

## Editorial

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This volume of the Global Campus journal contains a collection of articles written during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first section is a collection of articles which explore the situation of human rights in the second year of the pandemic from four regional perspectives: Europe, Africa, the Asia-Pacific, and Southeast Europe. While each region responded to the pandemic in its own way, there are similar human rights concerns found across all four regions. For example, the increase in the number and the strength of emergency laws has created concern for human rights defenders. It is acknowledged that the pandemic necessitates a limitation to some civil rights for the health of the population, such as standards to stop misinformation or a limit to the size of public meetings. It is of concern when these laws are, in many cases, promulgated by political regimes who use them to erode democratic values. Regimes that are not known for their respect of the rule of law or human rights have been able to use the conditions of the pandemic to put in place laws which increase their power. A further concern noted by some of these regional reports is whether these regimes will lift these restrictions once the pandemic has gone. Illiberal regimes are not known for their willingness to grant more freedoms to their civil society, and their reluctance to do so can mean pandemic restrictions stay in place long after the virus has ceased to be a threat. The return of human rights protection to pre-pandemic levels is not guaranteed.

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The regional reports also shared the concern of the continued existence of discrimination and racism across the regions. The killing by security forces of unarmed black, men in the United States, which started the Black Lives Matter movement, has triggered responses across the globe. While it is disappointing that some States continue to deny racism, especially in the Asia-Pacific, there has been recognition by the European Commission that police attitudes to racial and ethnic minorities continue to lead to violations, as do attitudes to the Roma in South East Europe. Again, each region has its own variety of racism as it is not necessarily people of African descent who face injustice. Ethnic or indigenous minorities, migrant workers, or religious minorities can all face discrimination which can threaten life. Religious intolerance across Asia has cost the lives of many, though there is a reluctance to see the similarities between racism in the United States and the failures to protect religious minorities.

The pandemic has been an economic as well as a health crisis. Across all the regions the pandemic has caused economic concerns for marginalised groups. Whether it is limited access to health, the impact of job losses, or the collapse of industries using migrant workers, people are living in greater economic stress even as the pandemic is ending. However, the economic cost has not been evenly distributed. State economies were often quick to assist businesses and provide security around wages for many wage earners, though these protections were not as easily awarded to those in informal sectors or people in economically vulnerable sectors. In Southeast Europe the aged did not always receive this protection they needed. Migrant workers in the Asia Pacific did not receive their social security protection, even though many of them have been regularly making their payments into their welfare schemes. The mottos of Build Back Better or a Just Recovery are proving to be only partial as the globe emerges from the pandemic.

A final cross regional issue is the status of the environment during the pandemic. On a positive note, there were short term benefits as people stopped travel or work from home became the norm. A reduction in pollution, the return of wildlife to areas where humans are normally found, or a halt in greenhouse gas emission gave people hope that eventually the world could adapt to a low carbon-emitting lifestyle. These changes made many people aware that the individual changes made by people could reduce their carbon footprint. However, as threatened nations in the Asia Pacific are quick to point out, individual changes will not reduce the impact of climate change on the Pacific Island nations who are threatened by sea level rises, especially if fossil fuel industry activities are not halted. Once the threats of climate change were seen to be potential future events. But the increase in extreme weather, such as heatwaves in Europe, or the stress on agricultural land which will lead to food insecurity across parts of Africa, demonstrates that the world must now respond to climate change in multiple ways. Not only reducing greenhouse gasses, but mitigating the impact of climate change, and adapting to the changing climate.

The universities, academics and students of the Global Campus who make up the Global Campus often work in areas in crisis. In recent years this has included people in higher education in Myanmar, Venezuela, Ukraine, and Afghanistan. In each of these situations, regional members of the Global Campus have assisted students and academics to continue their study or research. While humanitarian concerns are critical, the continuity of higher education has importance. Societies in conflict need education in rule of law, justice, and human rights if peace is to be restored.

The second section of this journal contains articles from two Afghan refugees who are part of the Global Campus and have direct experience of conducting academic work in a crisis. After the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in mid-2021, many academics, civil society workers, and people working with North American and Western European development organizations were faced with a difficult decision whether to remain in Afghanistan and face threats and intimidation, or to seek asylum. For some the only choice was to leave because the work they do is not tolerated under the Taliban. This is the case of the two Afghan researchers whose work is published here. The two articles highlight the increase in violations under the Taliban rule, and give an understanding of how the Taliban could seize power. The fears of the suppression of women's rights proved true as Hussain Rezaï's article demonstrates. The Taliban's deeply held anachronistic views of gender are matched with ethnocentric attitudes which marginalises the non-Pashtun tribes from political positions. As Ali Ahmadi explains, Afghanistan is a country of great ethnic diversity, but one in which this diversity has not always been recognised. However, a federal system gives the possibility for the diversity to be represented, but this is impossible under the current centralised control of the Taliban.

As an overview of human rights in the early 2020s, the articles in this journal are evidence that there are wide ranging problems for human rights. While we must wait to see if the promotion and protection of rights improves in the post-pandemic period, for people from Afghanistan and other countries in conflict, there is little hope in the immediate future of a return to peace and stability.