



GENEVA CENTRE
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
ADVANCEMENT AND
GLOBAL DIALOGUE

HUMAN RIGHTS NEWS AND VIEWS

»»» NEWSLETTER «««



Issue n°15

July 2025

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HATE SPEECH AT THE INTERSECTION OF RELIGION AND GENDER

On 17 June 2025, the **Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue** jointly with the **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)** had the pleasure of hosting a side event at the margins of the 59th session of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) which offered the perfect platform to draw UNHRC stakeholders' attention to challenges and approaches to countering hate speech at the intersection of religion and gender.

Given the increase in the latter, this event could have not been more timely to reflect on how to mobilise meaningful, inclusive, and gender-appropriate responses. Hosted at the Palais des Nations and co-chaired by Dr Michael Wiener, Human Rights Officer at OHCHR, and Dr. Umesh Palwankar, Executive Director of the Geneva Centre, more than 100 attendants could benefit from the extensive and lived experiences of **three distinguished female experts** in the field, namely:

- **H.E. Ms. Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann**, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Sovereign Order of Malta to UN Geneva
- **Ms. Adriana Quiñones**, Deputy Director, UN Geneva Office Women
- **Dr. Saba Haddad**, Baha'i International Community



➤➤➤ FAITH AS A FORCE FOR HEALING RATHER THAN HARM

Speaking in her capacity as Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Sovereign Order of Malta to UN Geneva, **H.E. Ms. Marie-Thérèse Althann-Pictet** stressed that women remain underrepresented in religious leadership and how religion is sometimes instrumentalised to justify gender inequality, distorting traditions rooted in compassion and justice. In its fieldwork from the Middle East to sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, the Order of Malta witnesses first-hand how conflict, displacement and marginalisation are intensified by both gender and religious bias.



Grounded in the firm belief that faith can be a force for healing rather than harm, inclusion rather than exclusion, the Order of Malta advocates for intersectional strategies to tackle these overlapping forms of discrimination. To counter hate speech at the intersection of religion and gender, going beyond condemnation and acting collectively are the imperatives - partnering across sectors, listening to marginalised voices and equipping communities with the tools for peace.

➤➤➤ HATE SPEECH UNDERMINES WOMEN'S RIGHTS

In her capacity as Deputy Director of UN Women at Geneva, **Ms. Adriana Quiñones** evoked the challenges posed by hate speech and its intersection with religious organizations that oppose gender equality, which obstructs the goals set by the Beijing Platform and Programme of Action (BPPA).

Hate speech affects women's ability to participate in decision-making and express themselves freely, particularly during humanitarian crises where their voices are often silenced. Women's roles in communities must be considered fully, as increased hate speech and violence directly impact their political participation and economic empowerment.

Women face hate messages in public life, it hinders their freedom to become leaders and participate in economic development and efforts to rein in the climate crisis. Along with a collective commitment to equality and non-discrimination, UN Women calls for collaboration with faith-based organizations for effectively implementing both the Beijing Platform and laws on violence against women; and a focussed approach in addressing social norms, connecting normative work with real-world impacts, and assessing progress in legislation.





MINORITY AND FAITH - DOUBLE DISCRIMINATION

Bringing the voice of the Baha'i International Community, **Dr. Saba Haddad** emphasized that women from minority faiths often face dual discrimination based on both their religion and gender, rendering them powerless. The advancement of women is crucial for peaceful societies, requiring the proactive involvement of all. Instead of viewing women as victims, women's resilience and agency for change should be recognized, citing the Baha'i community in Yemen as an example where women empowered their communities amidst persecution.



Empowering women empowers the entire community and families, necessitating prevention of persecution through transformation of individual mindsets and social norms. Equality of men and women is vital for humanity's progress. Examples from India, Brazil, and the UAE show how communities are fostering social cohesion, shared identity, and unified action based on common values to combat hate speech and build peaceful societies.

From the contributions of the three panellists - coming from completely different backgrounds and drawing from as many different field experiences - it clearly emerges the **vital role of collective action for addressing social norms**, involving women in and faith-based organizations, and equipping communities with the tools for fostering dialogue and social cohesion. Beyond this *prima facie* lesson, this rich side event paves the way for more in-depth reflections, takeaways and pathways forward as reflected in this [report](#).



CLIMATE INEQUALITY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Geneva Centre jointly with Mr. Surya Deva, **Special Rapporteur on the right to development**, are glad to announce the holding of an international conference exploring the interlinkages among climate inequality, human rights and sustainable development.

To be held at the Palais des Nations (UN Geneva) and online on 21 November 2025, this conference is conceived as a **participatory and inclusive discussion** on human rights and climate change, on the concluding day of COP30, scheduled to be held in Belém (Brazil) from 12 to 21 November 2025. Following the high-level segment, the conference will be articulated in three thematic panels as follows:

- The adverse impacts of climate change on certain **fundamental socio-economic rights** such as food, housing, education and health.
- Differentiated and disproportionate impacts of climate change on **children, women, older persons, and Indigenous peoples**.
- The right to development as a **pathway to overcome climate inequality**, thereby exploring how various aspects of the right to development such as - intergenerational equity; fair distribution; active, free and meaningful participation; and international cooperation - provide a transformative pathway to overcome climate inequality.

Keep an eye on the Geneva Centre's social media channels - LinkedIn, Facebook and X - for updates and insights ahead of the Conference.



PRESERVING THE INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

On the occasion of the 58th regular session of the Human Rights Council (#HRC58), the Geneva Centre introduced a **brand-new UNHRC Reporting Initiative**. Combined with an enhanced social media dissemination, the new Initiative aims at providing extensive coverage of the **wealth of expertise and reflections** emerging from interactive dialogues among Special Procedures, UN high-ranking officials, eminent researchers and practitioners, State delegations, inter-governmental organizations and civil society playing an active role on the Council's global stage.

Drawing directly from the long-standing experience and official style of UN summary records, the Geneva Centre's UNHRC reports ensure an in-depth coverage of all views expressed by each delegation and organization in an **objective and impartial manner**, resting upon cardinal UN principles and core values such as equal treatment, sovereign equality, respect for diversity and openness to dialogue.

UNHRC Reporting is most and foremost a **testimony of the immense research work** carried out by leading experts in various thematic fields who bring to the table of the Council a wealth of knowledge, creativity and interdisciplinary background which ultimately serves to the furtherance of human rights and sustainable development.

As the institutional memory of the world's most prominent multilateral body dedicated to human rights, UNHRC Reporting chiefly serves the **historical legacy** of emerging human rights concepts and burgeoning human rights standards which may become tomorrow's hard law. Looking forward to your valuable feedback, comments and questions, feel free to reach out any time at rfranceschet@gchragd.org, including for an in-person discussion.



SPOTLIGHT ON #HRC59

All along the 59th regular session of the UNHRC, the Geneva Centre's Reporting Initiative covered 11 interactive discussions on **country-specific situations** ranging from the Americas (Colombia), through Eastern Europe (Belarus and Ukraine), to Africa (Burundi, eastern DRC, and Sudan) and Asia (Afghanistan, Myanmar, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Syria). This encompasses in-depth dialogues with 4 **investigative mechanisms** covering eastern DRC, Palestine, Sudan and Syria).

The Geneva Centre further **produced 13 thematic** reports providing extensive coverage of a rich array of interactive dialogues dedicated to the following:

- Genocide prevention.
- Transnational corporations.
- Education and extreme poverty.
- The rights to freedom of opinion and expression; peaceful assembly and association.
- The independence of judges and lawyers.
- Human rights in the context of climate change.
- Internally displaced persons and human trafficking.
- Discrimination and violence against women and girls.
- Contemporary forms of racism and related intolerance.

The Centre also reported extensively on **four panels** on:

- Overcoming barriers to women's leadership in peace processes.
- Gender-based violence against women and girls in (post-)conflict and humanitarian settings.
- The realization of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, ahead of the **2026 UN Water Conference** hosted by the United Arab Emirates.
- The facilitation of just transitions in the context of addressing the impacts of climate change.

For the very first time, the topics covered by the Reporting Initiative have been selected by the users through our **Reports-on-Demand Survey**. With the aim of tailoring the Geneva Centre's reporting to preferences of its audience, a survey will be shared ahead of each Council's session. The full range of reports is available at the dedicated [section of the Centre's website](#).



INTRODUCING A NEW REPORTING FOR #UPR49

On the occasion of the #UPR49 reviews of Kuwait and Türkiye, the Geneva Centre has introduced a new UPR Reporting aimed at better responding to the needs of permanent missions, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, and other stakeholders. The new UPR Reporting was **informed by valuable suggestions** delivered by various UNHRC actors including permanent missions and human rights experts.

The new UPR Reporting intends to fulfil the request advanced by some permanent missions and other stakeholders to provide a more extensive coverage of the review, thereby upholding the principles of equality, fairness and objectivity.

The newly introduced reports feature an in-depth section dedicated to the **presentation of the national report** as delivered by the chief of the delegation of the State under review, which aims at giving relevance to the **efforts deployed by the delegation of the State under review** to present the national report, followed by extensive insights into observations and replies offered by the members of the same delegation.

A new section of the reports illustrates **domestic measures qualified as positive advancements** by recommending States, followed by an extensive section dedicated to recommendations offered to the State under review grouped, for ease of reference, by thematic issues. In closing, the report details the list of States that took the floor during the review.

For an **in-person exchange** on the new UPR Reporting, suggestions on its future outlook and any research requests, please feel free to reach out any time to rfranceschet@gchragd.org any time.

Your views matter!



SETTING SAIL TOWARDS GAZA - THE FREEDOM FLOTILLA

On June 1, 2025, twelve men and women, activists committed to recognising the rights of the Palestinian people, met aboard the Freedom Flotilla. The sailboat carrying them, the Madleen Kulab, pays tribute to the first – and only – woman fisherwoman from Gaza. For over fifteen years, Madleen defied the Israeli blockade to feed her family, until her equipment was destroyed by the army, depriving her of her livelihood and her identity.

The Geneva Centre drafted a brief research paper sheds light on the legal significance of the act of resistance carried out by the Gaza Freedom Flotilla and the profound message the fleet carries to the international community. Beyond the symbolic gesture of approaching the Gaza's enclave to bring a drop of humanitarian aid in an ocean of humanitarian needs, the Gaza Freedom Flotilla is not just a desperate attempt to liberate Gaza from the yoke of war, colonization and unspeakable suffering.

➤➤➤ NAVIGATING WITH THE COMPASS OF INTERNATIONAL LAW

Most and foremost, the Gaza Freedom Flotilla navigated through troubled waters to bring back to life the lost compass of international law. The Flotilla itself is a pacific and powerful symbol of hope – hope to restore the lost faith in humanity and human rights which rose from the ashes of WW2 along with their golden promise of a better future for all. Against the backdrop of states perilously relinquishing humanity and universal values, civil society who set sail on the Freedom Flotilla takes up the baton and bravely navigates with the compass of international law in an attempt to save it from annihilation in Gaza and beyond.

Downloadable PDF version: [The Gaza Freedom Flotilla – Research Paper](#)



WOMEN'S ECONOMIC RIGHTS IN THE MENA REGION

As a result of a fruitful partnership between the Graduate Institute and the the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue, this **Applied Research Project** examines the issue of women's economic empowerment in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Given the region's vastness and diversity, the Applied Research Project focussed on the analysis of **three case studies** - Iraq, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia - to better grasp diversity within the MENA region.

The Research Project intends to provide an in-depth **analysis of legal and policy developments** from 2017 onward, aligning with the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and state reviews carried out by the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee). This allows for the review to remain timely and relevant, while considering previous publications for valuable insights.



»»» RESEARCH QUESTION

The Research Project aims to understand the **factors that prevent women's economic empowerment** in Iraq, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia, focussing on UN Women's definition of women's economic empowerment. The research focuses on the core factors to economic empowerment measures for women in these countries, the factors being reported and monitored through international reporting mechanisms such as the CEDAW and the UPR, and the reforms recommended for future efforts to improve women's economic empowerment in these countries.

»»» KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IRAQ, MOROCCO AND SAUDI ARABIA

The final research report adopts the UN Women's definition of women's economic empowerment, emphasizing **structural change in societies** necessary for advancing women's economic empowerment. However, the reliance on quantitative metrics and the prevalence of women's labor force participation raises questions about how this framework is operationalized and invites broader consideration of women's economic empowerment as a system of context-specific, interacting, and interlocking factors.

The research also identified areas more accessible and resistant to change based on international reporting mechanisms' ability to influence measures taken by countries in the MENA region. **Financial inclusion** appears to be the most accessible area to change, suggesting additional scrutiny and recommendations for financial inclusion at CEDAW and UPR sessions. Inheritance is one of the more resistant areas to change due to Sharia law and longstanding norms around women's economic empowerment.

This finding ties women's economic empowerment in the MENA region to broader feminist campaigns to **dismantle legal and sociocultural barriers** and ensure women's meaningful participation in economies around the world. Have a look at the [final report](#) to discover this extensive analytical work and the **specific recommendations addressed to Iraq, Morocco and Saudi Arabia**.



SCIENTIFIC CAFÉ

>>> THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN THE PROMOTION OF CLIMATE PROTECTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS

In the wake of the 2024 success, the Geneva Centre is glad to announce the 2025 edition of its Scientific Café on **'The Role of Education in the Promotion of Climate Protection and Environmental Rights'**. With the aim of better exploring the interlinkages between education and climate protection, the Scientific Café offers a unique opportunity to learn from our guests' extensive background and experience the crucial role played by education in influencing climate actions and adaptation efforts. Cognizant of the fact that education has a huge **potential to reinforce environmental rights**, the education sector is vitally integral to efforts towards climate change adaptation and mitigation. However, the **education system faces barriers** such as limited access to quality education and a lacking integration of climate-related topics into curricula. With this in mind, the 2025 edition aims to provide practical recommendations on how to boost the right to education towards greater climate protection and environmental rights.

Discover the first-class interviewees welcomed on the Scientific Café stage until July 2025:

- **Ms. Won Jung Byun**, Team Leader, Greening Education Partnership in the Section of Education for Sustainable Development Section, UNESCO.
- **Mr. Sergio Venegas Marin**, Economist, World Bank's Education Global Practice.
- **Dr. Hélène Benveniste**, Assistant Professor, Department of Environmental Social Sciences, Stanford Doerr School of Sustainability.
- **Mr. David Wilgenbu**, Head of Educational Resources, La Main à la Pâte Foundation.
- **Dr. Ana Maria Suarez Franco**, Secretary-General, FIAN International.
- **Dr. Christopher Henderson**, Education in Emergencies Specialist, Geneva Graduate Institute's NORRAG Global Education Center.
- **Dr. Sanae Okamoto**, Senior Researcher, United Nations University – Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (UNU-MERIT).



IT'S IN THE NEWS!

»»» DISSEMINATING HUMAN RIGHTS VALUES THROUGH THE POWER OF IMAGES

From January to July 2025, the Geneva Centre has been disseminating **video messages** for **international commemorative days** relevant to its mandate. Through the power of images depicting scenes of every day's life, the Geneva Centre intends to raise awareness among the general public about key human rights issues transcending national borders and affecting the daily life of common persons. Discover our videos on our social media channels (Youtube, Linkedin, X and Facebook).

- International Day of Education (24 January)
- International Day of Human Fraternity (4 February)
- International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation (6 February)
- International Day of Women and Girls in Science (11 February)
- International Women's Day (8 March)
- International Day to Combat Islamophobia (15 March)
- International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (21 March)
- World Health Day (7 April)
- International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace (24 April)
- International Labour Day (1 May)
- International Day of Living Together in Peace (16 May)
- World Day for Cultural Diversity Dialogue and Development (21 May)
- World Environment Day (5 June)
- World Day Against Child Labour (12 June)
- International Day for Countering Hate Speech (18 June)
- International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict (19 June)
- International Day of Women in Diplomacy (24 June)
- Nelson Mandela International Day (18 July)
- World Day Against Trafficking in Persons (30 July)



Let us ban microplastics NOW

NEW BOARD AND DIRECTOR

In April 2025, the Board of the Geneva Centre elected three new Board members, including a new Board Chairperson. This was followed by the appointment of a new Executive Director, Dr. Fabrice Crégut, succeeding Dr. Umesh Palwankar, who continue to serve the Centre as Strategic Advisor.

»»» NEW BOARD MEMBERS

- **The Right Honourable Alistair Burt (United Kingdom)**, Chairmain of the Geneva Centre's Board, has been Pro-Chancellor of Lancaster University, and Chair of Council since 2020. He is further serving as the UK's Commissioner on the International Commission on Missing Persons, a treaty based organisation situated in The Hague, since 2013.
- **Mr. Markos Kyprianou (Cyprus)**, Board Member, pursued his legal studies at the Law School of the University of Athens, followed by graduate studies at Trinity College, Cambridge (LLM in International and Tax Law) and Harvard Law School (LLM in Business Law and Taxation). Early in his career, Mr. Kyprianou worked as a trainee at the Human Rights Commission of the Council of Europe and conducted research in international law at the University of Cambridge.
- **Mr. Miroslav Lajčák (Slovakia)**, Board Member, is a diplomat with more than 30 years' experience in foreign policy, having represented both the Slovak Republic and the international community. In his national capacity, Dr. Lajčák served as Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic for four mandates, a position he first held from 2009 to 2010. From 2012 to 2016, he served as both Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of Slovakia. Currently, he serves as National Security Adviser to the Prime Minister of Slovakia.

»»» NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

- **Dr. Fabrice Crégut (France)** was appointed Executive Director of the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue in July 2025. He brings to the role over 17 years of international experience in human rights, justice reform, and child protection across more than 40 countries in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific. Dr. Crégut has worked extensively with the United Nations system, including as a child justice expert for UNICEF and UNDP in Palestine, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tunisia, and the broader MENA and Pacific regions. His work focussed on legislative reform, the development of national child protection strategies, and police and justice training programmes aligned with international standards.





HUMAN RIGHTS AS THE THREAD FROM TUNISIA TO GENEVA

Born to a family committed to defending human rights in Tunisia, Khalil grew up to the rhythm of the **Arab Spring**, which he experienced vicariously through the stories, concerns and hopes of those close to him. Through his university path, Khalil wanted to give meaning to and fully grasp what himself had witnessed - a revolutionary wind of change which brought to an end a 30-year-old chapter of history in Tunisia, and sparked hopes for democratic and human rights embetterments across the entire Arab world. This strongly motivated him to embark on a double degree in **political science and history** at the *Institut d'Etudes Politiques* in Fontainebleau (Paris), which was awarded to him with honours. Afterwards, he decided to pursue his academic journey in the French city of Grenoble, where he was admitted to a highly specialized master's programme focussing on 'Integration and Change in the Mediterranean and the Middle East' at the Faculty of Political Science, which perfectly reflects his vested interest in the MENA region.



A RICH EXTRACURRICULAR ENGAGEMENT

Beyond his academic path, his active engagement with various associations reflects his profound awareness of concrete issues at stake in the MENA region. Khalil is a regular contributor to the website *Espace Manager*, a Tunisian platform dedicated to geopolitical analysis, for which he most notably conducted and published an interview with **Mr. Firas Kontar**, a French-Syrian lawyer and human rights activist, which took place just after the fall of Bashar al-Assad. Khalil is also an active member of the *Association Hispolitique*, for which he drafts articles at the crossroads of history, politics and culture, with a constant focus on the MENA region. Bilingual French-Arabic, Khalil has also a professional mastery of English and brings a vibrant energy to the Geneva Centre thanks to his fine eye for the MENA region. In his daily work, Khalil provides valuable support to the Geneva Centre in various roles encompassing digital communications, monitoring of political developments at the UNHRC and drafting for the Geneva Centre's UNHRC Reporting Initiative.





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