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**Bringing Human Rights Home – Everywhere: How Advocacy Strategies Abroad are  
Building the Human Rights Field in a Changing World**

Friday, July 12, 2013

10:45 – 12:15 pm

***Session Organizer:***

- Julie Broome, Head of Human Rights, Sigrid Rausing Trust

***Facilitator:***

- Julie Broome, Head of Human Rights, Sigrid Rausing Trust

***Panelists:***

- Fateh Azzam, Chairman of the Board, Arab Human Rights Fund
- Wolfgang Kaleck, General Secretary, European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights
- Edwin Rekosh, Executive Director, PILnet

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This session examined the relationship between international norms and locally-oriented strategies to promote and protect human rights. Edwin Rekosh, Executive Director of PILnet, opened by explaining how a foreign presence can “crowd out” the local perspective in human rights work. He suggested that outsiders can support human rights on the ground by empowering local actors, offering guidance as they approach reports and litigation, and sharing insight into international frameworks.

Fateh Azzam, Chairman of the Arab Human Rights Fund Board, discussed efforts in the Middle East to craft local strategies and hold states accountable within existing international frameworks. New organizations emerging in formerly oppressive regimes have helped raise public awareness of human rights; these actors may require training from those with experience in the international arena.

Wolfgang Kaleck, General Secretary of the European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights, highlighted different perspectives between European and Global South litigators. Western European litigators have focused on civil and political rights specifically, while Global South litigators incorporate rights frameworks into broader social movements. Kaleck noted that the value of a movement is not

defined by written law or the outcome of litigation, pointing to the Rios Montt genocide trial, which emboldened local communities in their pursuit of rights despite the overturned conviction.

Julie Broome, Head of Human Rights at the Sigrid Rausing Trust, asked the panelists to comment on non-legal alternatives and strategies. Azzam spoke about documenting and reporting in the absence of legal systems. Middle Eastern human rights actors have also engaged in training and education, fighting the cultural conception that human rights are a Western imposition.

Rekosh explained that the value of international legal frameworks is contextual: it depends on how robust the legal system is and whether advocacy can inspire political change outside judicial decisions. Europe's robust legal system, for example, enables local actors to strategize within the existing framework. This is a contrast to China, where international standards hold little value for local actors. Many actors embrace widely accepted human rights values (relating to labor and the environment, for example) but don't engage the international frameworks, because they bear little weight on the ground.

Broome asked the panelists about points of conflict and how organizations can work together more effectively. Kaleck discussed his experience with indigenous actors in Bogota, who expressed passionate concerns that lawyers end up dividing the community and represent individual claims at the expense of unity. He suggested that funders use their resources to empower Global South-based movements and enable local ownership.

Rekosh provided a case study on sterilization of Roma women in Slovakia, where an international organization's involvement conflicted with the local lawyer's approach. The lawyer sought the best outcome for both the affected women and the broader issue, while the international actors didn't understand local concerns. There was no mechanism to sync local and international strategies. Azzam expanded on these concerns, noting that international work often fails to give adequate credit to actors doing the work on the ground. He pointed to the International Federation for Human Rights and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network as good models of global networks collaborating effectively with local members.

Broome then turned to specific recommendations for funders to tap into local movements. Azzam explained that work in the ever-changing Arab world requires different strategies: legal work must continue, but funders must build capacity on the ground and strengthen institutional protection of human rights. As an example, he suggested that funders focus on grants that:

- foster dialogue among traditional and young human rights actors
- focus on journalists and the media, including access to the arts
- engage with development actors (for example, integrating rights into local children's groups)
- foster collaboration among actors (for example, local councils in Syria working with international experts to integrate human rights into their work)
- build capacity through convenings and social entrepreneurship

Rekosh said that outsiders can provide resources, but people ultimately empower themselves. What are missing are connections: funders can achieve impact by connecting funds and intellectual resources to local talent, including by supporting regional organizations directly.

Broome shared perspectives from the Sigrid Rausing Trust, which works globally but with no staff on the ground. To strike a balance between major grants and impact at the local level, the Trust identifies

regional funders and works through intermediaries. It also supports international networks of organizations, though Broome noted that funders must ensure the networks foster equal partnerships and decision-making among their members.

### Question-and-Answer Session

One participant connected the conversation to questions of where “human rights” resonate, pointing to a publication (Making Human Rights a Reality, by Emily Hafner-Burton) that found no correlation between international norms and a decline in rights violations at the local level. The findings don’t suggest that international norms are unimportant, but they indicate that a new approach is needed. International norms must be linked to movements on the ground.

The participant also questioned the importance of language, asking whether it matters that many global movements do not frame their struggles as “human rights.” Rekosh said it may not matter, so long as protections for rights are growing, and questioned his right as an outsider to impose a human rights frame on local movements. Azzam disagreed, opining that hiding the work is dangerous for the human rights paradigm. Within Arab region, “human rights” is an important criteria for judging governments. The challenge is to give the term meaning at the local level. A participant pointed out the difference between groups that consciously hide the human rights aspects of their work and those that simply don’t use that frame.

One participant asked for methods for funders to achieve success. Kaleck explained that it takes time for work to trickle down into the justice system and the public. Litigation must be accompanied by communication efforts and consideration of the political environment. Azzam emphasized the incredible diversity of human rights actors, noting that legal work must adapt to different contexts and cautioning against a one-size-fits-all approach. A participant shared lessons from human rights defenders, highlighting the value of traditional advocacy and convening local actors around international human rights reviews.

Rekosh said that social norms can be just as important as legal norms in integrating human rights at the local level. In response to a question about implementing the rights frameworks enshrined in some African constitutions, he concluded that building support and enforcing human rights norms is a long game.