



Re-energising the narrative: human rights in the digital age

Monday 14 – Wednesday 16 January 2019 | WP1655

Background and objectives

The theme of the conference, the 14th in the annual human rights series, will be the overarching concern of **human rights under threat** with a specific emphasis on narratives, language and discourse, including opportunities and threats presented on and off line.

In recent years the international community has witnessed increasingly polarised views, a rise in populist leaders and the emergence of extremist movements, including a retreat from human rights responsibilities by some key powers. There is an urgent need to address the diminishing commitment to human rights, characterised by the reduction of civic space and increased attacks on activists. At this critical juncture, the Wilton Park meeting will provide an opportunity for human rights advocates to identify ways in which to develop and promote positive human rights narratives and generate creative proposals to engage and motivate key networks and institutions in order to reverse the trend.

The conference will consider the specific threats presented by abuse via social media platforms, the 'echo chamber' effect on critical thinking and policy making, and the deliberate exploitation of divisions in societies- eg computational propaganda/'fake news', amplification by algorithms and systematised trolling.

Through a mix of plenary and break-out sessions, the conference will provide an opportunity to:

- Re-think existing approaches and current messaging in order to re-energise human rights discourse
- Explore creative proposals and develop recommendations to refresh the debate
- Consider ways in which the digital environment can be used to strengthen respect for human rights
- Identify opportunities to promote a safe and inclusive digital future for all, taking into account relevant human rights norms
- Reflect on how to ensure diversity online through more transparent algorithmic decision-making

Participation

Up to 55 participants: human rights experts, including policy makers, academics, thinkers/philosophers, private sector and NGO representatives from selected countries plus international and regional bodies alongside 'unusual suspects'- experts in strategic communications, social commentators/influencers and analysts/technical experts from social media.

Themes for discussion to include

The message

- How to communicate about human rights more effectively?
- How to tailor the message to fit with the 'local' narrative, whilst sustaining the core principles of the human rights framework

- Mainstreaming rights into common discourse
- How to strengthen and broaden the debate (Addressing the 'What's in it for me?' question):
 - Reframing the human rights and security discourse so they are not portrayed as a trade-off.
 - In what ways can specific human rights communications increase impact 'on the ground' in different contexts?
 - Building on national and global commitments to economic, social, and cultural rights:
 - promoting links between human rights, prosperity and development
 - Freedom of assembly and association
 - Local contexts- rights to health, food, water, sanitation, education

The messengers

- How to expand audiences and engage wider groupings, including "unusual suspects"?
- How to build alliances across diverse groups?
- Who should be targeted?
 - Different demographics- youth? Regions?
 - Music industry/arts/high profile individuals
 - role of education/schools
- Story telling- eg profiles/stories of HRDs and what differences they've made
- Success stories of engagement with 'new actors' eg human rights and business, tech. companies etc.
- City to city initiatives- sharing best practice at a more local level

The medium

- What platforms and channels are most effective and where?
- Who are the messengers and how does this affect the message?
- Trusted media and democratisation of information- how does this change the equation?
 - Established journalists and known news platforms; social media / bloggers/vloggers
- Links with popular narratives

Format of roundtable

Wilton Park, a not for profit executive agency of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, provides a neutral and open residential environment where all discussions are held off the record. Through expert facilitation, participants are encouraged to be fully engaged with one another and frank in their contributions. The proposal is for a 48 hour dialogue, spread over 3 days/2 nights for up to 55 participants. The timetable is structured for 8-10 sessions, including a mixture of roundtable, group and plenary discussions. This format maximises opportunities for identifying policy solutions and networking. It also allows for substantial informal discussion time during breaks, evenings and dinners. More information can be found here: <https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/about-us/>

Julia Purcell

Programme Director, Wilton Park

T: +44 (0) 1903 817699 | E: julia.purcell@wiltonpark.org.uk | www.wiltonpark.org.uk