The Role of Civil Society: Grassroots Movements and NGOs

SDIS 3320 (4 Credits / 60 class hours)

Local Faculty NYC--Chris Westcott
Local Faculty Nepal--Anne Dekyi McGuinness
Local Faculty Jordan--Sara Ababneh
Local Faculty Chile--Jose Aylwin

International Honors Program (IHP):
Human Rights: Foundations, Challenges, and Advocacy
Fall 2015

Course Description
The latter half of the twentieth-century gave rise to a large and diverse sector of civil society organizations working at multiple scales (transnational, regional, national, and local), utilizing a variety of approaches to achieve human rights based change. Though the aims, intentions, and impact of these organizations is contested, and the source of much debate, the constellation of actors working towards human rights under the umbrella of civil society has become a defining feature of contemporary human rights praxis. This course is designed to provide students with an understanding of the diverse configurations of these civil society organizations: NGOs, foundations, legal advocacy organizations, grassroots community-based organizations, social movement networks etc., as well as familiarity with the differing strategies of change they employ. Through visits to local organizers of such groups, students learn how advocacy and activist movements are launched and developed, as well as what strategies are used to navigate legal, political, and public arenas. The course contrasts the role, agendas, and the effectiveness of grassroots organizations with those of governmental, private sector, and supranational stakeholders. By experiencing first-hand a broad spectrum of civil society and grassroots approaches to creating change, students will be challenged to come to their own conclusions of how to bridge the gap between human rights rhetoric and reality. This is a practicum course composed of classroom-based sessions with Local Faculty as well as field-based activities such as workshops, site visits, and guest lectures in each program site.

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Course Objectives

• To examine the role of country-specific NGOs and grassroots organizations as agents of advocacy and change in national contexts.
• To identify the strategies used by local, national, and international organizations to build popular support and assert their voices at the policy level.
• To develop a comparative perspective on the varied civil society actors operating in the name of human rights, and the differing strategies they utilize to achieve change.
• To cultivate skills in analysis, assessment, communications with local representatives of organizations, and working in teams.

Course Methodology

The course will rely on a combination of pedagogical methods; Local Faculty lectures, field study, discussion, critical inquiry, presentation and reflection. The purpose is to create a community where students freely offer ideas, comments and questions and share the responsibility for learning. The course seeks to make optimal use of the time in each country through guest lectures, site visits, homestays, individual explorations of human rights and immersion in the culture and society. In particular, students will collaborate with specific organizations in each country site to gain first-hand experience of human rights praxis.

Learning Outcomes

• Demonstrate familiarity with different types of civil society organizations in each country context that are involved with human rights issues.
• Articulate successful strategies used by key organizations to impact policy, as well as obstacles encountered.
• Compare the various social and political climates in the host countries that facilitate or impede the role of NGOs alongside grassroots movements.
• Identify common agendas and differences between local grassroots groups, NGOs and international organizations in strategy, tactics, mission, and outcomes.
• Develop and put to practice skills utilized by practitioners of human rights, including: human-rights storytelling, social media advocacy, project or campaign mapping, and group facilitation.

Local Faculty Bio’s

Chris Westcott
Program Director, IHP Human Rights
Local Faculty, NYC

Chris is an educator and change-maker with extensive experience working with grassroots human rights NGOs and social change-oriented study abroad programs. Chris’s human rights work has focused predominately on the provision of economic, social, and cultural

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rights. Chris has worked on housing and workers’ rights campaigns with the Urban Justice Center and the Freelancers Union in New York City. Additionally, Chris was a founding staff member of ENGAGE, where he worked in Thailand and the San Francisco Bay area on trade justice campaigns affecting the economic rights of farmers and access to affordable medicines for people living with HIV/AIDS. Chris has worked as a traveling faculty member, then as a program manager with IHP since 2012. Earlier, Chris worked for two years on CIEE Thailand’s study abroad program focusing on globalization and development. Chris has a BA in environmental studies from Bates College and an MA in international educational development from Columbia University. Chris has conducted ethnographic research on the land reform process in post-apartheid South Africa and has done participatory action research on housing rights and educational equity in New York City. Chris currently serves on the solidarity board of Community Voices Heard, a social, economic, and racial justice organization based in New York.

**Anne Dekyi McGuinness**  
**Local Faculty, Nepal**  
Anne Dekyi McGuinness is Tibetan and American and was raised in Kathmandu, Nepal. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in International Studies from American University’s School of International Service. Currently, she is pursuing a Master of Education degree in International Education from Endicott College. Anne has recently completed a three-year contract with UNHCR in Kathmandu, where she was working directly with Tibetan and Urban refugee populations. Following the earthquake in Nepal on 25 April 2015, Anne was actively involved in relief efforts on behalf of Friends of Nepal, a local partner of #WeHelpNepal.

**Sara Ababneh**  
**Local Faculty, Jordan**  
Sara Ababneh is an assistant professor and researcher at the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, the coordinator of the internship program and the coordinator of the Arab Barometer. She is also the academic coordinator for the AMIDEAST study abroad program in Jordan. Dr. Ababneh taught courses on Middle Eastern politics, gender and IR theories at the University of Jordan, Counseling International (CIEE) and at various colleges at the University of Oxford. In the summers of 2013 and 2014 Ababneh was the faculty host of the CIEE Interdisciplinary Faculty Development Seminar in which American professors visited Jordan to learn about the complex landscape of the struggle for gender justice. After receiving a BSc in Politics and Economic from Earlham College and an MScEcon in International Politics, at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, Sara Ababneh obtained her DPhil in Politics and International Relations at St. Antony’s College, University of Oxford in 2009. She wrote her dissertation on female Islamists in Hamas in occupied Palestine and the Islamic Action Front in Jordan. Currently Dr. Ababneh is studying the popular Jordanian protest movement *(al hirak al sha’bi al urduni)*, the Jordanian Personal Status Law reform in terms of gender and class and EU-Jordanian Relations.

**Jose Aylwin**  
**Founder & Director, Observatario Ciudadano**  
**Local Faculty, Chile**  
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Jose Aylwin is a lawyer specializing in human rights and indigenous peoples, and is founder of Observatorio Ciudadano in Chile. He is a lawyer educated at the University of Chile (degree in Social and Legal Sciences) and the University of British Columbia (LLM) and specialization in human rights. He joined the Chilean Commission on Human Rights from 1984 to 1993. He was Director of the Institute of Indian Studies between 1994 and 1997. UFRO Program Coordinator Indigenous Institute (2002-2004) Rights. Jose has been co-director of the Observatory of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (now Citizen Observatory), NGO documentation, promotion and defense of human rights of indigenous peoples in Chile since 2004. He has conducted studies and research on the rights of indigenous peoples in the Americas and is author of several publications on the subject of human rights, indigenous peoples and citizens in Chile and abroad. Currently, Jose serves as professor of the chair of Indigenous Law at Universidad Austral de Chile, and recently took over as Director of the National Institute of Human Rights for the appointment of civil society organizations.

Course Requirements

Required readings, compiled on eReserves through SIT, will be available before the launch of the program. Supplementary readings and sources, listed at the end the syllabus, are provided for further reference and to better understand the course content. Students are expected to complete the required readings before each class unit and to use them in fulfilling assignments. Students should explore local resources, such as newspapers and television, and take the initiative in seeking out other material.

Solidarity Initiative Assignment  (50 Points)

Over the past few semesters, the IHP Human Rights program has had a number of repeat site visits with specific grassroots organizations in Nepal, Jordan, and Chile that we’ve met with each semester. These visits have prompted significant conversations amongst students, program staff, and local hosts about how the visits, and the program in general, are relevant to the ongoing human rights aims of these organizations and movements. These visits have raised critical questions: what is the nature of our relationship with the organizations and individuals we meet with every semester? How do these relationships reflect reciprocity in not just a transactional sense, but at the level of personal/political praxis? What are the impacts of our visits collectively across semesters? This assignment is born out of these ongoing conversations, and is designed to create structural space in the curriculum for longer-term, reflective, and mutually constructed initiatives to emerge from relationships based on the politics of solidarity. Students will undertake projects with local organizations in this spirit.

At the launch in NYC, students will be split up into small group ‘country teams.’ In these country teams, students will work on solidarity initiatives with specific grassroots organizations that the program has developed an ongoing relationship with in one of the three countries the program visits. These initiatives will entail an extended small group site visit, where students and host organizations co-construct specific action-oriented projects.

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based on the interests of local host organizations. Examples of possible projects include: writing newspaper articles, filming and/or editing video shorts, social media campaigns, fundraising drives etc. In addition to whatever projects students work on with local organizations, students will be responsible for a 40-minute group presentation overviewing the organization and the project they worked on. During the presentations students are encouraged to analyze the strategies of change underlying the projects, ethical questions prompted by the initiative and exchange, as well as ways to carry the work forward beyond the end of the semester.

See the full assignment description at the end of the syllabus for more information.

Praxis Paper Assignment (50 Points)
This assignment invites you to reflect on the examples of human rights advocacy, activism and resistance we have observed in Nepal, Jordan and Chile and develop a praxis-oriented program for bringing this knowledge and experience back to the U.S. context. Thinking concretely yet aspirationally, outline how you would pursue a human rights issue you’ve seen contested in our field sites in the US context, and specifically in your local region or city. Areas of inquiry include: How does the problem you’ve identified manifest – historically and in the current moment – in the US? What would a human rights project – for example, a campaign, an organization, a movement-based approach, a service-oriented program, a legal complaint or court case – in this area look like in the US? What organizations and/or communities (national and international) would you work with? Would you use the language of human rights, and if so, how? What problems do you foresee, both practically and conceptually? Accordingly, what is the relationship between human rights theory and practice in the US context?

See the full assignment description at the end of the syllabus for more information.

Assignments

Solidarity Initiative 50%
- Details attached at end of syllabus

Praxis Paper 50%
- Details attached at end of syllabus
- Due date, December 8th

Course Organization and Required Reading

I. New York City, USA

Session 1: Introduction to Civil Society and the Politics of Solidarity

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II. Nepal

Session 2: The UN & Civil Society in Nepal


Session 3: The Politics of Disaster Relief


III. Jordan

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Session 4: Riding the Development Wave: The Case of Jordan

Required:


Recommended:


Session 5: Contesting the Hegemonic Human Rights Discourse, Jordan’s Popular Protest Movement


IV. Chile

Session 6: The Role of Social Movements in Chile Since the Dictatorship Until Today


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Session 7: The emergence of the Mapuche as a central political actor in Chile: from a peasant to an ethno-national movement


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Evaluation and Grading Criteria
The faculty will grade you on the basis of points and will return written assignments with comments. The range of points will indicate how your work compares with the rest of the class. At the end of the term, your cumulative point score will be calculated to determine your final letter grade for the course. Point grades for individual assignments are not directly correlated to final letter grades, which will reflect your work on assignments in all countries.

It is useful for faculty and students to view final grades in this way. An “A” represents truly outstanding work, exemplifying rigorous analysis, superior insights, and precise presentation. A “B” signifies highly competent work that completes the assignment very well, with considerable thought, reasonable analytical results and an effective presentation. A “C” represents acceptable, work, satisfying the basic requirements, but lacking distinction, original analytical insights or organization. A “D” grade indicates poorly or partially completed work, reflecting a lack of initiative, inconsistent analytical conclusions and/or a disorganized presentation. Pluses and minuses for the four letter grades indicate better or poorer work. There is no “A+” grade.

Grading Scale

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<thead>
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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94-100%</td>
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<td>90-93%</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<td>87-89%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>D+</td>
<td>Below Average</td>
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<tr>
<td>64-66%</td>
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<td>below 64</td>
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Expectations and Policies

- **Show up prepared.** Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.
- **Have assignments completed on schedule, printed, and done accordingly to the specified requirements.** This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.
- **Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturer.** These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak….
- **Comply with academic integrity policies** (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- **Respect differences of opinion** (classmates’, lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Student Handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment, and the academic appeals process.

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HMRT 3000: The Role of Civil Society
Fall 2015
Assignment: Solidarity Initiatives
50 points

“I believe that the exercise of solidarity, when it is practiced in our daily lives, is also an exercise of humility that teaches you to recognize yourself in the other, and realize the greatness hidden in small things. It implies also denouncing the falsities of great things…..The great mysteries of life, the mystery of human pain, but also the mystery of human persistence, sometimes unexplained, fighting for a world that must be the house of everyone, and not the house of very few people or the hell of the majority.”

--Eduardo Galeano

Over the past few semesters, the IHP Human Rights program has had a number of repeat site visits with specific grassroots organizations in Nepal, Jordan, and Chile that we’ve met with each semester. These visits have prompted significant conversations amongst students, program staff, and local hosts about how the visits, and the program in general, are relevant to the ongoing human rights aims of these organizations and movements. These visits have raised critical questions: what is the nature of our relationship with the organizations and individuals we meet with every semester? How do these relationships reflect reciprocity in not just a transactional sense, but at the level of personal/political praxis? What are the impacts of our visits collectively across semesters? This assignment is born out of these ongoing conversations, and is designed to create structural space in the curriculum for longer-term, reflective, and mutually constructed initiatives to emerge from relationships based on the politics of solidarity. Students will undertake projects with local organizations in this spirit.

This assignment uses the concept of solidarity as a point of departure. The idea that reciprocal relations of trust, obligation, and mutual intent should inform political collaborations across difference has an old and weathered political and intellectual lineage, as we will explore throughout the semester. Yet solidarity in name is much simpler to achieve than solidarity in spirit. If we seek a form of praxis that does not simply repackage the injustices and violence of the social worlds we inherit, then we must also begin with an understanding of inequality as a starting point – an understanding that our different positionalities and relationships to power should inform the means and ends of the actions we pursue. With this awareness in mind, we have identified the following principles to inform our engagements:

1. Initiatives we undertake should be led by the local organizations with whom we, as a program, have an ongoing relationship.
2. Students should not be involved in local community politics or projects that they are not well positioned to understand or be of use.
3. Students are best positioned as bridge builders—connecting issues, conveying stories, and communicating struggles at an international level and/or back to the US.

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What emerges from these initiatives and relationship will necessarily be process-driven, and will be made by walking. Collectively we will be reflective about the ethical questions that arise from our actions. Individually, we encourage each of you to approach this assignment with humility, and to exercise personal agency when considering your role in these ongoing collaborations.

**How the assignment will work:**
At the launch in NYC, students will be split up into small group ‘country teams.’ In these country teams, students will work on solidarity initiatives with specific grassroots organizations that the program has developed an ongoing relationship with in one of the three countries the program visits. These initiatives will entail an extended small group site visit, where students and host organizations co-construct specific action-oriented projects based on the interests of local host organizations. Examples of possible projects include: writing newspaper articles, filming and/or editing video shorts, social media campaigns, fundraising drives etc. The specific details of what your group pursues will be largely framed by the local organizations that are hosting us as a program. At the end of the assignment description you will find background information on the three organizations with whom we will be collaborating in Nepal, Jordan, and Chile.

**Guidelines for the group presentation:**
In addition to whatever projects students work on with local organizations, students will be responsible for a 40-minute group presentation overviewing the organization and the project they worked on to be delivered to the learning community at the end of our stay in the respective country. Presentations should include the following elements:

1. **Overview of the Organization** – What is the organization’s purpose, and how do they achieve that purpose? What scale does the organization work at—local, national, regional, international and how? What is the organization’s approach to leadership? Who are leaders of the organization’s work? Who are the members and/or constituents? How is the organization funded?
2. **Strategy of Change** – What theory of change informs the organization’s approach to human rights? Does the organization’s means or methods inform its mission and aims? Is the organization’s approach to human rights based change informed by the particular set of issues their work is focused on? If so, how?
3. **Project Presentation** – What were the specific projects that your group worked on? How can you share your work with the rest of the group in a creative manner? How do you plan on using this work in the future? What lessons did you learn through the process of completing these particular projects? What is the primary audience for the project you worked on, and how do you plan to connect with that audience?
4. **Ethical Considerations** – What ethical questions were raised through your group assignment? Understanding that who we are shapes the work we are positioned to do in significant ways, how did your group understand your individual and collective

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role collaborating with this organization? Has your understanding of agency, positionality, or solidarity shifted as a result of this assignment? If so, how?

5. Possible Next Steps – How might your group continue your collaborations with this organization at the end of the semester? What steps did you map out? How might you pass on the work you started to the next semester of IHP Human Rights students?

In addition to your group’s presentation, you are expected to submit a 500-word summary describing the work of your group, and the different roles played by each member. In this write-up include reflections about how you would like to see this project developed or continued by the next semester of IHP Human Rights students. Include any feedback you have about how to structure the group more effectively.

Each group’s presentation and body of work will be presented to the whole group at the end of each country program. Each group will get feedback directly from their peers, which will be compiled by local IHP staff who will determine your final grade. Each group will get one-grade that will extend to all participants in the project.

Assessment criteria include:
- Strength of the group's presentation based on the criteria described above
- Quality of project work completed
- Report back from organizational hosts about their experience collaborating with your group
- Ability of the group to share and distribute work equitably and amicably
- Clarity and concise communication

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Organizational Descriptions:

Nepal—Environmental Camps for Conservation Awareness (ECCA)
Environomtal Camps for Conservation Awareness has been a leading organization in the sector of social mobilization and community development in Nepal since 1987. It implements various programs in order to raise the quality of life through wise-use of available local resources and application of alternative and renewable technologies. Since the recent earthquake in Nepal this past may, ECCA has been involved in grassroots disaster relief in the kavrepalanchowk and lalitpur districts where schools and thousands of homes were left in disrepair. IHP students participating in this group will get an opportunity to see how the politics of disaster relief play out at a grassroots level. With ECCA students will explore how villages are rebuilding their homes and communities and shaping the process of disaster transition. This project will feature various media-making initiatives—journalistic writing, video documentation, and/or photo-essay work to convey the stories and experiences of villagers and practitioners involved in bottom-up disaster relief.

Jordan—Collateral Repair Project (CRP)
Collateral Repair Project is a grassroots effort to bring much-needed assistance to refugees and other victims of war and conflict—those commonly referred to as "collateral damage." Collateral Repair Project was started in 2006 by two American women who worked hard to stop the US invasion of Iraq and grieved over the loss of innocent lives in their name. They wanted to establish an organization that allowed for a direct connection between citizens of coalition countries and innocent Iraqis who suffered from the consequences of war. They decided to set up Collateral Repair Project in Amman, Jordan, where many refugees were relocating. Much of CRP's early work was charity related, but as the organization grew it ran numerous programs focusing on community building, education and emergency aid. CRP's programs seek to restore dignity and community among displaced urban refugees as well as to ensure that their basic food and housing needs are met. CRP provides emergency assistance to hundreds of families through, in-kind aid, information and referral services, and a monthly food voucher program that provides eligible households with coupons to purchase fresh produce and groceries. Students collaborating with CRP will work on awareness-building activities to broaden international understanding of the urban refugee crisis in Amman; to highlight the work CRP is doing on the ground to support refugee families.

Chile—Observatorio Ciudadano
Observatorio Ciudadano or “Citizen’s Watch’ is a nongovernmental organization for the defense, promotion and documentation and human rights. It was created in September 2004 in the city of Temuco, as Observatory of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, by a group of citizens from different parts of the country, different professions and ethnic backgrounds. The work to date has been plural, multidisciplinary and marked by interethnic relationship that allows us to take on new challenges. Beginning in July 2008 are the Citizen Observatory, a learning and growing from their experiences and current realities facing the country, always guided by the guidelines contained in international instruments on human rights and rights of indigenous peoples organization force. Students working with Observatorio will live and learn with Mapuche families in the Curarrehue region towards the south of Chile working to spread awareness of the Mapuche struggle for land, recognition, and rights at an international level.

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HMRT 3000: The Role of Civil Society
Fall 2015
Assignment: Praxis Paper
50 points

The Human Rights context in the US is arguably unique. The US is not a party to ILO Convention 169 or the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (signed but not ratified), and in fact has only ratified two of the major international human rights conventions (the US is a signatory to UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). With this context in mind, this assignment invites you to reflect on the examples of human rights advocacy, activism and resistance we have observed in Chile, Jordan and Nepal and develop a praxis-oriented program for bringing this knowledge and experience back to the U.S. context.

Thinking concretely yet aspirationally, outline how you would pursue a human rights issue you’ve seen contested in our field sites in the US context, and specifically in your local region or city. Areas of inquiry include: How does the problem you’ve identified manifest – historically and in the current moment – in the US? What would a human rights project – for example, a campaign, an organization, a movement-based approach, a service-oriented program, a legal complaint or court case – in this area look like in the US? What organizations and/or communities (national and international) would you work with? Would you use the language of human rights, and if so, how? What problems do you foresee, both practically and conceptually? Accordingly, what is the relationship between human rights theory and practice in the US context?

*** Note that this assignment does NOT assume that we all identify as “Americans.” However, by attending a university in the U.S., your network becomes imbricated with the U.S., its attendant positionality, and all the possibilities (and constraints) that entails. Conceptualize your paper with this in mind.

Guidelines: Each response should be 800 words not including references. Use APA style for citations in text, such as (Smith, 2013) and include a bibliography. Primary sources such as guest lectures and interviews can be included in the bibliography in alphabetical order. This assignment counts for 50% of the Role of Civil Society grade.

Assessment criteria include:
- Strength and effective development of arguments supporting your position
- Clear analytical connections to human rights concepts we have studied
- Effective use of primary and secondary information for descriptive and analytical purposes
- Ability to skillfully synthesize information from various sources
- Clarity and concise communication

E-mail your completed paper by 9am December 8th to the Program Director, Chris Westcott at chris.westcott@ihp.edu

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