to gather the best female players from the southern half of Emilia-Romagna, but after COVID-19 the players' base was reduced and it had to unite with another club from the area around Bologna, further north, in order to survive. Now they are left with about 20 players that are actively part of the last standing rugby XV's women team in the area.

Coming from different cities, from Bologna to San Marino, each on travels up to 50 minutes to the training grounds. Commute alone can represent a barrier for many young girls wanting to play the sport, and while travel allowances (and in some cases even stipends) are granted to many men players at the level of Serie A and Serie B (first and second league in Italian non-professional rugby), the same cannot be said for our colleagues.

"I'd rather not look at how much I must spend just to be able to play this sport," - Dorotea says with a patient smile, "but not everybody can afford the same luxury and this might cut them out."

But this is just one of the barriers to accessing rugby for women. The biggest challenge is overcoming the prejudice about rugby being a "men's sport" and the stigma around being a female rugby player. "People think that if you play rugby, as a woman, you're either a tomboy or

lesbian.” Dorotea is not new to these kinds of comments, and she’s not alone. The Italian Rugby Union recently released a video showing some of the most recurring insults that professional rugby players receive online. Many of those targeted at women were purposefully attacking their femininity, alleged sexual orientations and, ultimately, their dignity.

Dorotea has delicate features, a tight waist and small hands. “They say: ‘It doesn’t look like you play rugby.’ and when I ask them how I should look, they usually reply ‘bigger, fatter, more ‘macho.’ And they start posing and grunting [like cavemen], implying that that’s what we should look like. It’s a distorted and ignorant vision.”

These prejudices, which too often prevent girls from trying out this sport, are even perpetuated within the family and in the school environment. It is even worse when women practicing rugby face discrimination and frequently abandon sports altogether because of it.

A survey carried out in Italy with rugby girls aged 10-13 and 14-18, as part of the Erasmus+ Sport Woman in Rugby project, found that while almost half of girls aged 10-13 enjoyed the friendships created thanks to this sport the most, 40 percent of them were discouraged from playing it, largely by peers and family. When looking at girls aged 10-18, the survey found that more than a quarter felt discriminated against because of rugby, mostly in school and by friends. Stereotypes represent one of the biggest barriers to the development of women rugby. Girls that might want to express themselves in this sport, but are discouraged by the stigma around it, are missing out on ways to express and – for some – fulfill themselves.

“You’ve got to be willing to get muddy, to sweat, to mess up your hair, and get bruises and scars. These things are harder to deal with for girls because of societal expectations,” Dorotea tells me as she takes another puff of her cigarette. She wears the marks on her skin with pride, they are stories to tell from the times when she feels most alive.

Her passion transpires beyond the rugby pitch and she knows that “All these prejudices disappear when people actually go to the field and find out what it really is about. Yes you get hurt, you get dirty, but they never show all the good that it has done to people like me.” In this, our experiences align perfectly. Rugby can be deeply engaging on an emotional level and allow for a self-discovery journey that makes you grow as an individual and find confidence in sides of you that you didn’t know you had.

“As a person, rugby has mutated me and my parents have fallen in love with it by seeing what it has done to me. This is what should be communicated to those who are outside the fanbase. We should display how warm the community is, how much fun it is, how many friendships are created, how much of what you have inside can be unleashed, and how your self-esteem benefits from it. This sport is more than just brute force. This sport unites people even if they don’t play it.”

* * *

On a typical training day, around 20:00, Dorotea and I would see each other from afar at the pitch in Cesena. In winter it would be dark already, but during the summer this place treats you with some beautiful sunsets. Men start practicing earlier and take possession of the whole artificial training ground. Sometimes we would hear a loud roar coming from the nearby football stadium and, in turning around, we would see the women’s team starting to warm up in a small patch of land that they’ll use until we’re finished on the artificial ground. Dorotea would be there almost all of the times, discussing with her teammates on how to make some sharper movements and

plays. The captaincy requires that she addresses the team's weaknesses, while setting a positive mindset in preparation of the next game.

For an outside observer, the view would tell the tale immediately: on the main training ground, they would see a group of about 35 men, wearing the same training kit branded with the golden rooster holding a 'Caveja', a typical symbol of Romagna; while on a small field to the side, there would be 15 to 20 women with little in common, except for their passion.

That's because even when barriers to access are overcome, the idea that rugby is not a sport for women translates into less investments and resources allocated to their sector. This can be seen at the national level, with only the top 24 female players being put under contract by the Italian Rugby Union since 2022, but it's even more obvious for local teams: "We don't have physiotherapists that take care of us as you do, nor a training kit or a bag, very basic things," Dorotea tells me. It must be said that Romagna provides the only opportunity for these women to play rugby XV's in the region and does not ask for a subscription fee from their athletes, unlike other teams.

However, what is generally asked of a female athlete is much more. "What I feel is discriminatory is that I cannot afford to be 'just' a rugby player, like you can. I need to be the best athlete on the field, as we all do, and on top of that I must take care of keeping the team together, bringing more girls and visibility to the team by doing extra activities without any support, because we need them and there is no real dedicated recruitment project. I would just like to be a rugby player, but I can't and it stresses me out. I need to take energies away from practicing my passion and devote them to all those aspects that revolve around it: from managing the team, to planning for the immediate future with the staff. I would like to pack my bag and go home after training, but for us it's not that easy."

But Dorotea and her teammates, like many other rugby girls elsewhere, are determined to chase their ambitions at all costs, even by taking on responsibilities that would usually befall on the managers. In doing this, they must sacrifice their time, which they take away from their studies, jobs, families, partners, and generally their personal lives. It goes to show the amount of passion, dedication, and perseverance that is required of a woman in rugby. It's not unusual to see self-managed social media profiles for these teams – this way they can tailor their communications to their audience and fight prejudices in their own words. "We even created a team Tinder profile so that more people know we exist!"

This feeling of being left alone in maintaining the team, counting only on your own resources and energies, undermines any attempt at creating a feeling of belonging to the same colours – of pride in wearing the same jersey. In the long run, it can be debilitating. "We're always thinking of whether there would even be a team next year, there's a constant uncertainty that affects our experiences." The regret starts surfacing. "I love this sport, it's part of who I am, but it has hurt me so much. It gives me a feeling of something unresolved; that I haven't achieved all that I could have, because I could have given more, but without the opportunities, the support, the platform, it's impossible. And when girls ask for equal conditions, we are seen as pretentious."

* * *

It's May. A peaceful sense of belonging quiets all the apprehension for the weeks to come. Dorotea has made sure that everything is in order for the departure of San Marino's national rugby 7s team, which will compete at the 2023 Games of the Small States of Europe in Malta. She sighs, making peace with the side of her that wants everything to be perfectly arranged for

others, and which too often pushes her to load an unfairly heavy weight on her shoulders. She sits on a bench facing the rugby field outside the clubhouse, the home of rugby in San Marino, her home that she contributed to build. She takes in the clean air that only a place so surrounded by trees and hills can provide and then she lights up a cigarette.

Dorotea watches us practicing in the field, knowing that now it's up to us. Hoping that we can understand and live up to the opportunity we're given. When you come from a micro-state, sometimes you forget of how difficult it is for other people to represent their nation in sports, the fierce competition, the sacrifices...

In San Marino, our hometown, our involvement in rugby differs slightly: Dorotea has an active and crucial role in the Sammarinese Rugby Union and, while she takes care of the development of rugby in our little country, her main focus is making sure that the men's national team can compete on the international stage every summer. I am one of the beneficiaries of Dorotea's efforts, and just recently became involved in women's rugby development in San Marino.

Despite the strong mutual support that such a small community can enable, there's very little opportunities for her here. Just last year we were able to re-create a grassroots women's rugby team, held together by the coach's and the players' dedication, passion, and friendship, but the numbers are still low. Dorotea is almost 30, she has a job and rugby has been taking a lot from her; she doesn't know how long this will last. Despite everything, as if she could conjure more hours than a day is actually made of, Dorotea shows up at these local training sessions too. When I ask her why she gives so much, while receiving so little back, she replies: "I live off of the adrenaline that it gives me to see you playing. That adrenaline that I'd feel if I were in your shoes during these tournaments, I can put it to work so that at least you can feel it first-hand. I do what I do hoping that, one day, I'll also experience this."

Enabling other people to chase their dreams, while you don't know if you're allowed to dream in the first place is hard enough, but Dorotea doesn't falter. "I give my contribution because we rejoice together for what we can achieve with such a small group of people. This can resonate with others and hopefully bring bigger results than a win in a game of rugby. Hopefully, one day, there will be someone to give me the same opportunities."

Once the Games are concluded under the hot Maltese sun, it's time for the awards ceremony. It was the first time that San Marino had played against other national teams of such a high level, and the results were not in our favor. Even in defeat, these experiences fill your heart to the point that you smile and are content regardless. Being able to travel, confront yourself with other players, tackle them, score tries to other national teams far better than you and most importantly, express yourself freely, all while representing your nation on the international stage sparks a feeling so liberating and empowering that it's very hard to put down in words.

Anyway, it's a very emotional moment now, especially for Dorotea: it's the women's national teams' turn to receive their awards. As she watches them smiling, taking in all the applause, walking towards the event director, ready to shake their hands, she can feel her dreams hitting the wall of the harsh reality that San Marino is not ready to allow her to be there, to be proud of herself as a player and of her teammates, to be recognized for the way that she expresses herself on the field. And in that moment a tear breaks through her proud eyes. "I will never be able to experience this": that's what's pounding in her head as she watches her peers cheering.

Dorotea is a rugby player, a very good one too, one of those who will keep showing up week after week for years, who will withstand injuries, who will intentionally switch on her 'rugby-brain' before

entering the pitch to be better than last time. She has ambitions and she knows she'd deserve to see them fulfilled. She knows she would enjoy herself competing at that level, if given the chance. It's a bitter tear the one that's falling. "Despite all the work in any capacity, all the sacrifices, all the dedication, I will never get there, even though I know I could be one of them. To me, dreaming causes sadness and disillusionment because I know that the times are not ripe for me to have the same opportunities, there aren't enough players in San Marino." The next tear though is somewhat sweet and hopeful, it's the tear of a player that stands up after being tackled in the mud and looks for the next opportunity:

"You guys need to give it your all, because what you do is inspiring to others. If there's just a remote possibility that I can do the same in the next years, I'll break my bones to get there."

Although women's rugby is slowly becoming more popular and normalized worldwide, there are still barriers to its fulfillment. The prejudices and stigmas around girls playing rugby come in various forms: from online hate speech, to discouragement from peers and family. Discrimination takes shape in a continued under-investment in the women sector, because rugby is still considered a sport for big, strong, primitive men; with management paying little attention to the very basic requests that players like Dorotea have. Yes, it's more difficult to play rugby as a woman. It requires commitment, passion, perseverance and the courage to go against the world.

But Dorotea has hopes for the future: at some point the turnover of the people in power will bring decision-makers that are more sensible to their participation in sports and things will start to change. Girls that are currently playing will grow up to be the ones who take the lead in providing better and equal opportunities for the next generations.

"I wish I could give more. If I didn't play, I could transfer my passion in a more constructive manner to other people. Right now I'm so frustrated that sometimes I forget why I'm here, doing what I'm doing. I would like to find that healthy passion again and really communicate it to girls new to rugby. Maybe even build something 'serious' in San Marino." Rugby needs these people and it will keep failing and missing out on them until Unions worldwide do not take concrete steps to eradicate stereotypes and renew the public image of rugby.

But fighting discrimination is not enough. Resources should be allocated based on effort and needs. If we keep giving more to the same categories that have benefitted from the status quo for years, the gap with more vulnerable ones can only increase and women rugby players will have to run more and more to reach their try-line.

Dorotea puts down the cigarette and looks in the distance, projected into the future.

"I wish to conclude my career with satisfaction, leaving something positive behind and knowing that even if I stop playing, the team will go on and it will be in a better place than before."

AI Anxiety: Fear of Being Left Behind

Saugat Pokharel

As the excitement for the fourth industrial revolution looms, anxiety grips me. With AI being positioned as the technology that will reshape the world, I can't help but question: Will some or all of our jobs disappear? Is Nepal ready, or will we be left behind? And is anyone doing something about this?

The questions are relevant as the Oxford Insight's Government and AI Readiness Index 2023¹ paints a stark picture for Nepal. It ranks Nepal 150th out of 193 countries, far behind the top three: the USA, Singapore, and the UK. Other South Asian nations fare similarly poorly: Afghanistan (186), Bangladesh (82), Bhutan (114), Maldives (146), Pakistan (92), and Sri Lanka (95), with rising superpower India (40) as an exception. The report shows a similar position for low-income developing countries across the globe. It makes it clear that Nepal is not ready, but will it be left behind?

Darshan Parajuli, a young Nepali entrepreneur, personifies the same anxiety. While studying Development Studies in Nepal and Journalism at the Asian College of Journalism, Darshan witnessed firsthand the transformative power of Generative AI.

However, when he came back to Nepal after his education, he realized that most Nepalese didn't share the same enthusiasm. More importantly, most Nepalese were not aware of AI, and those who were aware were reluctant to adopt it. With the problem statement in mind, Darshan co-founded TeachMeAI with Sunil Chaulagain and Devadas Rajaram. Their venture offers workshops, training, and consulting services to institutions, students, and businesses, aiming to bridge the AI knowledge gap. Darshan says, "It's my mission to make AI easy, accessible and exciting for everyone."

Within a sea of raised hands, you can see a passionate Darshan with a mic on, and in the background, a digital banner reading "Responsible AI for Youth." In the audience, young students and graduates attentively listen to Darshan speak. He conducts several of these workshops aiming to educate the masses about AI.

In another instance, you see him standing with a mic in hand and a brown notebook, reading out facts regarding Nepal's national policies and asking policymakers, "When will Nepal make its own National Policy on AI?". Advocacy from youth like him has resulted in Nepal releasing its concept paper on June 30, 2024.

Darshan sees AI as having enormous potential to impact students and views it as a great equalizer. Having faith in the younger generation and considering that the median age of Nepal is 25 years old, Darshan is optimistic about the future. He believes that with awareness and upskilling, they would not only be saved from falling behind but "100% possible" to compete in the global market.

However, in the backdrop of Darshan's optimism for the future, the present is but bleak. While the Asia-Pacific region leads in AI adoption, Nepal clearly lags behind. There are no exact studies, but experts estimate that only 5% of Nepal's population uses AI regularly², and those figures

seem accurate considering Nepal's economic realities. With a per-capita income of \$1,456, spending \$240 (the cost of ChatGPT Pro) annually on AI seems inaccessible.

* * *

For developing countries, the true potential of AI lies not in mass-consumer products (like ChatGPT) but in leveraging data to solve local problems. A study by Saurabh Mishra et al.³ suggests that nations have diverse needs, necessitating AI specialization.

It's believed that with specialization, AI can help developing nations enhance traditional industries and uncover new opportunities, allowing them to stay competitive in the rapidly expanding and evolving field of AI. The study highlighted an example: the use of AI in Agro-Tech to boost the competitiveness of India's agricultural sector (a large portion of India's GDP). While the study focused on just four countries, it underscores the importance of national or sub-national level investment in AI specializations, which is needed if a nation wants to be competitive.

Prabhat Khadka, a Nepalese software engineer with a master's degree from the University of Greenwich, exemplifies this localized approach. Having studied natural language processing and AI in Nepal during his Bachelor's at Kathmandu University in 2006, Prabhat is an AI enthusiast. Running a tech company called ktmbees in Nepal, Prabhat was approached by Sampanna Tiwari, a law student with a social problem, hoping for a technological solution. Sampanna recognized the gap in legal literacy in Nepal and proposed developing Juriease, a legal chatbot that could generate answers to legal questions using AI.

However, in developing Juriease, the team is encountering several challenges, particularly among them is the processing of Nepalese legal texts. Legal texts in Nepal use the Devanagari script, which is written in the Nepali language. Juriease currently is built upon base LLM models like Gemini and ChatGPT, which support Nepali, but their capabilities are limited. Prabhat notes that the results often miss linguistic nuances, producing odd translations and sometimes even producing Hindi as a response. This is because the models are mostly trained in Hindi for the large consumer base of India, and these companies have limited incentive to prioritize or focus on the smaller consumer base like Nepal.

These issues highlight the need for a native LLM model trained specifically in Nepali. Prabhat, too, recognizes that developing such a model will be crucial for Juriease, viewing their current product as but a proof of concept.

However, the development of a native LLM is not easy; Prabhat acknowledged that extensive investment would be required for such a model. "Access to AI infrastructure is not a problem," Prabhat notes to me. "The issue is access to investment."

This is because creating powerful language models like ChatGPT demands millions of dollars of investment in computing power. A few global companies like Nvidia primarily provide the infrastructure for this computing. Providers for such infrastructure are limited and charge a premium for access, and big tech is willing to pay the price. However, for entrepreneurs in most developing nations, the cost can be an insurmountable burden.

This has significant implications for the future of economic prosperity as even when developing

nations are successful in AI Specialization building native solutions, the end beneficiaries (those receiving payment for using the computing infrastructure) are limited to big-tech giants in the rich nations.

Additionally, AI research is generally dominated by a few actors, namely large technology firms, well-funded unicorn startups, and elite universities. For instance, 100% of the world's supercomputers are located in only 30 nations, leaving 85% of the world's 204 countries⁴ without the necessary domestic AI infrastructure to develop or compete in this sector. While with enough investment, access to AI Infrastructure is currently not an issue, it might not always be true. For example, on April 4, 2024, the US significantly restricted China's access to advanced AI chips, citing national security reasons⁵.

* * *

AI's disruptive potential extends beyond the tech industry, affecting jobs across multiple sectors. However, experts say this is natural. A study revealed that more than 60 per cent of employment in the United States in 2018 was in job titles that didn't exist in 1940⁶. Thus, AI matures, and while jobs in other sectors are reduced, the scope of AI-related jobs is expected to increase.

An analysis of LinkedIn data from Latin American countries suggested that half of the 20 fastest-growing skills (including AI) were directly linked to technological advancements. Similarly, in India, demand for AI-related skills has grown exponentially since 2016, with these roles offering substantially higher wages than other white-collar service jobs⁷. Innovative technologies often create new job opportunities. The question is what the new jobs will look like and whether the workforce in developing nations can upskill to meet the requirements of these new AI-related jobs.

With an increase in AI capability, the nature of jobs created will change. For instance, AI image recognition requires extensive human effort in data labelling, with 1 hour of autonomous driving video potentially needing 800 hours of human labour. This has created a new and rapidly growing data labelling market, estimated at \$1-3 billion and expected to see double-digit growth for the rest of the decade.

However, these new jobs often exacerbate inequality. They primarily benefit highly skilled labour and capital owners. Trends show rising wage premiums for high-skilled workers, while low and middle-skilled workers face sluggish wage growth. AI is expected to intensify these disparities. It is evident that while an AI engineer at the top would be paid a premium, jobs like data labelling will require minimal skills and thus be paid less. This reduction in pay and jobs can widen the income gap, which affects not just individuals within countries but also between nations.

AI favours scale and early adoption, potentially deepening the divide between higher and lower-income countries in terms of both income and technological complexity. The first-mover advantage in AI is significant, with Chinese and US companies currently dominating the field. The massive funding required for the AI arms race makes it challenging for competing products to rival tech giants.

This raises clear concerns that AI-driven productivity gains will likely concentrate in rich countries where these technologies are first created and adopted. There's a risk that a few big-tech

companies in wealthy nations will produce globally disruptive technology, potentially making these countries the next superpowers while leaving the rest of the world behind.

But all is not lost.

Bishal Kharal, a young engineer from Nepal, is working remotely as an AI Engineer at Fagoon AI. Currently, Bishal is working on highly sought-after sectors like LLMs and diffusion models, which qualifies him as a highly-skilled tech employee. He exemplifies the participation of individuals from developing countries in the AI revolution. But maybe even more interestingly, he is a self-taught engineer.

Having finished Grade 12 at Burnhardt College, Bishal already had experience working on tech-projects as a back-end developer. He used his background experience and his interest in AI to land his internship as a Data Scientist in Reduct Nepal, which started his career in AI.

When asked if such upskilling was possible for other students like him, Bishal notes, “With enough hard work and dedication, one can learn the necessary skills regarding AI.” As he points out, “The mathematics course in Grade 12 in Nepal is advanced and really helped in such a transition.”

However, Bishal also pointed out that “Many of the terms and technology relating to AI were scientific and technical in nature, making self-study difficult.” This was especially a problem as Bishal entered the AI space at a young age when mentorship and guidance were key to proper development. Recognizing this gap and seeking a community of like-minded enthusiasts, Bishal co-founded the Data Research Council for Students (DRCFS). DRCFS is a student-led, research-based, non-government organization working on data-intensive hands-on practice for students at all levels.

He said that while the interest in AI has increased significantly in recent years, the utilization of AI for productive work is still in development, for localized development technologies like native LLMs trained in the Nepali Language would be required, which needed extensive work and collective effort.

When asked about the potential of AI to impact jobs, he stated that non-creative work will be reduced significantly, and without a global policy for AI, inequalities can be expected to increase.

* * *

Ultimately, these are massive challenges that risk undoing years of efforts put into reducing income inequality and narrowing the gap between developing and developed nations. They can't be ignored. There's an urgent need to democratize AI and address the digital divide. But the stories of Darshan Parajuli, Prabhat Khadka and Bishal Kharal offer optimism about Nepal and other developing nations' participation in AI.

Studies emphasize the necessity for specialized investment in AI infrastructure, local AI ecosystems, skill development, sectoral strategies, and AI regulations to keep nations competitive. Developing nations can't do this alone; sharing of investment and technology along with global support is essential to ensure developing nations also get to participate in this Fourth Industrial Revolution.

* * *

¹ Emma Hankins et. al. Government AI Readiness Index 2023 (Oxford Insights, Dec. 20, 2023), <https://oxfordinsights.com/ai-readiness/ai-readiness-index/> (accessed July 10, 2024).

² Anup Ojha, The Promises and Pitfalls of ChatGPT in Nepal, The Kathmandu Post (Jan. 31, 2023), <https://kathmandupost.com/science-technology/2023/01/31/the-promises-and-pitfalls-of-chatgpt-in-nepal> (accessed July 10, 2024).

³ Mishra, S. et al. AI specialization for pathways of economic diversification. *Sci Rep* 13, 19475 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-45723-x>

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Bureau of Industry and Security, Department of Commerce, Implementation of Additional Export Controls: Certain Advanced Computing Items; Supercomputer and Semiconductor End Use; Updates and Corrections; and Export Controls on Semiconductor Manufacturing Items; Corrections and Clarifications, 15 C.F.R. §§ 732, 734, 736, 740, 742, 744, 746, 748, 758, 770, 772, & 774 (2024) (interim final rule).

⁶ Autor, David, Caroline Chin, Anna M. Salomons, and Bryan Seegmiller. 2022. *New Frontiers: The Origins and Content of New Work, 1940–2018*. Technical Report. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

⁷ Wall, Sheridan, and Hike Schellmann. 2021. "LinkedIn's Job-Matching AI Was Biased. The Company's Solution? More AI." *MIT Technology Review*, June 23, 2021.

News and Events

“Authoring Justice”: new online course on storytelling for change with Prof. Andrew Leon Hanna

In June 2024, the Global Campus of Human Rights launched its first-ever specialised online course called “Authoring Justice”, born out of a longstanding collaboration with Prof. Andrew Leon Hanna, award winning author of *25 Million Sparks: The Untold Story of Refugee Entrepreneurs* (Cambridge University Press).

Designed for those eager to enrich their craft and embark on the journey of writing a book or long-form work, this course was for prospective authors who are keen on writing non-fiction narrative centered on a variety of human rights topics: from climate justice to gender equality; from racial justice to social justice at large.

“The written word has the remarkable power to inspire social change,” says Prof. Andrew Leon Hanna. “In this course, we’ll explore how to write with empathy and strength on topics that we feel most enlivened to change in the world. In particular, we’ll emphasise human-centred narrative storytelling – as it can effectively shine a light on those who are too-often excluded, honour their stories and respect equal dignity, and move society toward greater mutual understanding.”

In addition to learning from video lectures and readings prepared by Prof. Hanna, students in this course participated in 5 live webinars where they heard from a dynamic, diverse group of international literary leaders – authors as well as publishers – who shared their invaluable wisdom, firsthand experiences and writing tips. Guests included Justice Albie Sachs, renowned freedom fighter and former Judge on the Constitutional Court of South Africa; writer, campaigner and GCA alumna Jemma Neville; and award winning authors Kao Kalia Yang and Casey Gerald; and Joel Rickett, Managing Director of Ebury Publishing, the non-fiction publisher at Penguin Random House.

Throughout the course, participants also submitted two short pieces and their Capstone Project (~2,000-word



piece) for personalised feedback by Prof. Hanna. Some of the capstones are being published in this edition in the previous section and others will be in the next one of the Global Campus Magazine. The last week of the course was dedicated to the final celebration where each participant read excerpts from their project.

This was a unique opportunity for prospective non-fiction writers. As remarked by Dr. Angela Melchiorre, E-Learning Manager at the Global Campus of Human Rights, “telling the stories of unsung heroes is an inspiring and effective way to remind us that human rights and justice issues have to be nurtured, protected, and conquered every single day. This is exactly what this course did in a very pragmatic but also encouraging way. As an educational institution, there is no better means for us than to help aspiring authors put their ideas and those voices down on paper for broader audiences and systemic change.”

The course ran fully online between 3 June - 26 July 2024, mostly in asynchronous mode but with weekly live webinars. For more information contact e-learning@gchumanrights.org

High-Level Conference on Global State of Human Rights to Convene in Venice

The Global Campus of Human Rights, in partnership with Right Livelihood, proudly announced the forthcoming high-level conference dedicated to addressing critical issues surrounding human rights worldwide.

Scheduled for 24-25 May 2024, this landmark event again assembled leading figures from across the globe to tackle pressing challenges faced by human rights de-

ice. Distinguished speakers, including Manfred Nowak, Secretary General of the Global Campus of Human Rights, and Gunilla Hallonsten, Chair of the Board at Right Livelihood, set the stage for discussions led by prominent figures such as Matteo Mecacci, Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, Chiara

dynamic roundtable discussions exploring topics ranging from redefining exile for human rights defenders to strategies for protecting human rights during periods of conflict. Human rights defenders are at the centre of the event, such as Mozn Hassan, Egyptian Women's Rights Activist and Right Livelihood Laureate, and many other activists from countries such as Nicaragua, Sudan, Russia, Guatemala,



fenders, with a special focus on contexts of exile, conflict, and the degradation of our environment.

The conference kicked off with a public opening roundtable hosted by the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe in the beautiful Palazzo Zorzi in Ven-

Adamo from the European Commission, and Olof Skoog, EU Special Representative for Human Rights. Continuing the second day, discussions resumed at the Global Campus headquarters at the Monastery of San Nicolò, Venice Lido.

Over the course of two days, participants engaged in dy-

Cambodia and Iran. Notable speakers further include Michael O'Flaherty, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, and Heidi Hautala, Vice-President of the European Parliament.

The conference also showcased presentations by members of the Global Cam-

pus Child Leadership Team, underscoring the vital role of youth in human rights advocacy. Attendees had the opportunity to participate in afternoon sessions focused on leveraging human rights frameworks to prevent environmental disasters, with insights from experts such as Aoife Nolan, President of the European Committee of Social Rights.

In addition to stimulating discussions, attendees enjoyed

cultural performances, including poetry and music by Lisette Ma Neza, a speech from renowned artist exhibiting at the Venice Biennale Koen Vanmechelen, and a dance performance choreographed by GC alumnus Kosta Karakashyan.

The event culminated in a reception and dinner held in the historic Cloister of the Monastery of San Nicolò, continuing inspiring discussions in a more informal setting.

Building on the successful editions of the past and in the intimate setting of the islands of Venice, the High-Level Conference on Global Human Rights is a unique platform for substantive dialogue and action towards advancing human rights worldwide.

Event Contacts:
Imke Steimann
veniceHRconference@
gchumanrights.org

Kick-off of the new EU-funded “Climate Justice and Human Rights Education” project at the Moldova State University

The Global Campus and the GC Caucasus hub were glad to announce a new capacity development project with the Moldova State University, thanks to the support of the EU Delegation in Chisinau.

Over the next 18 months, the action “Development of Climate Justice and Human Rights Education at the Moldova State University (MSU)” will focus on the setting up of an interdisciplinary Lab on climate justice and human rights between the Faculties of Law and Biology, which flagship activity will be a credit-based cross-regional summer school that involves lecturers and students from Moldova and universities/countries of the EU enlargement Eastward.

The project will allow for the State University, as a new GC member, to contribute to the promotion and protection of environmental rights and climate justice by producing and disseminating critical knowledge for policy change, in the context of the EU enlargement.

This will be achieved through curriculum and teaching tools development, teachers training in theory and practical skills, including specialized language training, refurbishment of teaching spaces and outreach activities. In the project logic, a follow-up phase shall later transform the Lab into a Centre, and the School into the first post-graduate MA in this subject for this region.

This new sub-regional project is the result of the ongoing cooperation with the MSU, initiated in early 2023 after a comprehensive mapping, consultation and needs assessment process, and under the backing of the government of the Republic of Moldova.

The innovation of the project lays in its interdisciplinarity, evidenced by the exceptional cooperation with the facul-

ties of Law and Biology, but also in the cross-regional approach: for the first time, three GC hubs, namely GC Caucasus/CES, GC Europe/EMA and GC South East Europe/ERMA will join forces to implement a collaborative human rights education initiative of universities from

Right Livelihood was then kick-started in January 2023 and after intensive work has already allowed for the creation of skills and tools to set-up new human rights education courses at the Law Faculty in Chisinau (European Standards of child rights protection; IT

process has later led to the awarding of a grant for its implementation.

Eventually, the project was inaugurated in a public event held at the Faculty of Law in Chisinau on March 1st, with the participation of Minister of the Environment Ms Ior-



the Western Balkans, Caucasus, and the Eastern Partnership countries.

This new sub-regional project is the result of the ongoing cooperation with the MSU, initiated in early 2023 after a comprehensive mapping, consultation and needs assessment process, and under the backing of the government of the Republic of Moldova. A multi-year MoU was hence signed by MSU, GC and GC Caucasus with the goal of supporting the MSU's integration within the regional network, through the newly established GC Capacity Development programme.

A first project funded by

and human rights). These two courses are being piloted during this semester, also enabling the mobility of GC Caucasus students. Given these encouraging outcomes, the MSU was already accepted as a new GC member by the General Assembly in September 2023.

The GC was later proposed to extend the cooperation to develop a thematic specialization in environmental rights and climate justice with a human rights perspective, in the context of the EU integration process. Such perspective was welcomed both at the GC and in talks with the EU, hence an extensive preparation

danca-Rodica Iordanov, the University leadership, representatives of the EU Delegation, delegates of the Global Campus and the project team. Currently, environmental rights and climate justice education are thematic pillars of the GC action. Understanding the systemic and structural factors contributing to both climate change and social injustice is the initial step toward envisioning and advocating for solutions that address these root causes. This is particularly true in the developing countries of South-eastern and Caucasian Europe, such as Moldova, which lag behind in terms of effective and right-based environmental policies.

“This initiative could be a first step towards making substantial progress of the MSU in providing expertise at the national and regional

on subjects that have been neglected, but which are vital”.

Ms. Iordanca-Rodica Iordanov, Minister of Environment

This project is part of the GC Capacity Development programme. For more information contact adriano.remiddi@gchumanrights.org

Art as a Gateway to Inclusion: Insights from an Unconventional Conference Hosted by GC Caucasus in Yerevan



From March 6-8, the Global Campus Caucasus hub, coordinated by Yerevan State University and its Centre for European Studies, orchestrated a transformative international conference titled “Inclusion through Art”.

This dynamic event, featuring panel discussions, keynote speeches, interactive sessions, and performances, convened civil society

members, policymakers, and cultural organisations to explore the intricate nexus of art, human rights, children’s rights, disability rights, and inclusion. Delving into the intersection of children’s rights and the arts, attendees examined case studies from various countries, shedding light on inclusive practices within performing arts.

The event was a collabora-

tion with Swedish ShareMusic & Performing Arts, Henrik Igityan National Centre for Aesthetics (GAC), and Right Livelihood. It brought together distinguished international guests, academics, representatives from educational, disability, and child development authorities in Armenia, Global Campus faculty and experts, as well as prominent local figures committed to advancing

Delving into the intersection of children's rights and the arts, attendees examined case studies from various countries, shedding light on inclusive practices within performing arts.



children's rights and fostering inclusive societies.

Day 1 Highlights

The first day kicked off with a keynote address by Cameroonian activist and Right Livelihood Laureate Marthe Wandou, centering on the intersection of disability and human rights. Wandou's insights paved the way for engaging discussions moderated by experts like Kristine Gevorgyan, GC Caucasus Programme Coordinator.



Panel discussions explored various themes including children's rights and the arts, with ShareMusic's Chief Executive and artistic director Sophia Alexandersson showcasing the My Convention project focused on the CRC. Additionally, a debate among GC experts examined child participation, emphasizing the shift from tokenism to meaningful engagement. An artistic performance titled "Discipline Room" by Alessandro Lenzi, produced by Raizes Teatro, offered a compelling interlude, highlighting the potency of performance art in conveying societal messages.

Day 2 Highlights

On the second day of the conference, the focus shifted to examining case studies in the practice of performing arts and inclusion globally. Composer, aid worker, and human rights activist Nigel Osborne shared insightful perspectives drawn from his experiences spanning various

countries including Sweden, the United Kingdom, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon, South India, North Uganda, and Ukraine.

Panel discussions explored diverse themes, with one moderated by Zaruhi Batoyan, a journalist and expert on the rights of persons with disabilities. Lilit Mnatsakanyan, Director of the Republican Pedagogical-Psychological Center (RPPC), discussed inclusion as policy, referencing the Armenian education policy, reforms in inclusive education, and the potential introduction of institutional mechanisms to ensure accessibility and inclusivity.

The day concluded with an impressive child-led panel discussing the rights of children with disabilities and the impact of conflict and displacement on their mental wellbeing. Comprising members of the Armenian Children Leadership Team (a GC initiative) and the Consultative Body to the Ombudsman Of-

face, this panel also provided a very moving moment.

Day 3 Highlights

On the final day of the conference, the focus shifted to practical applications and toolkits for promoting inclusion through art. Mariam Muradyan, alumna and child rights expert from GC Caucasus, along with two co-authors, introduced the “Inclusion Through Arts” toolkit. This new resource equips art teachers with practical activities infused with child rights content, aiming for significant outcomes.

Attendees actively participated in discussions revolving around achievements, challenges, and recommendations, with a specific emphasis on the right to education for individuals

with disabilities. The day concluded with a workshop training session led by Vahan Badalyan, providing participants with valuable insights into teaching approaches and tools applicable in an inclusive art environment.

Closing Reflections

Jihad Nammour, Academic Coordinator of the GC Arab World and the conference's wrap-up speaker, highlighted the diverse perspectives brought by international panellists, offering a comparative outlook spanning the globe. Meanwhile, the array of Armenian speakers delved deeply into Armenia's specific context regarding inclusion and access to services.

Though disability was a primary focus, the varied view-

points shared during the conference emphasised the universal challenges faced by marginalised communities. They underscored the necessity for collective action to tackle systemic inequalities, as emphasised by one of the panellists who noted that the absence of complaints doesn't equate to issue resolution.

In summary, the international conference on “Inclusion through Art” served as a catalyst for transformative change, reigniting a sense of purpose in the global pursuit of a more just and equitable world. The Global Campus of Human Rights, along with its partners, remains steadfast in its commitment to protecting children's rights and nurturing inclusive societies.

Global Campus Alumni Together for Climate Justice and the Right of Future Generations – a remarkable gathering in Athens

As part of the growing emphasis of the Global Campus of Human Rights on the value of its alumni network, the Global Campus Alumni (GCA) recently organised their largest three-day event in years in Athens, Greece. This gathering followed the participation of a “taskforce” consisting of seven alumni from each GC

region in the 2023 High-Level Conference in Venice. Subsequently, they planned a year-long alumni programme focusing on climate justice and the rights of future generations. Despite its small size, the taskforce has successfully engaged with over 50 alumni from around the globe, who have been ac-

tively involved in various on-the-ground activities. The majority of these alumni attended the conference hosted by Panteion University, a longstanding member of the Global Campus. The event provided an excellent opportunity to showcase the progress of the alumni and to expand their voluntary efforts.



5) Europe alumni conducted country-specific mapping and initiated a 'campaign for beginners'.

6) Alumni from South East Europe tackled disinformation about the climate crisis in the Balkan region and launched the Voices for Tomorrow lecture series.

Showcasing alumni projects and initiatives

Alumni have tailored their activities to the priorities and characteristics of each region. It's challenging to capture the breadth and specificity of these activities, but we'll attempt to summarise:

- 1) Alumni from the Arab World focused on mapping climate justice actors in the MENA region.
- 2) African alumni concentrat

ed on establishing a research and advocacy hub in Africa, starting with a podcast series on children's rights and climate justice.

3) Latin American alumni prioritised climate justice education in schools.

4) Asia Pacific alumni worked on mapping capacity and resources, as well as developing child-friendly educational materials.

The event provided an excellent opportunity to showcase the progress of the alumni and to expand their voluntary efforts. Alumni have tailored their activities to the priorities and characteristics of each region.



7) Caucasus alumni presented a diverse range of activities, including a photography exhibition, creative games, and discussions on specific challenges faced by the Post-Soviet region regarding climate justice.

Fostering collaborations and connections across regions

In addition to addressing climate justice and the rights of future generations, the event provided a platform for alumni to network and share insights. A key feature of the conference was the unique chance for the seven leaders of regional alumni associations to convene, exchange best practices, and strengthen the global identity of GCA.

Engaging with the Greek scene

Participants not only had the opportunity to connect with each other but also engage with inspiring Greek representatives leading the climate justice movement. Professors Daniella Marouda (GC Europe national director) and Vasiliki Karagiorgou (both from Panteion University), along with MEP Petros Kokkalis from the Green Party, shared insights into strategic litigations and socio-economic complexities surrounding climate justice. Additionally, contributions from individuals such as filmmakers Dimitris Kourtis and Stratis Vogiatzis, Deputy Ombudsman Theoni Koufonikolakou, and representatives from Climate Justice Camp



and Scientist Rebellion enriched discussions on climate activism and societal change.

Alumni also delved into the local Greek context, exploring initiatives aimed at mitigating the impacts of climate change. Visits to the municipality of Athens and the National Observatory of Athens provided firsthand insights into climate governance and adaptation strategies, highlighting the significance of local action in addressing global challenges. Nikos Chrysogelos, Deputy Mayor of Athens for Climate Governance Social Economy, welcomed the GC Alumni to the Municipality of Athens, shedding light on the city's struggles with climate justice and socio-economic challenges faced by young people. Dr. Christos Giannakopoulos, Research Director at the National Observatory of Athens and IPCC National Focal Point for Greece, not only showcased the facilities and museum of the National Observatory but also delivered a compelling lecture on the impact of climate change on people of various age groups and geographical locations. He emphasised the urgent need for a swift response and advocated for the rights of fu-

ture generations.

Way forward

As the conference concluded, participants reflected on the transformative ideas and connections forged during the event. Each presentation, whether focused on education initiatives utilising innovative tools like Minecraft or engaging with civil society organisations in the MENA region, underscored the collective commitment of GCA to amplify voices for climate justice and advocate for future generations. In a world grappling with unprecedented environmental challenges, the Global Campus Alumni Conference in Athens served as a significant milestone. It provided participants from around the globe, as well as esteemed local representatives, with the opportunity to collaboratively develop new plans and ideas regarding climate justice.

Stay tuned for further updates and outcomes from this impactful collaboration of impressive minds as GCA continues its mission to advocate for a just and sustainable future. Learn more about the GC Alumni Climate Justice Programme and activities implemented by the seven regional associations.

EMA cohort 2023-24 study visit to Kosovo: learning about a post-conflict country

The study trip to Kosovo has been an annual highlight in the EMA programme for twenty years. Concluding the first semester, visiting Kosovo represents the culmination of the topics studied in the first semester and is an opportunity for students to better understand how human rights work looks like on the ground. From 19 to 26 January 2024, the EMA 23-24 cohort visited Kosovo. The EMA programme is lucky to work with Marianna Grandits at the Vienna University of Applied Arts, who organises a packed and enriching programme through her strong ties with individuals and many local and international organisations present in Kosovo.

In 2024 the 82 students from Venice were accompanied by twenty students from Vienna. With this group of over 100 students, we learned about contemporary challenges for this post-conflict society by exchanging with local and international communities present in Kosovo.

A human rights field mission schedule

Divided into smaller groups, students have full schedules from early morning into the evening hours. It requires the students to deal with a lot of new information and impressions every day, with little time for rest in between. As such, the Kosovo trip mimics what a human rights field mission could look like and is there-

fore an important step in the students' training. In 2024, six groups had both shared meetings at larger organisations and asynchronous visits at smaller NGOs. Sudden changes are inevitable with a schedule of over 60 meetings and many moving elements, requiring the students to adjust to changing circumstances and sometimes think on their feet.

Local immersion and a spectrum of perspectives

Students stay with host families which allows them to be introduced to individual experiences of living in a post-conflict society. For many students this provides an important layer to put in perspective and critically analyse



the various official visits made throughout the week. Staying in Pristina but visiting different parts of Kosovo such as the Serbian enclave Graçanica near Pristina, or venturing further to Peja/ Peć, and Prizren creates further opportunities to learn about divergent understandings and experiences of life in Kosovo. In 2024, an especially crucial element of the trip was the visit to Mitrovica in the north of Kosovo. This divided city has a majority Kosovar Serbs in the North and a majority Kosovar Albanians in the South.

The visit made visible ongoing tensions between different ethnic groups in Kosovo, highlighting that the meaning of 'post-conflict' can look different for communities living in the same country. Meeting with local NGOs in the city showed the challenge, nuances, and importance of working in such a split community.

A broad view of Human Rights in the field

Overall, the full programme involves over 60 different visits to politicians and officials, international organisations, arts organisations, local NGOs, and cultural heritage sites. This allows students to see the great variety of actors involved in Human Rights and Democratisation efforts, even just in one day. For example, on a given day in the 2024 visit, students started the day with a visit to the EU mission EULEX supporting Rule of

Law developments in Kosovo, after which one group met a leader of Roma Veritas supporting the Roma community in Kosovo in a coffee shop, to finish the day with an inspiring talk by Igballe Rugova of the Kosovo Women's Network.

As a result, students heard from activists, institutional actors, and an NGO all in one day. Each actor highlighting different elements of working in the field of Human Rights within Kosovo.

"Our field trip to Kosovo was a turning point. It opened my eyes to the true meaning and extensive preparation behind this seemingly simple activity. I finally understood why the EMA team emphasized the immense relevance and en-

For example, on a given day in the 2024 visit, students started the day with a visit to the EU mission EULEX supporting Rule of Law developments in Kosovo, after which one group met a leader of Roma Veritas supporting the Roma community in Kosovo in a coffee shop, to finish the day with an inspiring talk by Igballe Rugova of the Kosovo Women's Network.

richment participation would bring. I had been underestimating its importance. That week in Kosovo was undeniably the most impactful of the entire master's program. It wasn't just about theory anymore. We had the chance to apply all the theoretical approaches we'd learned to real-world situations. What's more, we interacted with the most significant political institutions in Kosovo, gaining invaluable insights.

But the experience went beyond high-level meetings. Visiting Mitrovica and working alongside NGOs solidified my calling. I realized I don't want to be a human rights defender confined to a desk; I want to be in the field, making a direct difference".

"This Kosovo trip, guided by the EMA team and its allies, is what truly sets this program apart. It's the core element, the unparalleled added value you won't find anywhere else. Choosing this program with its Kosovo field trip was the best decision I could have made, and I strongly recommend its continuation", Juan Jose Valbuena, EMA student 2023-24.

Written by Inge Zwart, EMA fellow.

Reflecting on “Just Transition”: A Transformative Learning and Bonding Experience for 30 Students from Around the World

“The duty of being optimistic and the power of solidarity to advance an equitable global order”: Despite the bleak global landscape marked by a deep backslide in human rights and democracy, hope and resilience emerged as powerful themes shared by Global Campus students at the recent Conference on ‘Just Transition’. The event encompassed essential components of truth, justice, and reconciliation.

Held in Bishkek and Issyk Kul, Kyrgyzstan from June 17 to 21, and curated by the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, the conference provided a unique platform for learning, discussion, and connection. It focused on transitions from dictatorships or authoritarian regimes to democratic struc-

The students, representing over 20 nationalities, presented historical and contemporary case studies on transitional justice processes. They found commonalities across different geopolitical contexts.

tures, examining the facilitators and obstacles of genuine transitions.

The students, representing over 20 nationalities, presented historical and contemporary case studies on transitional justice processes. They found commonalities across different geopolitical contexts, discussing topics such as the role of political

quences of transitioning to democracy without justice, the impact of weaponized memories of past conflicts, and how participatory filmmaking can contribute to transitional justice.

Students explored how quickly democracy can be destroyed and the rule of law harmed, while recognizing that building these institutions takes generations.



dinasties in Southeast Asia, the misuse of constitutions and democratic frameworks by authoritarian regimes in Latin America, and the factors explaining the failure of democracy in Afghanistan. Debates addressed the challenge of establishing official truths during reconciliation processes, the crucial role of civil society in promoting justice for minorities, the conse-

Their research highlighted how autocrats misuse democratic structures and human rights to gradually dismantle well-functioning democracies, as noted by Manfred Nowak, Global Campus Secretary General, in his opening speech.

A final lesson learned at the conference is that no nation exists in isolation: problems

can be simultaneously local, national, and influenced by external factors. The consequences of violations of the rule of law, chaos, disorder, and bad governance can spread widely. Therefore, a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach is crucial.

This is exactly how the Global Campus of Human Rights steers its human rights education across its eight Master's programs. A big thank you to the staff of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, the main organizer of the program, the students, and the faculty from

the eight Global Campus regional academic hubs (Africa, Arab World, Europe, South East Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia, Latin America and Caribbean, and Asia Pacific) who challenged students in critical thinking and were also challenged by them.

Pioneering Climate Justice Education in Moldova and the EU Neighbourhood



The “1st European Cross-Regional School in Climate Justice and Human Rights” took place from May 20 to 25 in the village of Burcuta, in the outskirts of Chisinau, the capital of Moldova. The School is the flagship activity of the ongoing EU-funded project “Development of Climate Justice and Human Rights Education at the Moldova State University (MSU)” focused on setting up an Interdisciplinary Lab between the Faculties of Law and Biology by July 2025.

This innovative academic activity, the first of its kind in the region, was envisioned

for students, human rights defenders, and civil servants from Moldova and the EU enlargement countries. Jointly organized by the Global Campus and the Moldova State University - a member of the network since September 2023, the School was implemented under the umbrella of the GC Caucasus, and in a special collaboration with the two neighbouring regional hubs of GC Europe (Venice) and GC South East Europe (Sarajevo/Bologna).

The School gathered a highly heterogeneous and motivated group of 18 students, with different backgrounds

and approaches to climate justice. They participated in a rich programme of events, classes, practical exercises, field and social activities led by academics, experts, practitioners and alumni from the GC participating universities and partners, among them Manfred Nowak, Zoi Aliozi, Rodica Iordanov, Justina Grigaraviciene, Pim Martens, Alma Midzic and Samentha Goethals.

An important highlight of the programme was the special session “Mobilizing for the Climate: a conversation with Vladimir Slivyak” which al-

The School is the flagship activity of the ongoing EU-funded project “Development of Climate Justice and Human Rights Education at the Moldova State University (MSU)”

lowed participants to meet and discuss with the renowned activist, co-chairman of Ecodefense and 2021 Right Livelihood Laureate. All students have successfully and actively attended the School receiving a joint diploma by the Global Campus, GC Caucasus and the Moldova State University, while five of them have also opted to gain

5 ECTS after passing a final written exam.

The Spring School is an ambitious format that aims to create a legacy as an annual activity and incubator for innovative ideas, with the final goal of contributing solidly to a sustainable green transition in Moldova and the region. The School was organized as part of the events for the cel-

ebration of the 2024 EU Day in Moldova. Consult the programme here.

This project is part of the GC Capacity Development programme.

For more information contact the project manager Adriano Remiddi at adriano.remiddi@gchumanrights.or

6th edition of the GC Policy Observatory

The current 6th edition of the Global Campus Policy Observatory revolves around the research project on 'The digitalisation of education systems and its impact on human rights, with particular attention to the right to education', which is funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAECI) and by the European Commission.

The ongoing research is led by GC Research Manager Dr. Chiara Altafin and involves 7 talented policy analysts selected among GC alumni* of its regional programmes, namely Reda Benkhadra, Olga Lucía Camacho Gutierrez, Dr. Desara Dushi, Dr. Jean Linis-Dinco, Goharik Tigranyan, Aida Traidi, and Dr. Gergana Tzvetkova.

Research outputs will include policy briefs, advocacy plans, and digital tools developed in cooperation with the GC E-Learning Department.

The project encompasses dif-

ferent activities, in particular:

The forthcoming Webinar Series of June and July 2024 will provide special opportunities to hear the policy analysts anticipate their research findings, discuss with international experts and propose multiple policy recommendations, providing a space for reflection and advocacy.

Here is the calendar list for the webinar series:

05/06/2024, 2.00 – 3.00 PM
ChatGPT in the Classroom: Harnessing the Era of Generative AI in Higher Education
- Dr. Desara Dushi, GC PO Analyst (GC Europe)
- Dr. Rohan Nanda, Assistant Professor in Data Science for Law, Maastricht University
- Arianna Valentini, UNESCO IESALC

12/06/2024, 1.30 - 2.30 PM
EdTech or Empty Promises: Can It Deliver the Right to Education in the Philippines

and Cambodia?

- Dr. Jean Linis-Dinco, GC PO Analyst (GC Asia-Pacific)
- Swasti Karmacharya, Baan Dek Foundation
- Fia Hamid-Walker, Asia Pacific Forum

19/06/2024, 4.00 – 5.00 PM
EdTech Regulatory Frameworks and the Right to Education in Africa

- Reda Benkhadra, GC PO Analyst (GC Africa)
- Anderson D. Miamen, Senior Executive Director of CENTAL
- Aya Douabou, West Africa Program Manager of GI-ES-CR

26/06/2024, 3.30 – 4.30 PM
Teaching Digital Literacy and Digital Competencies: Insights from South East Europe

- Dr. Gergana Tzvetkova, GC PO Analyst (GC South East Europe)
- Ena Kosanović, Gender Equality Advocate
- Emanuil Georiev, Inde-

pendent Expert on teaching safe and responsible online behaviour

03/07/2024, 4.30 - 5.30 PM
Addressing the Digital Divide among Students at Risk of School Dropout in Latin America

- Lucia Camacio, GC PO Analyst (GC Latin America and the Caribbean)
- Jamila Venturini, Directora Ejecutiva Derechos Digitales
- Laura Giannechini or Israel Quirilo, Campaña Latinoamericana por el Derecho a la Educación (CLADE)

10/07/2024, 4.30 – 5.30 PM
Assessing Equity in Digital Education for Low-Income Students in Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine

- Goharik Tigranyan, GC PO Analyst (GC Caucasus)
- Anna Gevorgyan, Education Expert, Adjunct Lecturer, MA TEFL Programme, College of

Humanities and Social Sciences, American University of Armenia

- Lusine Karapetyan, Local Government and Regional Development Expert, Director of 'Solution Hub' Community Development NGO

26/08/2024, 4.30 – 5.30 PM
AI integration in education in the MENA region: will it be a driver of social inequality?

- Aida Traidi, GC PO Analyst (GC Arab World)
- Dr. Marwan Tarazi, Director of the Center for Continuing Education, Birzeit University
- Jihad Nammour, Academic Coordinator of the GC ARMA programme, Saint Joseph University

The in-person Workshop of 26 March 2024 in Venice Lido –with the opening welcome addresses by Secretary General Manfred Nowak, Research Manager Chiara

Altafin, and the MAECI Head of Analysis and Programming Unit Counsellor Giuliana Del Papa— provided a great opportunity to present and discuss with external experts and GC colleagues the insightful research conducted by the GC policy analysts in the various regions concerned (respectively, Asia-Pacific, Middle East & North Africa, Africa, Europe, South East Europe, Latin America, and Caucasus). Representatives from the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) and the tech school Develhope also shared their experiences.



Right Livelihood International Conference Unites Global Activists at UC Santa Cruz

From April 23-27, the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) hosted the Right Livelihood International Conference, a gathering that brought together Right Livelihood Laureates, student activists and community organizers across the globe interested in human rights, sustainability, peace, and justice. This event also celebrated the 10-year anniversary of the Right Livelihood Center at UCSC and we're excited to share that three Global Campus students were able to attend!

Right Livelihood Laureates Phyllis Omido from Kenya, Juan Pablo Orrego from Chile, and Chandaravuth Ly from Cambodia had a key role in the conference, which aimed to foster solidarity among student activists and equip them with the skills needed to address pressing global issues. What our students shared as highlights of the event was

the utilization of three innovative facilitation methods: the World Café, Open Space Technology, and Graphic Recording. These approaches encouraged participants to express their ideas and interests freely, leading to the formation of key priorities that shaped the conference agenda. This collaborative process underscored the importance of inclusive dialogue in building an involved international student network.

Along with this, another highlight of the conference was an event at the UCSC Silicon Valley campus titled "Silicon Valley and the Just Transition to a Green Economy: A Conversation with Right Livelihood Laureates." This event featured a groundbreaking dialogue between business leaders from Silicon Valley and the laureates on extractivism and the transition

to clean energy. Unlike typical confrontations between environmental activists and energy entrepreneurs, this conversation was notably constructive, with both sides finding common ground and discussing viable solutions for a sustainable future.

Student activists also had the unique opportunity to share their experiences during UCSC lectures. Our students used their background in human rights and international law to discuss the legal criteria for proving the crime of genocide in courses on Global Trade and Human Rights. These interactions allowed students to connect academic theory with real-world activism, enriching the learning experience for all involved.

The conference concluded with a resolution to establish monthly virtual meetings, planning for future conferences and additionally, the participants agreed on forming working groups, each mentored by a Right Livelihood Laureate, to efficiently execute the network's mandate.

Furthermore, in the aftermath of the conference, our students started to engage in the student network that was created within the framework of the conference, and are



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Human Dignity Takes Center Stage at 2024 Euregio Summer School

Human dignity has never been more relevant in our lives than now. Albana Hana, GC South East Europe Alumna, recounts the 2024 Euregio Summer School on "Artificial Intelligence, Technology, and Human Rights" held in May 2024, in Dobbiaco/Toblach, and organized by the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano.

The theme was "Artificial Intelligence, Technology, and Human Rights," with human dignity as the central focus.

Human dignity, a complex and often debated concept, is increasingly significant due to rapid technological advancements and the proliferation of digital personal

data. Prof. Robert Simon from the Free University of Bolzano, the Summer School's coordinator, opened the event with a lecture on Schiller's 'On Grace and Dignity,' emphasizing the importance of mental freedom in moral decision-making, i.e. between good and evil or good and bad deeds (the main dichoto-

my on which basis the entire Western system of human rights is built and operates).

Discussions also explored cultural relativity, Eastern philosophies, and the impact of social media on our image and reputation.

Prof. Maurizio Borghi from the University of Turin addressed the implications of Artificial Intelligence on fundamental human rights such as privacy and data protection, as stipulated in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the EU-GDPR. He drew parallels between traditional human rights practices leading to traditional dilemmas (e.g. the trolley problem) and contemporary practices shaped by machine errors and machine consciousness.

Artificial Intelligence, initially a marketing term from big

Despite recognising AI's positive aspects, such as uncovering subtle behavioural patterns, participants expressed concerns about its negative impacts and the ethical challenges it presents. AI is here to stay, creating new realities and challenges.



tech companies, now plays a crucial role in economic value creation, as discussed in Zuboff's work on surveillance capitalism. However, AI also poses significant risks, including mass surveillance and manipulation, which threaten democracy and decision-making processes.

Prof. Guglielmo Tamburrini from the University of Naples Federico II, focused on the EU's Artificial Intelligence Act and the seven principles for trustworthy AI. He highlighted AI's role in the climate crisis and the military, emphasising the need for societal and environmental well-being.

The School included participants from various disciplines, including philosophy, law, economics, political studies, and IT. Despite recognising AI's positive aspects, such as uncovering subtle behavioural patterns, participants expressed concerns about its negative impacts and the ethical challenges it presents. AI is here

to stay, creating new realities and challenges. During the working groups, the principle of accountability was emphasised as essential for any ethical AI approach. Defining parties in transactions is crucial for effective justice accessibility.

The Euregio Summer School 2024 was organised in cooperation with the Global Campus of Human Rights, represented by Prof. Christina Binder, Universität der Bundeswehr München (member of GC Europe); and alumnae Dr. Albana Hana (GC South East Europe Alumni 2003-2004) and Elise Kolen (GC Europe 2023-2024).

By Albana Hana, Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Network

Venice Statement: Reconceptualising Exile for Human Rights Defenders at Risk

We, the Global Campus of Human Rights and Right Livelihood, convened members of the global human rights community in Venice on 24 and 25 May 2024 for the **fourth annual Conference on the Global State of Human Rights**. Among them was a group of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) courageously continuing their important work despite being forced outside of their countries of origin by repressive governments and an increasingly perilous environment. These HRDs joined us not only as important voices during our conference discussions but as a group participated in further workshops and discussions which are the basis of this following Statement. Our shared aim was to reflect and deepen our collective understanding of the lived experiences of at-risk HRDs in the promotion of a rights-based and peaceful world order. This aim was our priority for 2024, while we reaffirm and recommit to the findings set out in the **Venice Statement: Towards a New Era of Human Rights** issued at the third Global State of Human Rights Conference held in 2023.

Today, we are faced with the urgency of responding to a **polycrisis**, where various current crises interact, creating complex and devastating consequences that are difficult to effectively address. In 2024, most prominently is the rise of authoritarianism worldwide and shrinking civic spaces, the intersection of the increasing number of **armed conflicts** causing untold horrors and suffering to communities in various parts of the world, and **human-induced climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental pollution** causing irreversible destruction to our planet home. Cumulatively, these lead to systemic, grave, and widespread human rights violations today that will carry on having a serious impact on future generations.

We acknowledge the continuing contributions and **positive impact of HRDs** to protect human rights, uphold the rule of law, and call for accountability. These individuals and groups of HRDs include but are not limited to indigenous groups, women, girls, children, LGBTIQ, and Environmental HRDs. Professionals, including artists, who actively engage in defending human rights also play an essential role in shedding light on injustices, challenging oppressive systems, and inspiring others to stand up for their rights. Despite the achievements made in the past 25 years since the adoption of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the **environment** in which HRDs conduct their work has **increasingly deteriorated** over the last years in all parts of the world, including increased frequency of killings, threats to life, being deprived of physical and mental safety and wellbeing, attacks on property, and similar threats to their families, friends, and colleagues. At the same time, we note the increased impunity with which certain state and non-state actors continue to violate international human rights law, humanitarian law,

environmental law, and other established principles of international law. This leads to further distrust in institutions to effectively protect our international legal order, which has severe and partly irreversible consequences across generations.

We highlight three aspects related to the work of HRDs which stand out to us in relevance and gravity today: the experience of at-risk HRDs forced into exile, the work of HRDs in conflict contexts, and the work of Environmental HRDs.

Reconceptualising Exile for Human Rights Defenders at Risk

While some mechanisms are in place for the protection and support of at-risk HRDs and those who are close to them, including relocation programmes, there is still much to learn from their lived experiences. We commit to adopting a meaningful human rights-based process of learning and research, following the principles of 'do no harm', conflict sensitivity and gender equality, and special consideration for the mental and physical health and wellbeing of HRDs. Despite certain general and shared experiences and conditions, each HRD faces unique circumstances which need attention.

We start from the understanding that exile has, within its colloquial meaning, negative connotations, carrying notions of stigma, marginalisation, and discrimination. Improving our understanding of this concept, however, may pave the way for a deeper appreciation of the challenges and suffering at-risk HRDs often face when moving into exile, and how to remedy and overcome them as adequately as possible. There are numerous practical challenges at least at three stages: 1) when evaluating the option to leave, 2) during the passage to a new country or location, and 3) integrating successfully in the new country or location. These include but are not limited to lack of access to comprehensive risk assessment, health insurance and access to medical services, access to travel authorisations, visas, and possibly emergency travel documentation, as well as clarification on educational and skills certification to find meaningful employment opportunities once relocated. Developing an understanding of how to design and improve mechanisms to effectively support at-risk HRDs at all stages of the process is a powerful tool to fight against the pain and stigma of exile and build a transnational support structure.

Defending Human Rights during Times of War and Conflict

We deeply regret to note that despite the gains made by humanity, especially over the past 125 years since the first Hague Peace Conference of 1899, which articulated the Means and Methods of Warfare and established the Principles of Humanity, the 21st century continues armed conflict as a tool for dispute resolution. This 'tool' is already bringing untold suffering and sorrow to millions of lives and irreversible destruction to our planet and carries the potential of complete destruction through the possible use of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons.

It is the duty of the global human rights movement to continue its fight towards ending the use of weapons and violence as a means to resolve conflict, and, instead, resort to peaceful means including through a strengthened international judicial architecture. This route also allows us to honour the collective memory of those who lived through the pain and suffering which armed conflict carries without exception.

We urgently call upon all states and non-state actors engaged in armed conflict to cease fire, enter negotiations, and pursue peaceful means of resolving their disputes respecting

international law, human rights law and humanitarian law. This action includes respecting the decisions and integrity of international judicial institutions, such as the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, the European Court of Human Rights, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and the African Court of Human and People's Rights.

Using Human Rights to Prevent Environmental Disasters

We acknowledge the important contributions made by EHRDs to the protection of our environment and toward strengthening the best available sciences in addressing environmental challenges, including climate change. We also highlight the valuable contributions of indigenous knowledge and legal systems and approaches in this context, by linking the principles of interconnectedness, interdependence, and inalienability of human rights with those of the planetary rights and duties. This approach is an essential component of understanding the role of humanity as being part of the community of life with Mother Earth.

Despite the landmark development of a Human Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment in 2022, there continues to be limited implementation of it, especially in consideration of the rights of children and future generations. We need to work harder on the development of human rights protection mechanisms that understand and respect the integrity of Earth systems.

We are alarmed by the considerable increase in killings and enforced disappearances of Environmental HRDs, as well as the increasing frequency of cases of harassment, intimidation, and malicious prosecution aimed at (Environmental) HRDs with the pretext of safeguarding the security of the state. These include specific cases brought against those who protect the natural environment using methods such as strategic litigation against public participation (SLAPPS). Whilst denouncing such methods, we call upon members of the global human rights community to publicly stand against such tactics and call out those who use such methods.

Climate litigation and environment movements are heralded as key tools for developing accountability for human-induced climate change as well as crimes against the environment, including ecocide. However, it is crucial that we urgently tackle the challenges of climate litigation, including the costs and time duration of such litigation, and the gaps in its application and implementation by relevant stakeholders, including by states and the private sector. Therefore, we must continuously work on further developing and refining the toolbox available for climate action. We require an urgent radical collaboration across generations as a call to action to use human rights to prevent environmental disasters and call for accountability from all responsible. This is an intergenerational imperative for achieving justice.

Examining Our Values and Imagining our Futures

We acknowledge that in times of this polycrisis, we are required to act and work outside the box and develop new tools and methods to document and illustrate the power, humanity, perseverance, courage, and dedication of HRDs.

Showcasing their successes and resilience when faced with difficulty, through methods and platforms for collective memory such as documentaries, movies, songs, poems, and other artistic and educational methods, will continue to inspire many working toward realising human rights at all levels of society, generations here and now and generations yet to come.

A Call for Radical Collaboration

We reiterate the six core messages set out in the Venice Statement of 2023 and **call for a radical collaboration** on:

- 1. Reconceptualising the concept of exile for HRDs**, by undertaking a detailed learning journey, including through collective memory and research, building on lived experiences, and respecting established approaches and principles for the protection of safety and wellbeing. The ultimate goal is to facilitate HRDs' work effectively while in exile through improving structures and processes, raising awareness, and building a transnational support base.
- 2. Communicating effectively and efficiently on the role of HRDs** and their contribution to the furtherance of international human rights standard-setting and implementation. This includes expressing public support for (Environmental) HRDs when they are targeted by state and non-state actors simply for carrying out their peaceful human rights work.
- 3. Effectively facilitating engagement of HRDs with multilateral, regional, and national institutions in the human rights architecture**, including the international judicial system set up for the peaceful resolution of disputes and providing justice for survivors of human rights violations.
- 4. Holding national, transnational and non-state actors, including the private sector, accountable to international human rights and environmental standards**, including the protection of Environmental HRDs in conforming to the UN Guiding Principles on the Protection of Environmental Human Rights Defenders (2023) and other recent developments.
- 5. Furthering opportunities for information sharing and learning for HRDs** in the hope that the deteriorating situation and severe risks faced by them, and those close to them, can be mitigated through exchange and learning from best practices. Such publicly available information should also serve to inform key duty-bearers in order to strengthen joint capacities for assessing and preventing such risks in the future.

Promotion

Biennale Arte 2024: Foreigners Everywhere

The 60th International Art Exhibition, titled *Stranieri Ovunque - Foreigners Everywhere*, opened to the public from Saturday April 20 to Sunday November 24, 2024, at the Giardini and the Arsenale; it is curated by Adriano Pedrosa and organised by La Biennale di Venezia. The Press Office of the Global Campus of Human Rights was invited and participated to the pre-opening days with a series of events. The International Jury of the 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia is made up of Julia Bryan-Wilson (president), American curator and professor at Columbia University; Alia Swastika, Indonesian curator and writer; Chika Okeke-Agulu, Nigerian curator and art critic; Elena Crippa, Italian curator; and María Inés Rodríguez, French-Colombian curator.

THE INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION of the Curator Adriano Pedrosa

The Exhibition takes place in the Central Pavilion (Giardini) and in the Arsenale, and it is presented in two sections: the Nucleo Contemporaneo and the Nucleo Storico.

As a guiding principle, the Biennale Arte 2024 has

avored artists who have never participated in the International Exhibition — though a number of them may have been featured in a National Pavilion, a Collateral Event, or in a past edition of the International Exhibition. Special attention is being given to outdoor projects, both in the Arsenale and in the Giardini, where a performance programme is being planned with events during the pre-opening and closing weekend of the 60th Exhibition.

Stranieri Ovunque - Foreigners Everywhere, the title of the 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, is drawn from a series of works started in 2004 by the Paris-born and Palermo-based collective Claire Fontaine. The works consist

of neon sculptures in different colours that render in a growing number of languages the words “Foreigners Everywhere”. The phrase comes, in turn, from the name of a Turin collective who fought racism and xenophobia in Italy in the early 2000s.

«The expression *Stranieri Ovunque -* explains the curator Adriano Pedrosa - has several meanings. First of all, that wherever you go and wherever you are you will always encounter foreigners— they/we are everywhere. Secondly, that no matter where you find yourself, you are always truly, and deep down inside, a foreigner.»

«Adriano Pedrosa is the first curator of Biennale Arte from South America - said



President Roberto Cicutto – whom I selected so that he could bring his personal point of view on contemporary art by reinterpreting different cultures as if in a movie reverse shot. La Biennale's international nature makes it a privileged vantage point from which to observe the state of the world through the transformation and evolution of the arts. No curator, in choosing the theme of their exhibition, seeks directly to capitalise on the hot issues of the moment, but all of them are influenced by them and the changing perception of the exhibitions themselves may be felt in the way they are interpreted by visitors, professionals in the field and the press. But it is first and foremost the real presence of the National Pavilions, that this year reached 88 participating countries and 30 Collateral Events, that make La Biennale a unique meeting ground between the arts and the changes in society. The autonomy of the artistic directors is the strongest guarantee that La Biennale di Venezia formula continue to work and produce sometimes surprising effects, even on the diplomatic and political level. The dialogue with the Countries, which with equal dignity and the freedom to choose their own curators take on the challenge of our contemporary age, expressing themselves freely on both the artistic and social level, makes the different with

respect to any other cultural institution in the world.»

NATIONAL PARTICIPATIONS

The Exhibition will also include 88 National Participations in the historic Pavilions at the Giardini, at the Arsenale and in the city centre of Venice. 4 countries will be participating for the first time at the Biennale Arte: Republic of Benin, Ethiopia, United Republic of Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Timor Leste. Republic of Panama and Senegal participate for the first time with their own pavilion. The Italian Pavilion at the Tese delle Vergini in the Arsenale, sponsored and promoted by the Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity of the Ministry of Culture, is curated by Luca Cerizza. The project *Due qui / To hear* by the artist Massimo Bartolini includes contributions specifically created by musicians and writers.

The City of Venice participates with its own pavilion, the Venice Pavilion, at the Giardini of Sant'Elena, that also counts this year with the support and participation of our Global Campus partners: Belgian artist Koen Vanmechelen and Fondazione Berengo.

COLLATERAL EVENTS

30 Collateral Events were admitted by the Curator and promoted by non-profit national and international

bodies and institutions, which are taking place in several locations around the city of Venice. They offer a wide range of contributions and participations that enrich the global diversity of voices that characterizes the Exhibition.

BIENNALE COLLEGE ARTE

The selected projects for the 2nd edition of Biennale College Arte 2023/24 are by Agnes Questionmark, Joyce Joumaa, Sandra Poulson, Nazira Karimi. The 4 artists will receive a grant of 25,000 euros for the realization of the final work. The artworks will be presented, out of competition, as part of the 60th International Art Exhibition. Over 150 young emerging artists under 30 from 37 countries around the world have joined the call for participation.

GOLDEN LIONS FOR LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

The Golden Lions for Lifetime Achievement will be awarded to The Italian-born Brazilian artist Anna Maria Maiolino and the Paris-based Turkish artist Nil Yalter during the Biennale Arte 2024 awards and inauguration ceremony, that will be held on Saturday 20th April, 2024 at Ca' Giustinian, headquarters of La Biennale di Venezia.

BIENNALE SESSIONS, the project for Universities

For the thirteenth consecutive year, La Biennale dedicates the Biennale Sessions project

to institutions that develop research and training programmes in architecture, the arts and related fields, and to Universities and Fine Arts Academies. The aim is to facilitate self-organised three-day visits for groups of at least 50 students and teachers, with the possibility of holding seminars in the exhibition venues offered free of charge and assistance in coordinating travel and accommodation.

EDUCATIONAL

For the past decade, La Biennale di Venezia has been devoting increased attention to learning activities and has developed a growing commitment to educational initiatives addressed to the audience of its Exhibitions, to universities, young people, and children, from schools at all levels. In the past two years, the Art and Architecture Exhibitions had 130,298 participants in Ed-

ucational activities in total, amongst whom 71,525 were youngsters. A broad Educational programme has been scheduled for 2024 as well, addressed to individuals and groups of students, children, adults, families, professionals, companies, and universities. All the initiatives aim at actively involving the participants, and are led by professional operators, carefully trained by La Biennale di Venezia. They are divided into two categories: Guided Tours and Workshop Activities.

Since 2021, La Biennale di Venezia launched a plan to reconsider all of its activities in light of recognized and consolidated principles of environmental sustainability. For the year 2024, the goal is to extend the achievement of “carbon neutrality” certification, which was obtained in 2023 for La Biennale’s scheduled activities: the 80th

Venice International Film Festival, the Theatre, Music and Dance Festivals and, in particular, the 18th International Architecture Exhibition which was the first major Exhibition in this discipline to test in the field a tangible process for achieving carbon neutrality – while furthermore itself reflecting upon the themes of decolonisation and decarbonisation.

About the complete calendar of events, please visit: www.labiennale.org

For more info, please contact pressoffice@gchumanrights.org

#BiennaleArte2024 #StranieriOvunque #ForeignersEverywhere #Art4HumanRights

For more information about these events, please contact the organisers:

communications@gchumanrights.org – pressoffice@gchumanrights.org

For more information, contact the
Press Office of the Global Campus of Human Rights
Elisa Aquino – Isotta Esposito – Francesca Sante
pressoffice@gchumanrights.org



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#GCHumanRightsMagazine

Headquarters:

Monastery of San Nicolò
Riviera San Nicolò, 26
30126 Venice Lido (Italy)

gchumanrights.org



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