



**UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE**



CALL FOR PAPERS

Human Rights Week

Academic Colloquium Freedom of Expression

University of Geneva

Thursday 24 and Friday 25 November 2022

DEADLINES

Applicants are invited to submit proposals of up to 500 words, in English, plus a short biographical note of 100 words, and 5 keywords by 20 June 2022, 5 pm CET

The Human Rights Week is one of the key events in Geneva not to be missed for anyone interested in the human rights challenges that our world is facing. It is organized by the University of Geneva in partnership with the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the Republic and Canton of Geneva and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Human Rights Week is rich in various events, such as conferences, debates, film screenings, exhibitions, artistic performances, and includes as a centerpiece an academic colloquium. For more information on previous editions, see [here](#).

The overarching theme of the Human Rights Week in 2022 is “Freedom of Expression”. Freedom of expression belongs to the core of human rights and was among the first liberties to be recognized. According to Article 11 of the 1789 French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, “[t]he free communication of ideas and of opinions is one of the most precious rights of man. Any citizen may therefore speak, write and publish freely, except what is tantamount to the abuse of this liberty in the cases determined by Law.” Yet, today, the very principle of freedom of expression is strongly tested in many countries where various forms of censorship take place. And, even when the principle is accepted, there are innumerable debates about the exact content and scope of freedom of expression as well as about its limits.

Freedom of expression in international human rights law

Article 19 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#) protects the right to hold opinions without interference (paragraph 1) and the right to freedom of expression (paragraph 2). According to the ICCPR, while this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice, its exercise carries with it special duties and responsibilities and may therefore be subject to certain restrictions: “1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference. 2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice. 3. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary: (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.” See also the Human Rights Committee’s [General Comment No. 34 dedicated to Article 19 ICCPR](#). All regional human rights treaties also guarantee freedom of expression (see Art. 13 [American Convention on Human Rights \(ACHR\)](#); Art. 9 [African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights \(AfCHPR\)](#) and Art. 10 [European Convention on Human Rights \(ECHR\)](#). See also Art. 11 [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#)).

The broad Sub-themes that will be addressed during the colloquium are as follows:

1. Freedom of the Press (including protection of journalistic sources and whistleblowers)

Freedom of the press is a vital part of freedom of speech. According to the Human Rights Committee, a “free, uncensored and unhindered press or other media is essential in any society to ensure freedom of opinion and expression and the enjoyment of other Covenant rights. It constitutes one of the cornerstones of a democratic society.” And yet, according to Reporters without Borders, 27 journalists and media workers have been killed since 1 January 2022 and 479 are currently detained. In its 2022 World Press Freedom Index, the organization has identified a record number of 28 countries in which the state of journalism is “very bad”, including Belarus, Russia, China and Iran. It should also be noted that, in order to give full weight to freedom of the press, freedom of expression also protects the confidentiality of journalistic sources and whistleblowers. However, freedom of the press is not absolute as it may in particular infringe upon state secrets (for instance in military matters) and other human rights (e.g. the right to respect of one’s private life or freedom of religion).

Are the limits of freedom of the press clearly delimited by human rights bodies? Are they conceived in an appropriate manner to allow medias to play their role? Could measures be implemented to better protect the activities of journalists, especially their sources? Which role does soft law play in the development of this aspect of freedom of speech?

2. Freedom of Expression and Disinformation

In the famous words of the European Court of Human Rights, freedom of expression does not only apply to ‘information’ or ‘ideas’ that are favorably received or regarded as inoffensive or as a matter of indifference, but also to those that offend, shock or disturb: “Such are the demands of pluralism, tolerance and broadmindedness without which there is no democratic society.” At the same time,

human rights instruments prevent the misuse of the rights they protect in order to avoid that these rights be claimed to defend activities seeking the annihilation of the values lying at the core of human rights and democratic values. In this context, disinformation, which has been defined by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression as “false information that is disseminated intentionally to cause serious social harm,” poses particular challenges.

How is disinformation dealt with today by human rights bodies within the framework of international treaties? What are disinformation’s effects on a country’s democratic life and on the level of public trust? Countering disinformation requires multidimensional and multi-stakeholder responses that are in compliance with international human rights law. What are the roles/responsibilities of international organizations, states, civil society and the private sector, including media, online platforms, social media and technology companies? When does a state’s fight against disinformation run afoul of freedom of expression?

3. Academic Freedom

Academic freedom is an integral part of freedom of expression. According to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, “history has proven that violations of academic freedom and university autonomy have always resulted in intellectual relapse, and consequently in social and economic stagnation.” And in recent times we have witnessed many frictions between academic freedom and “actual” academic life. For instance, “affairs” have recently surfaced concerning for instance the criticizing by academics of the Swiss bank secrecy, the criticizing of presumptive nominees to the U.S. Supreme Court and pressures to refrain from writing about certain topics or countries.

Is academic freedom tangibly protected today? What role does it play exactly in the life of a democratic state ruled by law? Has the position of the “intellectual” in our societies evolved or even changed over the last decades?

Eligibility: Graduate and postgraduate researchers having obtained their PhD within the past 10 years or being on the verge of obtaining it.

Deadlines for proposals and papers:

- Applicants are invited to submit proposals of up to 500 words, in English, plus a short biographical note of 100 words, and 5 keywords to Ms Roswitha Zahler (Roswitha.Zahler@unige.ch) by 20 June 2022, 5 pm CET.
- Applicants whose proposals have been selected will be informed in early July 2022.
- Final papers, of about 8,000 words in English, to be submitted by selected applicants will be due by Friday 30 September 2022.

An academic publication will follow the conference.

Format: The Academic colloquium is planned to take place in person at the University of Geneva. Depending on the evolution of the COVID-19 epidemic, it may be turned to an online or hybrid conference.

Funding: Researchers whose proposals have been selected may be eligible for assistance with travel and accommodation costs upon request.