

sur

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English Edition

● **Lucia Nader**

The role of NGOs in the UN Human Rights Council

● **Cecília MacDowell Santos**

Transnational legal activism and the State: reflections on cases against Brazil in the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

● **Tara Urs**

Imagining locally-motivated accountability for mass atrocities: voices from Cambodia

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The pursuit of transitional justice and African traditional values: a clash of civilizations – The case of Uganda

● **Ramona Vijeyarasa**

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● **Elizabeth Salmón G.**

The long road in the fight against poverty and its promising encounter with human rights

● **Interview with Juan Méndez**

By Glenda Mezarobba



HUMAN RIGHTS
UNIVERSITY NETWORK **SUR**

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SUR - HUMAN RIGHTS UNIVERSITY NETWORK is a network of academics working together with the mission to strengthen the voice of universities in the South on human rights and social justice, and to create stronger cooperation between them, civil society organizations and the United Nations. Conectas Human Rights, a not-for-profit organization founded in Brazil, is home to Sur. (See website <www.conectas.org> and portal <www.conectasur.org>. To access the online version of the journal, please go to: <www.surjournal.org>.)

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PRESENTATION



We have reached issue seven of *Sur – International Journal on Human Rights* with an excellent response from our readers and a new partnership with the International Center for Transitional Justice.

An evaluation of the journal was conducted to gain some feedback for us to improve the quality, to cater more to the interests of our readers and to make it even more accessible and critical. Of the 15% of readers who responded to an online survey, among them professors and human rights activists, 66% considered the journal to be excellent and 34% judged it to be good. The best qualities they identified were: (a) the high standard of the journal; (b) its potential to disseminate information on human rights; and (c) its broad application, both for university and non-university courses. The main challenges, meanwhile, are: (a) to address more specific thematic issues; (b) to publish new authors; and (c) to improve the dissemination of the journal. To meet these challenges, the following steps have already been taken: (a) we shall focus this and future issues on topics specifically related to the Global South, such as transitional justice, access to medicine and freedom of expression; and (b) we have staged launches in human rights centers at universities on different continents. Furthermore, we have plans in 2008 to establish a monitorial system, whereby new authors who have written promising articles will be supervised by more experienced researchers or professors. (For a more detailed account of the evaluation, please see the report at the end of this issue.)

In addition to the evaluation, we have also forged a partnership between Conectas Human Rights, which has published the journal since its first issue, and the International Center for Transitional Justice. This center was set up in 2000 with the mission to promote

justice, peace and reconciliation in societies emerging from repressive regimes or from armed conflicts, as well as to establish democracies where historical or systemic injustices remain unresolved.

The partnership was established so we could focus on a key topic for countries in the southern hemisphere: transitional justice. The balance between peace and justice and between reconciliation and retribution in post-conflict societies, or in cases of historical and persistent injustices, is dealt with by the authors from different geographical perspectives: Australia, Cambodia, Peru and Uganda. The authors, however, raise questions that often transcend these local contexts. By addressing the violated rights of aboriginal children in Australia who were forcibly taken from their families, for example, Ramona Vijayarasa questions whether Truth Commissions can help build more inclusive societies. By analyzing the Extraordinary Chambers in Cambodia, Tara Urs attempts to identify what truth commissions and extraordinary courts can realistically expect to accomplish. She also examines how culturally specific processes can help shape transitional justice and how best to respond to the interests of the victims. Looking at Peru's case, Elizabeth Salmón sheds some light on the links between conflict and poverty, and questions whether transitional justice should have a specific role beyond universalistic public policies. Finally, when addressing the situation in Uganda, Cecily Rose and Francis Ssekandi consider the role of amnesty in the consolidation of peace and question how to implement transitional justice in situations where peace agreements are still being reached.

To round off this subject, the journal is publishing an interview with Juan Méndez, director of the International Center for Transitional Justice.

This edition of the journal also carries an analysis of the recently established structure of the UN Human Rights Council (Lucia Nader) and a study on the influence of the inter-American system and "transnational legal activism" on the protection of human rights in Brazil (Cecília Santos).

We would like to thank the following professors and partners for their contribution to the selection of the articles for this issue: Glenda Mezarobba, Helena Olea, J. Paul Martin, Jeremy Sarkin, Juan Amaya Castro, Juan Carlos Arjona, Kawame Karikari, Maria Herminia Tavares de Almeida, Paula Ligia Martins, Richard Pierre Claude, Thami Ngwenya and Vinodh Jaichand.

Finally, we would like to announce that the next edition of the SUR Journal will be a special issue on access to medicine and human rights, to be published in collaboration with the Brazilian Interdisciplinary AIDS Association (ABIA). The journal will also carry articles on other topics.

The editors.

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ANNEX 2

RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION ON READER PROFILE AND THE QUALITY OF SUR JOURNAL

The journal was founded with the purpose of developing a channel for communication and for promoting innovative research on human rights, while adopting a focus that addresses the peculiarities of countries from the southern hemisphere. The first issue was launched in the second half of 2004 and it has been published twice yearly ever since. SUR Journal is printed in three languages with a press run of 2,700 copies and it is also available online. In addition, it has a mailing list of 2,119 readers. Subscription is aimed at professors, human rights activists and the libraries of universities with postgraduate courses in human rights.

As publication of issue No. 7 approached, we conducted a survey to discover who our readers are, what they think about the journal, what they use it for and how they think it could be improved. This was done with a questionnaire to evaluate reader profile and the quality of the journal.

Survey format

The survey on the quality of SUR Journal took six months (from April 15 to October 15). The questionnaire was posted on the journal's website and readers were invited by mail to fill it out.

Reader profile

The questionnaire was answered by 391 readers from 60 countries, representing approximately 18% of subscribers to the printed version (our goal was 300 responses). Brazilians represented 40% of respondents to the questionnaire. In numbers of responses, they were followed by Argentina (9.7%), United States (5.1%) and Mexico (4.6%). The African country with the highest number of responses was Nigeria (2.3%), while the most responses in Asia came from India (2.3%). The language distribution of our readers is relatively even: 38% read the journal in Portuguese, 32% in Spanish and 30% in English.

Most readers work at NGOs (31.2%) or are university professors (36.8%). The majority of them read between 3 and 5 articles.

Opinion about the quality of the journal

The survey appears to confirm that the journal primarily serves an educational purpose, since 58.3% of respondents said the articles frequently improve their understanding of a given topic. However, the journal has not achieved its goal to spark debate, given that 49.1% replied that only occasionally do the articles manage to challenge their position on specific matter.

The question about the purposes the journal is used for was presented in multiple-choice format. Most readers answered that they use the journal for research (77.2%), university training activities (45.2%), personal reading (43.7%) or as recommended reading for university courses (41.6%).

The most important question was the one asking the reader to make an overall evaluation of the journal, and it was in these responses that journal was given the best assessment: 62% of readers said the quality of the journal was excellent and 38% said it was good (none judged it to poor or very poor).

Reader suggestions

The final two questions enabled us to have some form of dialogue with our readers. Many of them responded, even though this section was optional.

The readers suggested an enormous list of topics that the journal could address, some of which are the subject of discussion in this and the next issue.

The question on critiques and suggestions yielded some welcome surprises and plenty of important information for us to continue our work with the journal: 36.3% of readers left comments, 28.1% of them to express their gratitude for the journal and to praise its content.

Many of the comments emphasized the need to give more space to new authors (young researchers) and others highlighted the need to publicize the journal more widely.

The next steps

We believe that the number of responses to our evaluation questionnaire represents a significant sample of our readers. As the responses have indicated, our major challenge now is to promote an effective human rights debate capable of shattering existing false consensus and, in doing so, help develop a doctrine on the topic in a more coherent and critical manner. We realize that we need to pursue this objective without sacrificing the achievements made so far, particularly the regularity of the publication and the diversity of the authors.

At the same time as we launched the online evaluation questionnaire, we also consulted some professors and activists on how to maintain the quality of the articles and the diversity of the authors (so far, 75% of the published articles have been penned by authors from the southern hemisphere). As a result, we reached the conclusion that it would be necessary to create a new system for editing articles, whereby professors with more research experience would collaborate with the new authors. Therefore, starting with our next issue, a group of professors will work with the authors to improve their contributions so we can publish articles by new authors without losing any of the editorial quality we enjoy.

We would like to thank everyone who responded to the questionnaire and invite you all to continue sending us your comments and suggestions. We always welcome your ideas on how to improve the quality of the journal and how best to publicize it among the right audience.

SURVEY - READER PROFILE AND SUR JOURNAL EVALUATION

A – Reader Profile

1. Indicate which category is applicable to you? (multiple answers possible)

- I work for a NGO
 I am a professor
 I am a student
 I work for a foundation
 I work for a government
 I am responsible for acquisitions in a library *
 I work for an international organization (UN, OAS, AU, etc.)
 Other

* if you are responsible for acquisitions in a library, please contact us at surjournal@surjournal.org

2. How many articles have you read?

- 0 1 - 2 3 - 5 6 - 10 More than 10

3. Country

4. Language in which you read the Sur Journal:

- Spanish English Portuguese

5. You usually read the Journal: (multiple answers possible)

- Printed On-line

Questions 5 and 6 are for subscribers of the printed version only:

6. The Sur Journal is used for: (multiple answers possible)

- Personal use Institutional use

7. Editions of the Sur Journal that you have received: (multiple answers possible)

- No. 1 No. 2 No. 3 No. 4 No. 5

B – Sur Journal Evaluation

8. In your opinion, the issues addressed in the Sur Journal are:

- Irrelevant Fairly relevant
 Relevant Very relevant

9. How often have the articles challenged your perception about a given topic?

- Never Sometimes
 Many times Very often

10. How often have the articles enlarged your perception about a given topic?

- Never Sometimes
 Many times Very often

11. Do you think that Sur Journal has succeeded in addressing specific issues of the Southern Hemisphere?

- Never Sometimes
 Many times Very often

12. You use the Sur Journal for: (multiple answers possible)

- Personal reading
 Bibliography for academic courses
 Litigation
 Mobilization
 Research
 Training
 Other

13. What is your evaluation concerning the layout of the Sur Journal?

- Very bad Bad
 Good Very good

14. What is your opinion in relation to the general quality of the Sur Journal?

- Very bad Bad
 Good Very good

15. Please, suggest topics for following issues:

16. Other suggestions and critiques:

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

PREVIOUS NUMBERS

Previous numbers are available at <www.surjournal.org>.

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EMILIO GARCÍA MÉNDEZ

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Reflections for a New Agenda

FLAVIA PIOVESAN

Social, Economic and Cultural Rights and Civil
and Political Rights

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Reflections on Civil Society and Human Rights

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