Editorial of special focus: The impact of new technologies on human rights

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The profusion of new technologies and of information and communication technologies in many aspects of individual and collective life is one of the defining features of our times. The advancement of new technologies in the twenty-first century – also known as the fourth industrial revolution – along with the expansion of the internet, social media and artificial intelligence has a direct impact on the way in which the public and private sectors and individuals interact. These new and transformational environments present opportunities and challenges when their practices are analysed in terms of rights.

The nature and speed of these developments have raised important questions. Among these is the impact of new technologies on the traditional notions of sovereignty and the new challenge of digital sovereignty; their impact on the dynamics of democracy and government; the challenges regarding human rights protection systems with respect to non-state actors in the realm of new technologies; the transformation of labour forces, social production relations and markets (commercial, financial, and so forth); access to education and to information in terms of use, benefit, profit and development; and the impact on the social fabric in terms of communicational dynamics, consumer behaviour, practices and identities (ethnicity, nationality, gender, class, religion, ideology).

During its 2019 Global Classroom,[1] the Global Campus of Human Rights regional programmes assessed the impact of new technologies on human rights and democracy by mapping and analysing regional and global trends. The conceptualisation of these challenges meant moving

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1   The 2019 Global Classroom involved several months of research at the seven Global Campus regional headquarters located at Global Campus Europe, South East Europe, Africa, Asia-Pacific, Caucasus, Latin America and Arab World, with the participation of post-graduate students from their respective Master's in Human Rights and Democracy. The process culminated in a face-to-face international conference in Buenos Aires, hosted by the Centre of International Studies of the University of San Martin (CIEP-UNSAM), headquarters of Global Campus Latin America. The event, held at the Legislative Palace of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, was attended by experts and representatives from governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental agencies and organisations, including the Regional Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNESCO, ILO, and the Delegation of the EU in Buenos Aires and the UN Rapporteur on the Right to Privacy.

away from traditional, state-centric conceptions; understanding new trends that permeate human existence in terms of the interface between technology, development and human rights; and promoting a new integrated approach to advancing development within and across nations.

The research outcomes have been summarised in the articles presented in this edition of the *Global Campus Human Rights Journal*. Each article provides a regional perspective on a particular issue and they are guided by research questions, including the identification of long-term structural challenges and at the national and regional level; the identification of actors and of conditions for the emergence of new risks to the enjoyment of rights; and the analysis of viable responses. The articles intend to understand the nexus between individual and collective rights, human development and new technologies and to analyse responses/initiatives/ activities that can or should be supported when responding to the identified challenges and risks.

The contribution from Global Campus Africa (HRDA) analyses state-sponsored internet shutdowns in Zimbabwe, Sudan, Cameroon, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in earlier 2019 coinciding with major political events, including mass protests and elections. In light of these incidents, the article addresses the role of information and communication technologies in human development and probes the intersections of the right to development and internet shutdowns in Africa. After analysing the invocation of judicial remedies in some jurisdictions and the role of the private section in light of corporate responsibility, the article proposes a multi-stakeholder approach to face these challenges.

The contribution from Global Campus Europe reviews technological developments such as thermal imaging, biometric data, virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and drones and their deployment at the service of action at the external border of the European Union (EU) in light of the regulatory framework on data privacy in the EU and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The article explores how vulnerable groups are to be affected by the collection of biometrics, how algorithms are repositories reflecting the manufacturer's bias, and proposes a diverse workforce as a tool to face the proliferation of bias.

The contribution from Global Campus South East Europe addresses the issue of online assemblies in Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkey. After exploring applicable domestic and international law, the article assesses the role of the state in providing and facilitating access to the internet and enabling online assemblies. The article analyses the surveillance of digital activities and security and its relation to online and offline assemblies.

The contribution from Global Campus Arab World analyses digital surveillance companies based in democratic countries and the use of their services by oppressive regimes, from monitoring centres facilitating mass surveillance on all telecommunications, to firewalls that filter the contents that users are allowed to access, and spyware that tap into the information stored in any personal device connected to the internet. The article assesses the volume of trade in these repression tools and the market value of surveillance companies operating in states that portrayed themselves as democracies.

The contribution from Global Campus Latin America presents a number of case studies on challenges and opportunities connected with information and communication technologies and their impact on social movements, litigation, politics and the enjoyment of individual rights. It also refers to the attempts to promote the legal regulation of the digital sphere in Colombia, Argentina and Ecuador. The analysis highlights the gap between citizens with access to technology and connectivity and those left behind.

The contribution of Global Campus Asia-Pacific focuses on digital authoritarianism as a state practice involving the invasion of privacy, the denial of access to information while promoting the spreading of misinformation, and the limitation of expression and participation. The article presents a number of case studies on arbitrary surveillance; secrecy and disinformation; fake news and misinformation, hate speech, racism and discrimination; troll armies on controlling freedom of expression and shaping public opinion; communication shutdowns; blocking and content removal by government cyber-control centres – all these leading to violations of freedom of expression – and other serious violations involving arrests, detention, gagging and killings or assassinations.

The contribution from Global Campus Caucasus aims at identifying long-term structural challenges to human rights in Armenia, Belarus and the Kyrgyz Republic with a focus on cyber security, freedom of expression, freedom of speech, access to information and data protection policies. On the one hand, the study reveals that the development of new technologies increased the accessibility of people to information in terms of e-governance programmes. Moreover, it shows that political mobilisation and participation, and freedom of expression have been enhanced due to social media developments. On the other hand, it identifies the growing challenges in terms of hate speech online, media manipulation, the spreading of disinformation, data leakage and cyber security. The piece presents a number of recommendations to stakeholders with the modernisation of legal framework as a basis, followed by unified regulations, the protection of personal data, guaranteed security in the digital environment, e-education, and culminating in the legitimate monitoring of human rights violations.

The above contributions and the general conversation leave us with the challenge of drawing equations to balance the impact of new technologies in the exercise of rights, among these the prohibition of discrimination, social rights and the access to public services, privacy and data protection, fair trial and due process, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and association.

Editors