

Working for Humanity

Human Rights Centre, University of Essex

Meeting Global Challenges

Founded in 1982, the Human Rights Centre marked the creation of a base for both academic and practical engagement in human rights work. Research has addressed, amongst other things, the prohibition against and prevention of torture, realisation of the right to health, challenges to freedom of religion, problems facing children in armed conflict, methods of democratic assessment, the relationship between human rights and foreign direct investment, and reconciliation of human rights and security for the prevention of violent conflict. For many years, senior staff have held key positions in international organisations, both inter-governmental (such as the UN and its agencies and the OSCE) and non-governmental (Amnesty International, Article XIX, Minority Rights Group, the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, etc.).

A Multidisciplinary Approach

Realised today by the strong team of academic human rights lawyers, philosophers, political theorists, sociologists and other (comprising 50 scholars across a dozen departments) the Centre has been, and remains, at the cutting edge of human rights research, theory, and practice.

A multidisciplinary approach to both its teaching and research has been vital to the success of the Centre. Strong collaborative work has been undertaken between researchers drawn from numerous departments across the University and beyond its boundaries. With a vibrant community and international composition, the research and activities of the Centre staff informs theory through practice and vice versa with a determined orientation towards the effective enjoyment of human rights around the world by means of design and implementation of institutions and programmes, advice to various actors, and training of staff.

Selected Research Impact

- The Centre created the Right to Health focuses on two main themes: poverty and the right to health, and stigma and discrimination and the right to health. The RHU has carried out research into issues including: the right to health dimensions of HIV/AIDS; maternal mortality; neglected diseases; mental health and well-being; the Millennium Development Goals; the World Trade Organization; poverty reduction strategies; indicators/measurement of compliance and performance; sexual and reproductive health rights; the work of healthcare professionals; maternal mortality; and access to medicines.
- The Children and Armed Conflict Unit was set up in 1997, following the groundbreaking report on the impact of armed conflict on children by Graça Machel (former First Lady of Mozambique), the Unit's patron, the Unit works around the world to improve the situation for civilian children caught up in armed conflict and civil unrest and for those emerging from years of violence.
- Research into how to document and respond to allegations of torture within the international system for the protection of human rights resulted in a series of handbooks being produced. Some 20,000 copies of the Torture Reporting Handbook have been circulated throughout the world and it is used in many countries to train NGO and UN workers along with governmental officials (including police and security officers). It has been translated into over ten languages.

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