



**GENEVA CENTRE
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
ADVANCEMENT AND
GLOBAL DIALOGUE**

ISSUE N°11

JANUARY - APRIL 2023

NEWSLETTER

Human Rights Without Prejudice



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The Geneva Centre began the year with the additional enthusiasm conferred by the adoption of an increasingly intensive annual workplan to fulfil its mandate in the domains of human rights research and publication, training, advocacy and global dialogue.

The activities during the January-April period included extensive reporting on the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council, a training session on Cybersecurity and Human Rights, the organisation of panel discussions on whose publication contained an analysis of the lessons learned and recommendations for ways forward.

In parallel, advocacy efforts continued with the publication of our Annual Report 2022 in January, as well as several videos and posts put out on our social media platforms, on selected commemorative days and significant developments in human rights promotion.

We are pleased to announce that the coming months will continue with more activities and projects, and international panel events. These will be described in our next Newsletter in autumn.

The Geneva Centre appreciates your interest in following its activities and your support towards combined efforts to promote human rights world-wide.

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DEFENDING WOMEN AND GIRLS' RIGHT TO EDUCATION: CURRENT CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

PANEL EVENT 24 JANUARY 2023

On January 2, the Geneva Centre issued a statement recognizing the urgent need to defend women and girls' fundamental right to education, following the decision by the ruling Afghan authorities. As a continuation, the Geneva Centre organized an online event entitled **"Defending Women and Girls' Right to Education: Current Challenges and Perspectives"** on the occasion of the International Day of Education, celebrated each year on 24 January.

The event saw the participation of seven distinguished panellists comprising experts and practitioners, including a member of the UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls.

The panel event aimed to create a space for discussion and called for mobilization around women and girls' right to education. The speakers addressed good practices on how to encourage more national and international commitments from the governments and shared concrete initiatives and action from the grassroots level to ensure the right to education for every woman and girl, which can contribute to laying the foundation for women's empowerment and is fundamental to achieving gender equality.



Highlights from the panel

The panel was moderated by **Dr. Umesh Palwankar**, Executive Director of the Geneva Centre.

He observed that the right to education, equally for men and women, is enshrined international law right from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights onwards, including in the 2 International Covenants of 1966 and several other treaties. Denying women and girls this basic human right would violate the fundamental principles of equality and nondiscrimination, embody a policy of flagrant gender discrimination, contrary international law and run against the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly 4 and 5. It would also seriously undermine the goals of the international community to establish just, tolerant, inclusive and prosperous societies.





Ms. Elizabeth Broderick, Member of the United Nations Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, said that in their country missions and official communications they are witness to the rise of authoritarian, nationalist and fundamentalist actors which lead to very difficult consequences for human rights, in particular, rights related to women and girls, and gender equality. The education of women and girls is one of the most effective investments for sustainable and inclusive development and peace.

Ms. Belquis Ahmadi, Senior Program Officer at the United States Institute of Peace, provided a brief overview of the state of education in Afghanistan before August 2021.

3 million girls and 7 million boys were in schools, close to 200 private and public universities operated throughout the country, where both men and women were pursuing their desired degrees. She then discussed the negative impact on the physical and mental well-being of girls. The ban on education had had an enormous psychological impact on them, affecting their self-image, self-confidence and self-worth



Dr. Racquel Warner, Career Educator, Academic Consultant, underlined that there are several barriers to girls' education, both income- and not income-related, such as living in a war-torn area, having despotic regimes and violations of human rights. The quality of education remains not gender-responsive, resulting in a gender gap in terms of learning and skills development for girls. Dr. Warner also addressed the learning loss that has happened because of COVID-19, which can be amounted to learning poverty.



Ms. Shekeba Ahmadi, Women's Rights Advocate, CMI-Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation, shared that she was the first girl and child in her family to receive school and university education and hoped not to be the last. It broke her heart when her nieces asked about the re-opening of schools in Kabul – a question that still remains open. Ms. Ahmadi discussed some current challenges in education, from both an advocate's and an ordinary person's perspective.

A change in Afghanistan is only possible when the international community, political stakeholders, and people of the world joins forces to convey united messages of solidarity with women and people of Afghanistan.



Ms. Saba Ismail, Co-Founder of the NGO, Aware Girls. She affirmed that researches at Aware Girls have shown that completion of high-quality higher secondary education for girls escalates the economic growth of communities, improves the quality of life for girls and increases women's political participation. The COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts, and climate change have exacerbated the education crisis in the world.

Ms. Ismail regretted that education was severely underfunded in Pakistan. Like many other countries, Pakistan spends more on military and defense than on constructing schools and offering high-quality education for girls.

Ms. Prasansa Karki, Program Development Coordinator, Nagarik Aawaz (Nepal), explained it was a peacebuilding organization that works with conflict-affected women and their children. It visions a Just and Peaceful Nepal through engaging youth, women, children and marginalized groups as a key to realizing the goal, through informal education, peer learning activities, by broadening the definition of education, teaching history and sharing stories of strength.

Ms. Karki touched upon the importance of psycho-social care in schools, including training teachers on mental health and the importance of avoiding corporal punishment in schools.



Dr. Mona Mostafa El-Sholkamy, Associate Professor, Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government, shared some current perspectives and challenges with respect to the Egyptian context. She started by saying that, in 2021, the female literacy rate in Egypt was 83.3%. Egypt was actively addressing the 2030 Sustainable Agenda, having brought the 17 sustainable development goals to each governorate, for all people, especially the young, to have sufficient information on the SDGs. Providing some general context,

Dr. El-Sholkamy mentioned that structural reforms, targeted subsidies, and interventions in the most vulnerable regions contributed to a reduction in poverty rates, which was reflected in education attainment records, especially among girls.



[Access the pdf version](#) of this publication.
Watch the full recording of the panel event [here](#).



INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AND RECONCILIATION: CREATING AND SUSTAINING SPACES OF ENCOUNTER

PANEL EVENT ON 24 FEBRUARY 2023

The second panel event of the year “**Interfaith Dialogue and Reconciliation: Creating and Sustaining Spaces of Encounter**” was successfully held on 22 February, with the participation of 54 participants and six renowned panelists.

The existence of a pluralistic society, particularly in terms of religion, faith and culture, requires a platform in the community. In this sense, interreligious and interfaith dialogue can be seen as an effective platform to build mutual understanding and tolerance in society. This process can be followed by anyone, from ordinary people to religious leaders, academics, and politicians operating at international, national and local levels. The term interfaith dialogue refers to cooperative, constructive, and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions and/or spiritual or humanistic beliefs, at both the individual and institutional levels. It aims to promote mutual understanding and to increase acceptance and tolerance. When employed as a tool or strategic practice, interfaith dialogue may facilitate discussions to combat intolerance, hate speech and discrimination and to promote peacebuilding.

A follow-up publication was issued, and it includes an analytical Lessons Learned and Ways Forward chapter.



Highlights from the panel

The panel was moderated by **Dr. Umesh Palwankar**, Executive Director of the Geneva Centre.

This panel sought to offer a forum for discussion and mobilization around the crucial issue of interfaith dialogue and reconciliation. The panel discussion attempted to map and discuss some of the most prominent initiatives and best practices for using interfaith and inter-religious dialogue and collaboration, in regard to efforts to promote tolerance, sincerity and empathy. The panel also examined the interrelation between diversity of faith and economic, social, historical and political factors of inclusiveness, peace and prosperity.





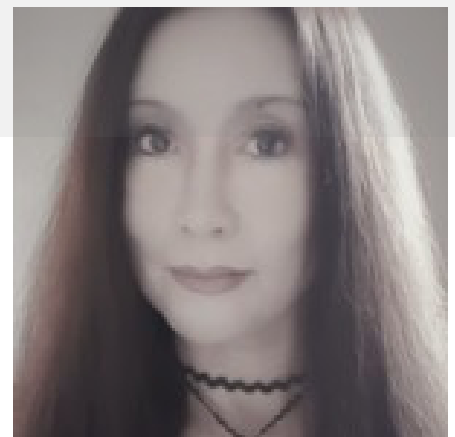
Ms. Nazila Ghanea, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, started her statement by providing a brief overview of the UN position on this topic.

She affirmed that human rights law recognizes States as holding legal obligations for ensuring human rights, but this doesn't take away from the responsibility of others and of non-State actors. With an ever-widening inclusion by the State on the one hand, and the deepening and spread of the commitment within the communities on the other, the potential of interfaith dialogue and collaboration could be greatly magnified, and trust established.

Prof. Fabio Petito, Religion & International Affairs, University of Sussex; Head of "Religions and International Relations" Programme, ISPI, affirmed that religion is often at the centre of a global scenario of conflict and insecurity. Today policy makers around the world increasingly recognize that religion and, inter-religious dialogue and collaboration, can be part of the solution. It can be a strategic resource for peace building, the strengthening of human rights and the advancement of sustainable development.



Dr Scherto Gill, Director of Global Humanity for Peace Institute; Senior Fellow and Executive Secretary, Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace (GHFP), recalled the idea that mutual understanding has become one of the major challenges for humanity. In practice, people and communities tend to partake either the essentialist or the pluralist worldview.



Rev Sören Lenz, Co-chair, Interreligious & Interconvictional Dialogue Committee, Conference of INGOs, Council of Europe, underlined that in liberal democracies, the separation of state and religion, freedom of conscience and freedom of belief is fundamental. Nevertheless, their organizational forms play a crucial role in civil society as they are instrumental in shaping the relationship of individuals with the world, state and society.

Thus religion and faith contribute indirectly to the shaping of civil society, as they concern the whole human being as a free, self-determined and acting societal being.



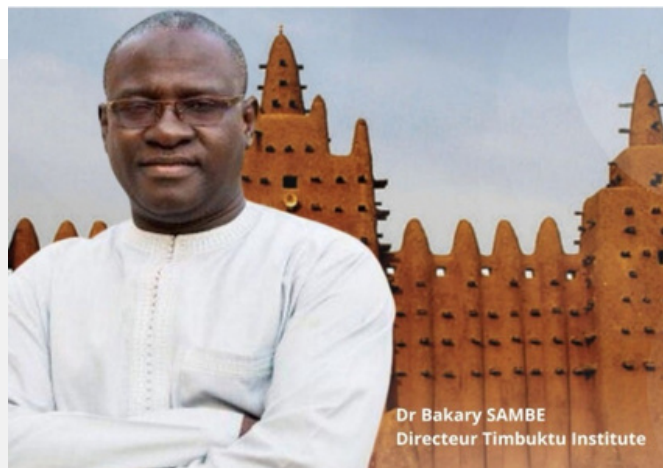
Dr Kezevino Aram, President of Shanti Ashram, India, emphasized that often religion is seen as a part of the problem. However, this premise is being challenged at the local and community levels. The desire to be in dialogue and to find common ground has a very long timeline.

The role of the State in the inter-religious dialogue is very significant, it needs to be a respectful partner and to facilitate, enable and co-create these spaces.

Dr Bakary Sambe, Regional Director, Timbuktu Institute, African Center for Peace Studies, discussed on radicalization, extremism and interfaith dialogue in Africa. African countries were marked by French secularism, and our society is purely religious.

He affirmed that we risk the clash of ignorance rather than the clash of civilizations.

To overcome this, the international community should integrate principles of dialogue and mutual understanding into education and educate on the diversity and plurality of faith and beliefs. The international community should also promote engagement with a broader set of actors in the fields of education, healthcare, economy and sustainable development in particular.



[Access the pdf version](#) of this publication.
Watch the full recording of the panel event [here](#).



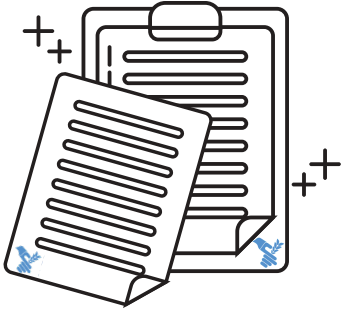
“Congrats to the Geneva Centre... for this innovative panel which has the virtue of delivering and crossing perspectives on a complex issue. Looking forward to reading the conclusions and recommendations.”

- Participant



HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL REPORTING INITIATIVE

HRC52 (27 FEBRUARY - 4 APRIL 2023)



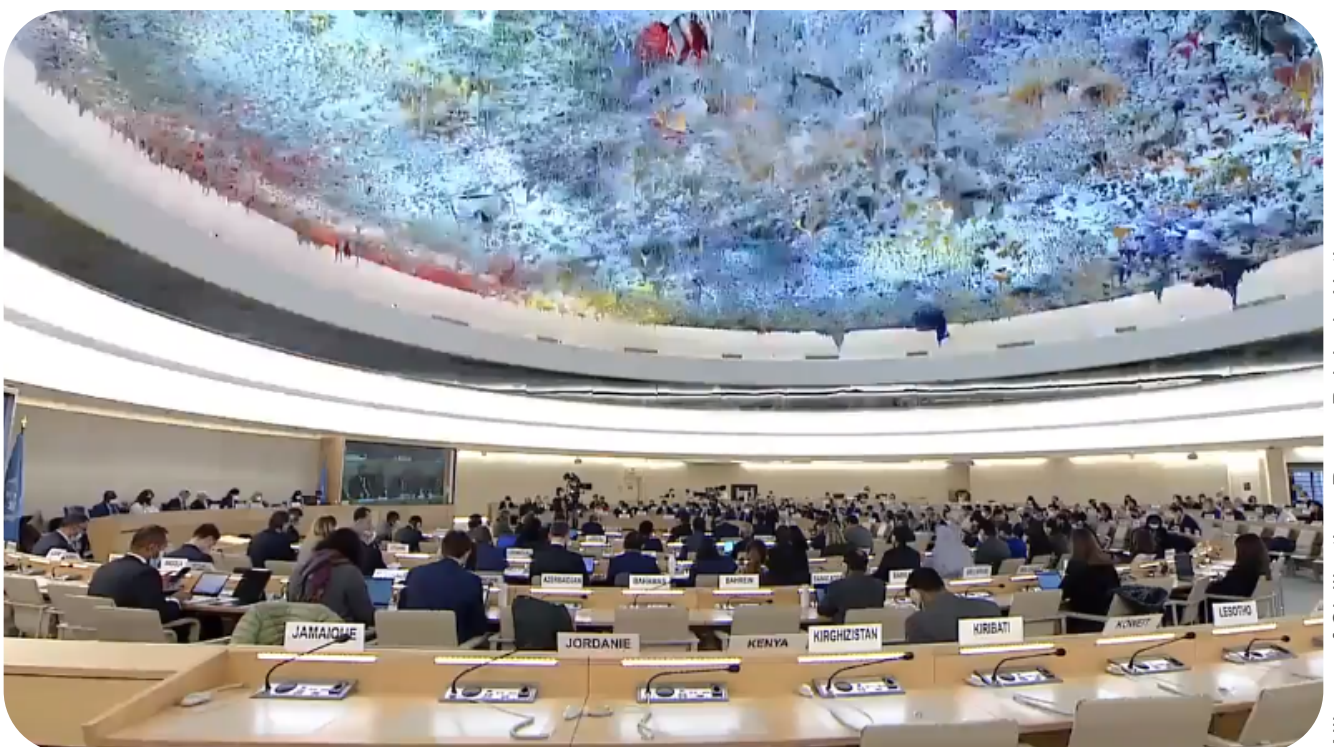
The Geneva Centre continued its unique monitoring initiative following closely and providing summary reports on some of the key meetings during the **52nd regular session of the Human Rights Council (HRC)**. The HRC concluded the session after adopting 43 resolutions, extending 19 thematic and country-specific mandates, and appointing 10 Special Procedure mandate holders.

Among the meetings covered were three-day High-Level Segment with a focus on the MENA region, and General debates 2, 3 and 4. Additionally, the Geneva Centre produced reports on several Interactive Dialogues, Oral updates, Panels, a Weekly Overview Report, and a final detailed report in table form of the adopted resolutions. A total of 26 reports were prepared and distributed to stakeholders.

The 53rd regular session of the Human Rights Council will be held between 19 June - 14 July 2023. Read all our HRC52 reports and subscribe to our unique HRC Newsletter [here](#).

"Human rights is a force to reckon with, not because it serves the interests of the powerful, but because it has captured the imagination of the powerless."

- Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights



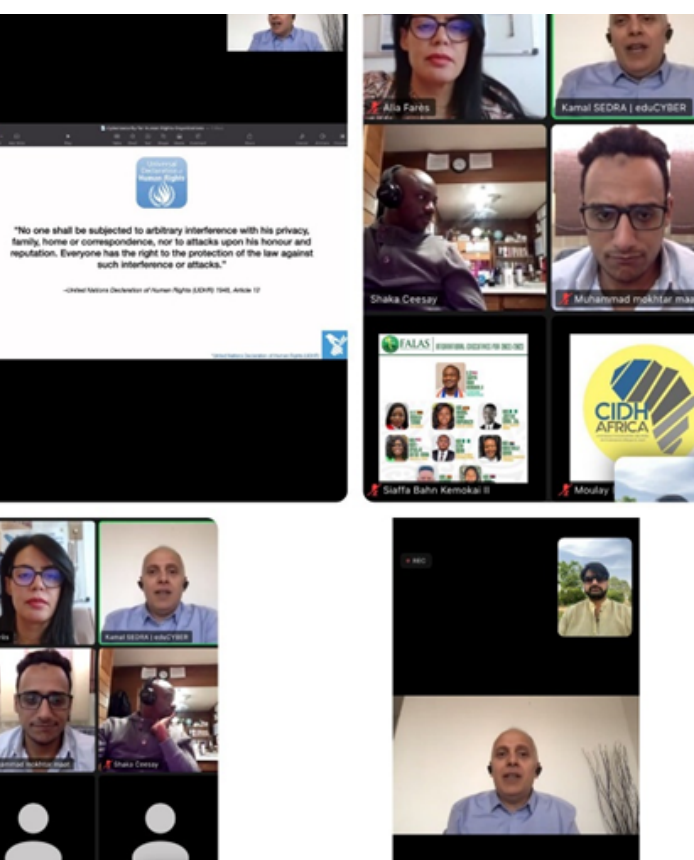
Alliance of Civilizations Room, Palais de Nations

CYBERSECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

ONLINE TRAINING SESSION 27 - 28 APRIL 2023

In a bid to empower human rights professionals with the necessary tools to navigate the ever-evolving digital landscape, a 2-day online training course on "**Cybersecurity for Human Rights Professionals**" was organized on the 27th and 28th of April. The course was a resounding success, with 15 participants from diverse regions joining in to broaden their knowledge and skills.

The participants expressed their satisfaction with the training, highlighting that the knowledge gained during the sessions would help them better protect human rights in their respective fields, particularly when it comes to cybersecurity. The training proved to be a significant boost to their capacity to navigate the complexities of digital security, allowing them to stay ahead of potential cyber threats.



COURSE MODULES

DAY 1: DATA PROTECTION & SECURE DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

Module 1: Cyber Security Risk Online Assessment

Module 2: Secure Digital Communications

DAY 2: INTERNET BROWSING SECURITY AND PRIVACY & CYBER SECURITY RISK ASSESSMENT/POLICY

Module 3: Internet Browsing Security and Privacy

Module 4: Data Protection

"The Centre had a wonderful and very informative first session of the 2-days training on 'Cybersecurity and Human Rights' shocked to know how CSOs have been attacked by various state and non-state actors globally. Excellent work!"

- Dr Malik H. Ahmad, PhD, participant

RAISING AWARENESS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

PRODUCING VIDEOS AND POSTS

Short videos and social media posts are an important medium to raise awareness and bring attention to different topics and developments in human rights. Between January and April 2023, the Geneva Centre produced several videos and posts related to human rights. In addition to raising awareness on human rights issues, with our communications we participate in global dialogue and give our support to the celebration of numerous international days.



Zero Discrimination Day 2023



International Day to Combat Islamophobia



International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination



International Days posts, videos Jan-April

4 February: **UN International Day of Human Fraternity**

6 February: **International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation**

20 February: **World Day of Social Justice**

1 March: **Zero Discrimination Day**

8 March: **International Women's Day**

15 March: **International Day to Combat Islamophobia**

21 March: **International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**



Social justice can only be achieved through collective awareness, by ensuring equal opportunities for each, eliminating all forms of systemic obstacles and discrimination, and ensuring everyone's human rights are respected and protected.

Access our short videos [here](#).



SCIENTIFIC CAFÉ INITIATIVE

INTERVIEWS

Since 2021, the Geneva Centre is hosting the **Scientific Café initiative**, consisting of short interviews with academic experts and field practitioners on issues linked to human rights. Questions are posed with the request to provide explanations in simple terms to make the information accessible to all viewers.

The theme for the 2023 edition is "**Right to a Healthy Environment: Significance for the Ordinary Citizen**". The discussion analyzes the impact of climate change and environmental damage – manifest in all spheres of life from agriculture to health, migration, labor and trade – on ordinary citizens. It considers the disproportionate effects on different groups based on their age, geographical location, socio-economic situation, ethnicity, disability and gender, and what can be the role of different actors in ensuring impactful policies to safeguards people's right to a clean and healthy environment are realized.

During the Jan-April period the Geneva Centre interviewed the following experts:

- **Dr. Megan Donald**, Associate Research Fellow, Geneva Academy
- **Dr. Robin Bronen**, Executive Director, Alaska Institute for Justice
- **Caroline Mayr**, Founder, Director, Institute for Small Islands; Chief Empowerment Officer for SHE Changes Climate
- **Anne Saab**, Associate Professor, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies
- **Dr. Denis Ruyschaert**, Faculty Lead, Environment & Sustainability (Graduate Institute)
- **Prof. Melodena Stephens**, Professor of Innovation Management at the Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government (MBRSG)

The questions posed to the experts:

1. What are some of the short and long-term effects of climate change and the environment on ordinary citizens and which groups are particularly affected?
2. What does this human right offer concretely to the ordinary citizen? Who is responsible for ensuring this right and what means of redress are available to the common man in case of violations?
3. How can countries be prompted to enshrine the right to a healthy environment in national legislation and be encouraged to robustly implement these laws?
4. What could be the role of intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, the business sector, especially multinationals, and the media in defending and promoting this right?
5. Do you have any recommendations on how to ensure the right to a healthy environment is brought to the forefront of political discourse and public debate?

Access the videos [here](#).



SOCIAL MEDIA

FACTS AND FIGURES

During the first four months of the year 2023, the Geneva Centre was active in all of its main social media platforms, increasing the number of followers and engagements. We share news, create visual content, and exchange with our partners via our Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and YouTube channels, on which we have **47.406 followers** in total.



12,998

Tweet impressions
2,043 profile visits
4,598 followers
@GCHRGD



30,994

Followers
+1,227 new since
Jan. 2023



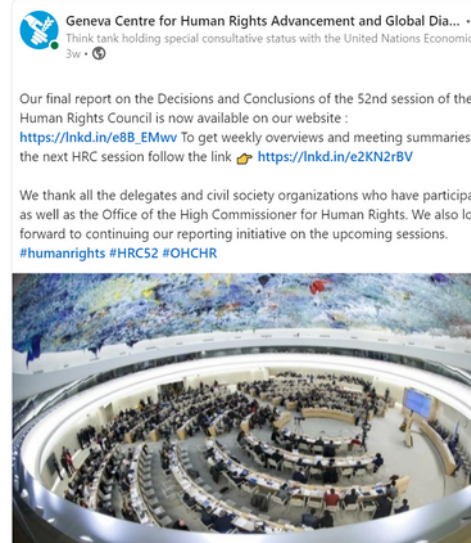
11,408

Followers
@the.gchragd



8

Videos produced
406 subscribers



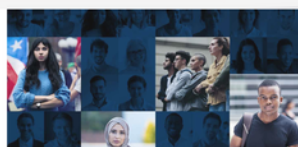
OTHER ACTIVITIES IN SHORT

The Geneva Centre published its Annual Report 2022 in January, with an overview of the main events and activities of the previous year.

You can **access our Annual Reports [here](#)**.



The winners of the HRRA 2022 Edition
"Youth in Human Rights Advancement"



The **Human Rights Recognition Awards** (HRRA) held for the first time in December 2021 is an exciting new initiative of the Geneva Centre, giving recognition to four individuals for their efforts to enhance human rights on the community level across the globe.

The HRRA will be given again in 2023.

During the virtual ceremony, **Visaka Dharmadasa**, Founder and Chair of Association of War Affected Women and Parents of Servicemen Missing in Action and a collective Nobel Peace Prize nominee (2005), served as chairwoman of the selection jury. She announced the 2022 winners who delivered inspiring speeches about their work to promote human rights in the field.

The winners of the Award for Youth Human Rights Champions were **Ms Stacy Dina Adhiambo Owino** from Kenya, **Dr. Kriti Bharti** from India, and **Mr. Jose Adolfo Quisocala** from Peru. The Award of Honour went to **Ms Tamara Altibi** from Palestine. Participants from all over the world attended the online ceremony.

Read the [publication](#) of the Awards Ceremony.

WHAT'S NEXT?

EVENTS - TRAININGS - HRC REPORTING

Upcoming events

The Geneva Centre will organize several **panel events** on various human rights issues of current concerns.

The Geneva Centre will continue its **Human Rights Council Reporting Initiative** by following closely the upcoming 53rd and 54th regular sessions starting respectively in June and September, and to produce high-quality reports on several important meetings.

Furthermore, the Centre's **Scientific Café Initiative** will continue across the 2023 with experts from different fields and regions.

Human Rights Recognition Awards

The year will conclude with the **Human Rights Recognition Awards** (HRRRA) Ceremony in December 2023. The awards are given in recognition of the commendable services of the nominees in human rights defence and promotion.

"We write our own stories and if we don't like them, we have the power to change them. Let's write our stories the way we want them to be, today and now!"

- Ms. Hira Amjad, HRRRA Awardee 2021, Co-Founder and Director of 'DASTAK Foundation



Capacity building

The Geneva Centre is establishing a good and concrete collaboration with the **Graduate Institute** and the **Webster University**, in terms of both, internship programme and experts' engagement in the initiatives (i.e., scientific café initiative interviews, and future panel events). This is making rapid and extensive progress with our collaborative agenda.





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