

## POSITION PAPER

ESTORIL CONFERENCES 2019

# EMPOWERING HUMANITY

from local to global justice



The XX century was filled with tragic events, but it also allowed humanity to rebuild its dignity from the ashes. After the Second World War, a general concern with the creation of national and international mechanisms for the protection of human rights grew worldwide.

In 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was put forward, followed by the adoption of the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966). Humanity's commitment towards democracy, justice and equal rights endured throughout the civil rights movement, in the United States and abroad. Two decades later, such commitment reached its climax with the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), an event some celebrated as «the end of history».

The XXI century has seen an ever-increasing process of globalization and reduction of the role and power of States. A new global order is emerging along with ill-designed and immature mechanisms of global governance. This is particularly true for typical transnational domains such as the environment and the migratory phenomena, which directly or indirectly affect communities everywhere.

In a world where information circulates at the speed of light, local problems have become global. Moreover, with a continuous flow of ideas connecting people all over the world, it is now inconceivable for a nation to project its future in isolation. This poses a challenge but, most of all, we regard it as an **opportunity**.

The interdependencies of countries and peoples and the worldwide confluence of ideas allow us to rethink the **concept of justice**. We must adapt old moral categories to a broad, plural, complex and more prosperous world. In this respect, the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** emerges as one of the most critical efforts towards a true universalization of human dignity.

Recently upheld by world leaders, the Agenda for Sustainable Development focuses on the eradication of poverty, the rejection of inequalities and environmental protection. These globally adopted Sustainable

Development Goals may be taken as a starting point to our discussion on Global Justice – what can we do to bolster and strengthen them?

More than focusing on the relationship between States, a global approach to justice must primarily focus on individuals – not only their **inalienable rights** but also their **binding duties** towards one another. Our purpose will be to unveil what lies at the core of human interactions of any kind, including state-level obligations, within countries and beyond borders.

As we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Estoril Conferences, the 2019 edition yearns to synthesize and bridge the dominant challenges posed by globalization in the last decade, revisiting the way we have approached them through the years.

The Estoril Conferences 2019 will develop around four main topics of debate: **human rights and duties, climate justice, global poverty and inequality and technology and development**. For three days, speakers will engage in vibrant debates, addressing these four topics in all their comprehensiveness, so they can then take on the more practical task of dealing with real problems of global (in)justice.

While avoiding the imposition of projected morals on anyone and offering plural perspectives on matters of political responsibility, the discussion will be built over some key and unavoidable recent developments that prompt us to think about our duties promoting peace and justice beyond borders. Different voices will be heard in order to conclude the best ways to advocate for human rights, both at an individual and a collective level and concerning civil, political, economic and social rights. Speakers will take part in impact discussions aimed at reaching concrete solutions to global justice issues, which might be adequately addressed locally or involve everyday transnational challenges that claim the implementation of international and supranational policies.

The Estoril Conferences will promote the dialogue between theory and praxis, ethics and politics, past and future, seniors and youngsters. For each of the topics above presented, we propose the following main axes of discussion:

## JUSTICE AND UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND DUTIES

One of the greatest moments in human history was the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948. It was drafted by representatives from all regions of the world and established the fundamental human rights to which universal protection was to be afforded: «a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations».

Some have pointed out the limitations of a mere formal outlining of rights that are not adequately enforced. Human rights approaches are often regarded as an insufficient foundation for global justice. To complement them, other conceptions arose.

The capabilities approach, for example, advocates for an actual threshold of human capabilities that national governments should guarantee to their citizens. It also promotes the substitution of traditional living standards indicators, such as GDP per capita, for other measures such as human development.

Addressing global justice further means acknowledging that along with rights there are also duties. That is why the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was complemented, in 1998, with the Declaration of Human Duties and Responsibilities, with the support of UNESCO and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. This declaration envisaged the transition from a formal to substantial equality by setting forth a list of duties and responsibilities to enforce the previously recognized human rights.

Other efforts have been undertaken. The idea of positive duties towards one another is now included in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the Statute of Rome, the Global Compact, The Earth Charter, the Kyoto Protocol, and additional UNESCO declarations and conventions. Furthermore, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development's call for action explicitly acknowledged the importance of taking responsibility for the world we live in.

As women's movements become one of the leading voices fighting against institutionalized discrimination of all kinds, the relation between global justice and recent gender equality claims cannot be forgotten. Having acknowledged the intersectional character of sexist oppression, feminists are now committed to voice and support other historically marginalized groups and minorities. Moreover, as it became a truly international movement, feminism's action must adapt to respect individuals who might not share the same conception of freedom, and whose distinct resources translate into diverse processes of emancipation.

The value of the Declaration of Human Rights as a legitimate source of universality or, somewhat, the result of an abusive process of axiological universalization is still disputed. However, there is no way to approach global problems without thinking of such a degree of commonality. This is still a topic of debate among contemporary anthropology, philosophy, sociology, and other fields of knowledge. Hence, when we speak of universal values and global justice, we must address these questions:

What can be universalized in a world filled with differences? How can we properly balance the defence of pluralism while upholding some universal values? How to reconcile Communitarian and Cosmopolitan approaches? What role should individual and collective bodies play, when it comes to safeguarding fundamental rights? How can we reach a global consensus on the legitimacy of international intervention in moments of crisis? Moreover, what is the actual role of international organizations in keeping peace and justice?

## JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE TECHNOLOGICAL ERA

Through the last century, technology has done much to improve the lives of people in the Global North. Generalized access to essential resources such as sanitation, clean water, efficient energy sources, better building materials, and medical care have not only raised life's expectancy, they have also enabled a dignified life where it did not exist before.

However, access to technology and a better life is still unequal on a global scale. Uneven access to technology and development is one of the features that separates the Global South from the Global North. In 2014, approximately 15% of the world's population (around 1 billion people) still lived without access to electricity.

Another aspect of technological justice concerns the limits-to-growth dilemma, in its relation to the prospect of constrained personal lives, colossal job loss, psychological problems, and unprecedented challenges that might arise from an ever-increasing technological development. Namely, the role of work as a human activity will inevitably be questioned as a defining identity trace. Partly due to advances in artificial intelligence research, working-class labor time is likely to decrease, depriving people of a fundamental dimension of their lives.

Furthermore, as technological development allows for a reduction in workforce expenses, there is an increasingly higher risk of economic monopolies, with a new elite emerging in the information era detaining a large part of technological resources. Transparent technological development is thus a matter of global justice that must be addressed so as not to leave people feeling helpless and with no control over their own lives.

The concern with technological justice reflects the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, namely when it

comes to ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, and to promote sustainable industrialization worldwide. We will also discuss how technology can serve equality and labor dignity instead of enhancing disparities and alienation.

How can we ensure universal, equal access to technology that guarantees equal opportunities to everyone? What measures can be taken in developed countries to prevent technology addiction and dependence? How can we envisage the future of work in societies where technology is predominant? Moreover, what can be done to ensure technological developments will work in the interests of workers and the least well-off, instead of merely following the markets' demands?

## JUSTICE, WORLD POVERTY, AND INEQUALITY

When addressing global justice, one of the main challenges lies in global economic inequality, particularly the unequal distribution of wealth and world poverty. Such concern is actively contemplated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which number one goal is to «end poverty in all its forms everywhere», permeating the subsequent objectives.

World poverty is directly related to inequalities in health outcomes and opportunities. Due to poor living conditions and to the lack of protection from the State, poor people are often more vulnerable to diseases and less likely to engage in social mobility. The pervasiveness of corruption in our societies further acts to prevent underprivileged people from leading dignified lives under the consecrated protection of their States. Given its negative impact on human rights enjoyment and development performance, it begs us to question the very governmental models we abide by and the structural changes required for the problem to be eradicated.

World poverty and inequality are closely related to the international order that has been established since the end of the Second World War. The role played by international organizations and corporations cannot be underestimated if we want to address economic inequalities effectively. Some contemporary thinkers argue that severe worldwide poverty could have been eradicated decades ago if affluent societies chose to do so. This negligence has already been called the «largest crime against humanity ever committed».

How can different nations play a part in solving the problem? Are measures such as the “Robin Hood tax” legitimate ways to address economic inequalities? Could the creation of basic income guarantee programs help balance such inequalities or would they, on the contrary, increase them? Is attracting private investment and raising agricultural productivity in developing countries enough? Do charitable organizations play an essential role in providing aid to the underprivileged or do they contribute to perpetuate inequality? Are western countries profiting from extreme poverty in other parts of the world? How can non-state actors raise awareness for the fact that the prevailing economic model might be itself causing such damages?

## JUSTICE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Climate justice is genuinely one of the most cross-cutting matters on the global agenda, as it will eventually affect every one of us. It relates to the issues of sustainable development as well as to the fundamental duties of prosperous societies and individuals towards the most vulnerable people. Moreover, lest we forget, it is also a matter of intergenerational justice.

Climate change is also related to other fields such as technology and economy since there is an ongoing

tension between long-term goals of global environmental balance and sustainability and short-term interests of individual agents and entities. Since the immediate effects of climate change are increasingly harder to dismiss, this is the moment to start taking real action in order to diminish the patterns of human behavior that will eventually destroy the planet as a generous home for humanity and many other species. For this same reason, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development stresses the urgency of initiatives aimed at tackling the problem.

The topic is connected to the environmental overburden imposed by the growing inadequate Westphalian world order, raising the question regarding fair distribution costs. This is a reality we must acknowledge if we are to allocate responsibilities without losing sight of human development needs. Therefore, we must ask ourselves who should be held accountable for more significant financial initiatives aimed at avoiding environmental catastrophe and the devastating outcomes of climate change.

Should industrialized nations hold responsibility for climate change? Is it an ethical duty for wealthier nations, which have the higher ability to pay for costs associated with mitigating climate change, to take the lead? Can individual actions serve as effective ways to alter the trajectory of the climatic crisis? Moreover, are exhortations to personal lifestyle changes legitimate admonitions or do they merely divert attention from a systemic issue requiring mass collective action? How can we adequately warn and empower future generations for what is to come?

## **THE ESTORIL CONFERENCES 2019**

These are some of the topics that must be analyzed when discussing Global Justice. To discuss the injustice of whatever kind, we must commit to the dismantling of taboos, namely when it comes to the role governments and international and transnational institutions may be playing in the perpetuation of structural inequality between individuals and countries alike.

Some other topics such as the **crisis in democracy, the rise of populist regimes and contemporary armed conflicts**, will naturally arise within the debates.

We believe that these issues are not detached from the most general topics related to human rights, the environment, technology and world poverty. They are possible consequences of exclusionary processes and rising inequality the neoliberal order has produced.

In 2019, the Estoril Conferences will also embrace the responsibility to continue the debate it started on its last edition: global migration.

In a world on the move, where many forced displaced people still lack international protection, how can the human rights of migrants be adequately protected? Will the recently agreed Global Compact on Migration effectively tackle the governance burdens of international migrants? Is it legitimate to build walls to keep people from searching for a better life for themselves and their families? What is the responsibility of the States concerning the protection of migrants in transit countries? Is there an enforceable duty to protect outside national borders? Moreover, how can the right to a safe passage, which we envisaged with our call to create a Global Safety Passport, be implemented and enforced?

**Our compromise:**

Our debates will be led based on respect and recognition. This is not merely a method; it is the very foundation of justice as it is. With an emphasis on the defense of pluralism and differences, we are committed to establishing dialogue as the main engine of change.

The Estoril Conferences invites everyone to be open to test the shortcomings of their positions. To confront them with other perspectives. To inevitably bump with dearly held dogmas. And find out new meanings for treasured concepts.

This, we believe, is the starting point of any good will to promote peace and equality in a globally just world.

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LOCAL ANSWERS

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