

3rd Conference

Religion and Human Rights (RHR)

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ZAGREB – Croatia



**Religion and
Human Rights**

Call for papers

Religion and political human rights in empirical perspective

In our contemporary world, many human rights are under pressure. Media reports of restrictions on the right to protest, the active and passive right to vote, the right to associate, the right to assemble and the right of self-defense. Torture takes place, refugees fear for their lives and asylum seekers are confronted with resistance and rejection. Populist groups seem to be successful in mobilizing many people against anything foreign and unknown. All people should be equal before the law and should be given a fair trial, regardless of their offence, but political practice is often different. Human rights are disrespected in many countries around the world. The perception of many people is that ideological interests effectively subordinate human rights. This is a clear challenge for the promotion of human rights.

The covenant on Civil and Political Rights by the UN (1966/1976) takes a closer look on a certain area of rights. It underpins the importance of political and public participation of all people. These rights will promote

“democratic governance, the rule of law, social inclusion and economic development, as well as in the advancement of all human rights. The right to directly and indirectly participate in political and public life is important in empowering individuals and groups, and is one of the core elements of human rights-based approaches aimed at eliminating marginalization and discrimination. (...) Obstacles to equal political and public participation exist in many contexts. These barriers may include direct and indirect discrimination on grounds such as race, colour, descent, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, birth, disability, nationality or other status. Even when there is no formal discrimination in connection with political or public participation, inequalities in access to other human rights may impede the effective exercise of political participation rights.”¹

One of the statements in the literature on human rights indicates a high probability that the human rights regime in a society depends on democratic structures. The assumption is that

¹ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/EqualParticipation.aspx>

democracy, political rights and the rule of law are connected. Political and judicial rights depend on the willingness and the ability of governments to implement them and to control their implementation. In this context, political participation is related to the perception about the functioning of the state, of democracy and its institutions. The “religion and human rights project” contains instruments that measure attitudes on state, democracy and institutions thus making it possible to research if and how they are connected with attitudes on political human rights. The next step is to include religion. Human rights law is supposed to direct all social forces towards the enhancement of autonomy and equality of all citizens and the possibility for a full participation for everyone. Because the rule of human rights law in themselves does not function as a strictly neutral umpire or even an impartial authority, accessible forces in civil society are needed to prevent any subordination of those rights from ideological interests and to improve their interpretation and application to further principles of human dignity, freedom and equality. A basic assumption of the “religion and human rights project” is that religion belongs to these forces. All religions claim that the ethical aspirations and moral duties they share contribute to the well-being and welfare of individual human beings, groups and communities. This applies particularly to the golden rule, which plays an important role in all religions, namely to treat others as one wants to be treated. The principle of universal reciprocity underlying this golden rule can be seen as the very basis of all human rights law. But one could ask whether and to what extent this principle is actually observed both within and between different religions, as well as in the secular world, both within and between nation-states. More specifically one could ask whether and to what extent religions contribute to the realization of human rights, i.e. how they legislate, positivize and universalize the moral codes they advocate, or at least help to prevent and counteract violations of human rights. The question is not only legitimate, because religions can be requested and even required to abide by their own ethical and moral standards but also relevant, since religions can be seen as the very core, or at least one important core aspect, of the various civilizations represented in our multicultural society today.

International empirical research on attitudes towards human rights is not about the legal dimension of rights, but about the legitimation of these rights in the opinion of the people. The question is how young people understand and value political and judicial rights and to which degree religious convictions and practices are connected with attitudes towards these human rights. It is also of interest whether the individual background of the respondents matters, (i.e. the degree of education, migration background and value orientation) - and if so, to what extent. Therefore the general question of the upcoming conference is: *What religious attitudes can be found among religious and non-religious citizens with regard to political and judicial rights? Can religion be identified as a force supporting the human rights regime?*