

Roosevelt in The Hague

17 May 2018

Summaries of Discussions of the Round Table Meetings

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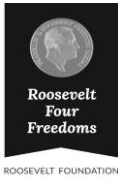
Round Table 1: Paris Climate Agreement

Round Table 2: Freedom of Speech and Expression

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Round Table 1: The Paris Climate Agreement

Chair: Prof. Joyeeta Gupta

Rapporteur: Raam Dutia

The Paris Climate Agreement round table meeting engendered much debate between participants who held numerous perspectives on how to address the core challenges presented by climate change and the best ways by which to move forwards. Below is a summary of the key topics of discussion.

The road to the Paris Climate Agreement

The round table meeting began with a brief discussion, led by [Professor Joyeeta Gupta](#) (Universiteit van Amsterdam), of some of the salient international milestones reached prior and in the run up to the Paris Climate Agreement. Professor Gupta firstly recalled the huge euphoria greeting the conclusion of the negotiations for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992 (in force 21 March 1994). The UNFCCC set the stage for international cooperation to combat climate change and limiting its damage. With negotiations for the UNFCCC beginning in 1990, the negotiation process benefitted from a favourable post-Cold War environment and was wrapped up in a mere two years. The "Second Euphoria" concerned the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol, binding developed state parties to emission reduction targets.

The adoption of the Paris Climate Agreement (the Agreement) in December 2015 heralded a "Third Euphoria." The Agreement aims to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change and limit temperature increases further, while also strengthening the ability of countries to deal with the adverse impacts of climate change – a theme that the round table participants would frequently return to.

Moving forwards: core challenges

A. Conceiving a future without fossil fuels and reaching carbon neutrality

The round table agreed that only by conceiving of a future without fossil fuels would we be able to achieve one. A key question for us all is thus whether we can imagine a fossil-fuel free and carbon neutral world.

For some participants, the development and use of new technologies would be key to unlocking this future. The future may also have a consumer "component", whereby consumers would need to make important behavioural changes in order to move towards carbon neutrality. One such change could be reducing our consumption of meat. Given the sheer land mass required

in the production of meat, its energy intensiveness and the gases produced as waste, effecting such a dietary change could be critical.

In any case, we need not "fear a lesser world" (or a reduced standard of living/limits to freedom and quality of life) as a result of the changes to be made – a fear which can paralyse action. Rather, there are significant opportunities to be taken advantage of and much potential for growth as we transition to a future free of fossil fuels. One suggestion among participants, for instance, was to reorient food production – and redistribute its commercial rewards – among countries in the Global South.

Participants considered a number of ways to reach the goal of carbon neutrality by 2050, an objective of the Agreement. Afforestation could be an important way of achieving this. Various technological solutions to offset the effects of fossil fuel use were also considered in turn. Yet, despite the initial excitement of discovering new technologies, many of these technologies seemed to be too damaging to the environment, unsafe, risky or simply too costly/impractical to be implementable. Pumping the oceans with algae would, for instance, profoundly disturb the finely balanced ecosystem of the ocean. Injecting sulphur dioxide into the stratosphere to "cool the globe" would lead to acid rain. Carbon capture and storage has led to earthquakes. Even if technology represents part of the solution, the amount of money invested in dealing with the risks of these technologies is very low, with both the US government and European Environmental Agency investing around one per cent of their budgets allocated to developing new technologies on the risks of these technological solutions.

B. Mobilising investment in a low carbon future

The round table recognised that financial institutions and pensions funds hold and direct the flow of huge amounts of investment capital – yet these actors still invest in "dirty fuels" such as coal, oil and gas. Noteworthy attempts have been made to change this with, for example, students and academics at the University of Amsterdam respectively campaigning and pressing pension funds to divest from fossil—fuel energy companies. A particular issue raised concerned the role of consumer demand and behaviour, and it was acknowledged that consumers would have to be willing to withdraw from pension funds investing in fossil fuels. Participants emphasised, once again, that consumers would have to be able to imagine an alternative future in order to be able to effect change.

C. Apportioning responsibility and accountability for climate change

a. The role of those who have the power (and holding them to account)

It was generally agreed that the bigger and more powerful the actor, the greater the responsibility they should bear for – and the more they should commit in the fight against – climate change.

Financial institutions:

Financial investors, principally pension funds and banks, need to commit to reducing their investments in fossil—fuel companies and industries, and work towards systemic change, whereby investors have an interest in investing differently. While market tools and voluntary commitments by financial institutions may be useful to this end, these commitments need to be backed by the law and the enforcement opportunities it creates. Target- and boundary-setting by states will be instrumental in changing the investment climate.

MNCs:

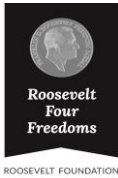
Multinational companies active in the fossil—fuel sector were also identified as a hugely powerful actor needing to bear its corresponding burden of responsibility. This responsibility could be (and is currently being) realised through the recognition of legal liability and accountability in the courts. The courts can help balance the scales somewhat between powerful companies and more disparate civil society groups/the people at large, particularly given the demonstrably growing role of scientific evidence in judicial proceedings and determinations. Similarly, the role of the media in holding these powerful actors to account, "naming and shaming" where necessary, is fundamental.

The media:

On a related note, the media was seen by participants as a crucial actor in shaping public opinion around the issue of climate change and its impacts, and the distorting effects of a media which prizes so-called "balance" in its climate-change related coverage were acknowledged and recognised as a real challenge by the participants. The media has a duty to inform publics of the threats posed by and real impacts of climate change. If the people are properly informed of these issues, political systems would be more sensitive to them. This issue has only grown in significance in the current era of "fake news".

States:

The participants agreed that the role of states is crucial in a number of ways. Governments may enact laws which set boundaries to the market and curb polluting activity/fossil fuel dependence. A particular tool at the disposal of states is taxation – governments may affect fuel pricing through a carbon tax. Particular challenges were recognised in relation to taxing carbon, for instance: (i) the issue of a potentially disinterested public (which, when "uninformed", can be passive and do not push their representatives to take such far-reaching measures); and (ii) the need to ensure the costs of climate change are borne more equitably (where developing economies do not pay disproportionately for the few who consume without impunity). Many participants stressed that efforts should not be impeded by the perceived rise of populism; it may be that national political leaders end up following the people on the issue of climate change. In this respect, a "gap" at the national level is being filled by politics at the local level (for instance by states in the US continuing to recognise their responsibilities under the Paris Climate Agreement despite the US withdrawal from the Agreement, and the encouraging example of the compulsory inclusion of climate change in the curriculum in Portland, Oregon). One participant noted that some national governments are aiming to go beyond the targets set by the Paris Climate Agreement.



Separately, it was recognised that governments can be constrained in certain respects when dealing with polluting industries, for instance by investor protections under bilateral investment treaties and state-investor contracts, and they may not be inclined to act where to do so would require the payment of compensation they may be legally obliged/contractually bound to provide (for instance in respect of "stranded assets").

The state role is significant in another particularly profound way. The extent to which states foster global solidarity and cooperation will be crucial – both in terms of: (i) how they deal with technology (pursing a policy of collaboration, while also regulating and managing the risks of these technologies effectively pursuant to the precautionary principle/avoiding lock-in technologies); and (ii) adaptation – helping those countries in the Global North and Global South bearing the brunt of creeping damage and sudden disasters effectively adapt to extreme weather.

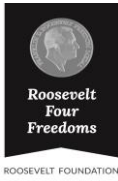
Relatedly, the participants addressed the challenge faced by the US withdrawal from the Agreement. Again, positive local forces (states and cities in the US) were alluded to – although local challenges do also persist. Closer collaboration between China, Asia, Europe and Latin America, though itself challenging, may have the effect of isolating the US, such that it may once again re-join the "pathway" forged by the international community in respect of climate change.

b. Power in numbers

The commitments and actions of other actors were also discussed. We, the people, can empower ourselves in a number of ways. Participants focused firstly on our role as consumers. We should be proactive when making investment and purchasing decisions, "voting with our wallets" to create an interest in funding non-fossil fuel/carbon intensive activities and industries. The round table emphasised the need for activism, with notable initiatives including writing letters to elected representatives and the lobbying of universities and other institutions in the public and private sectors to change their investment/sourcing practices. The influence and leverage of civil society and universities – often at the forefront of the climate debate – was also recognised.

D. Framing the climate debate: a moral question?

In the ultimate analysis, whether and how we respond to climate change are moral questions. Do we promote solidarity, protect those most vulnerable from harm (in the short and long-term), and apportion fairness with respect to the "burden" of dealing with climate change? Despite their differences, participants agreed emphatically that our ability to respond to the threat of climate change depends on whether we can reinvigorate the notion of the conscience for all actors.



Round Table 2: Freedom of Speech and Expression

Laureate: Erol Önderoğlu

Chair: Dr. Ulad Belavusau

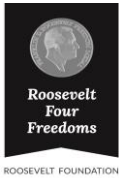
Rapporteur: Dr. Narin Idriz

After the chair of the session Dr. Ulad Belavusau, a senior researcher at T.M.C. Asser Institute, introduced himself and the laureate, Mr. Erol Önderoğlu, he gave the floor to the laureate to briefly tell the audience about his background and professional activities. Next, all the participants around the table introduced themselves and explained why they are interested in the freedom of speech and expression. The participants were mostly students studying at various universities in the Netherlands, a free-lance journalist and few young professionals working for civil society organizations. Following the round of introduction, the participants asked the laureate many questions, and engaged in an active debate on the limits of freedom of expression.

To begin with the introduction of Mr. Önderoğlu, he has been working for Reporters Without Borders (RSF) for twenty-three years. He is based in Istanbul and defines himself as a “journalist of journalists”. He follows closely cases against journalists; therefore, spends 2-3 days a week at court. There are hundreds of cases against journalists pending in Turkish courts. Recently, some of the cases that were brought after the July 2016 coup attempt have been concluded with convictions as heavy as aggravated life imprisonment, which is the most severe penalty after the capital punishment was abolished. There is a state of emergency in Turkey since the coup attempt, which made life difficult not just for journalists but many others. For instance, 4600 judges and public prosecutors were dismissed of their jobs on the ground that they were affiliated to the Gülen movement, which is accused of orchestrating the coup attempt. According to the laureate, the actions of the government in the aftermath of the coup attempt amount to destroying the rule of law in Turkey.

Like many journalists working in Turkey, there is also a case brought against Mr. Önderoğlu. His case was brought before the state of emergency, for the solidarity action he took with the Kurdish newspaper “Özgür Gündem” by acting as its “editor-in-chief” for a day. The public prosecutor held him accountable for the content of the newspaper on that day and charged him with spreading terrorist propaganda (PKK). The laureate was arrested and kept in prison for ten days. He believes he was released thanks to an international solidarity action with him. He is going to appear in court again in October.

The first question that followed was why he is going back to Turkey knowing that there is a serious possibility that he could be convicted and imprisoned. His reply was that he knew the risks, challenges and role of his profession for society at large when he chose it. That role changes in times of crisis and becomes even more important. While it is also possible to exercise a profession in a mechanical way, he believes that one gets more energy from exercising a job that one loves.



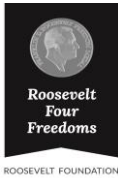
The second question concerned the necessity of protecting newspapers that are trying to undermine the territorial integrity of a state. Mr. Önderoğlu agreed that journalists had to be careful not to incite hatred and distribute propaganda. When in doubt as to the limits of their action, he argued that journalists could refer to international jurisprudence on the matter, and the case law of the European Court on Human Rights (ECtHR) in particular. He added that in the current context in Turkey, the government aims to silence all critical voices. Journalists that wrote on the Paradise papers and the cases of tax evasion by government officials were indicted for libel. A mere tweet about the President is enough to be prosecuted for insulting him.

The following questions were on the future prospect of achieving freedom of expression in Turkey and the possible success of the coalition of opposition parties in the forthcoming elections on the 24th of June. The laureate explained that the disrespect for people's identities in Turkey is nothing new. Different segments of society were oppressed in different periods in the past. Today the government wants to impose Sunni Islam on all. This does not mean that Turkey should be punished or isolated. Turkish society needs international solidarity more than ever. Many Turks are leaving the country at the moment, especially academics trying to escape the repressive political environment. However, despite all difficulties, there is also a dynamic civil rights movement. It is the efforts and strength of that movement that will make a difference at the end.

The laureate does not believe that the upcoming elections will bring anything substantial. The source of this pessimism is the deep divisions within Turkish society. He argues that even if Erdoğan loses, it is very likely that the coalition against him will quickly dissolve. He might also manipulate the process and create trouble for the new president that make it difficult for him to operate and deliver his/her promises.

On the question whether there should be room next to the established media in Europe for all Turks to express their views, including Erdoğan supporters, the laureate responded in the affirmative. He said that it was not surprising that many Turks in Europe support Erdoğan. 90% of these people come from Turkey's conservative periphery, and the media on which they rely as a source of information is controlled by the government. That control exceeds 80% of the media. Therefore, it is important that everyone has the possibility to express their views, as this will lead to a dialogue. Debate is good and dialogue is important in overcoming divisions.

With reference to what is going on in Russia, another question was what the journalists could do for dissemination of information and knowledge rather than ideology. The reply was that journalists have to rely on as many sources as possible to ensure that what they are spreading is knowledge and not ideology. Personal efforts and respecting the standard of one's work was important. When governments try to control the media that becomes a challenge. To monitor what the government is doing to restrict the media and freedom of expression, Mr. Önderoğlu is releasing a quarterly monitor of media. (You can find the summary of his latest report on the following link: <https://bianet.org/english/media/196761-210-years-in-prison-3-aggravated-lifetime-imprisonment-for-48-journalists-in-3-months>)

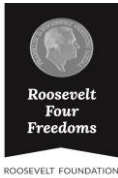


Another interesting question was on the clash between freedom of expression and freedom of religion, and whether the two were reconcilable. The laureate said that the Western experience shows that they are. He said there were cartoonists convicted for blasphemy in the West as well, but that was very rare. Referring to the controversy of the Danish cartoons of the prophet Mohammed in 2005, he argued that globalization was too early in bringing a discussion on criticism of religion. Therefore, one part of the world was not able to understand what is going on in another part. According to the laureate, the world will become more mature when people everywhere are able to discuss freely issues concerning religion. However, it is important to distinguish between what is criticism of religion versus incitement to hatred of religion.

The rest of the round table meeting was devoted to an exercise and discussion on the possible limits of freedom of expression. Post-its were distributed to all participants so that they could write down what they thought could constitute justified restrictions on freedom of expression. The overwhelming majority was of the opinion that hate speech and incitement to violence should be the limits. However, there were also those arguing that even giving room for hate speech might be useful in order to be able to identify those with extreme ideas and engage them in a debate. The fear was that restrictions would not eradicate such views but only suppress them and make them even more unpredictable and dangerous. For others, this kind of “strategic” thinking meant undermining the values on which our societies are built. Hence, actions in this field should be guided by our values rather than strategy. Overall, there was an agreement that it is important to protect different social groups against hate speech as well as calls for physical violence.

The next crucial question was about the boundary between offensive speech and hate speech. Establishing that boundary proved difficult. It was argued that while criticising a particular social group should be possible (even if that group perceives it as offensive), saying that one wants “minder, minder, minder ...” (less, less, less) people of a particular social group or ethnic origin, as PVV leader Wilders did, constituted hate speech. Participants also emphasised the importance of the status and societal role of those exercising the freedom of expression. While private actors (individuals) could have more freedom to hold and express their opinions, public figures, i.e. people in power, leaders of political parties had to be more cautious and exercise restraint when expressing opinions that could be offensive to particular social groups.

The opinion of the laureate regarding the question on the limits of freedom of expression was that it was important to restrict the grounds of derogation from the freedom, and if possible to move towards the American approach. He underlined the value of an open public debate on all kinds of issues. His experience was that grounds for derogation from freedoms are used creatively by governments to further restrict and repress any opposition rather than to protect different social groups or genuine public interest.



Round Table 3: Freedom of Worship

Laureate: Bishop Paride Taban

Chair: Dr. Tarlach McGonagle

Rapporteur: Aylin Gayibli, LL.M.

Emeritus Bishop Paride Taban was the 2018 Laureate for the award for the Freedom of Worship for his outstanding work founding and running the Holy Trinity Peace Village in Kuron, South Sudan. The Peace Village represents the lifelong dedication of the Bishop to peacebuilding in South Sudan.

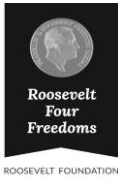
The round table meeting chaired by Dr. Tarlach McGonagle was attended by several of Bishop Paride's supporters and people from the NGO sector as well as students, who all joined in a lively discussion about personal experiences related to the Peace Village and peacebuilding through the lens of freedom of worship.

The Bishop set the theme for the discussion by emphasising that his current priority for the Peace Village is education, which he sees as the key for eradicating poverty as it starts with the human mind and people feeling like valued individuals. The Peace Village is strategically located at the problem spot of three conflicting cattle paths crossing, and thus emblematic of how to bridge intercultural lines. During the round table two key strands emerged in this regard – the international and the local level.

The international input centres on financing, yet is currently misguided in its focus. Peacebuilding should not be seen as a project but a process. Thus, the flexibility and sustainability of funding is essential. Demanding adherence to externally imposed deadlines, which do not take into account circumstances on the ground, in fact results in donor money being wasted. Instead, long-term commitment and trust is required, which can be achieved by bringing the donors to personally see the project.

This shift in objective should further translate into trusting the local communities to know best how to build peace in the local area. Unfortunately, today, the international peacebuilding efforts view circumstances through a Western lens, which tends to ignore local idiosyncrasies. For instance, installing democracy the way it is understood in the Global North is doomed to fail in a region like South Sudan where the locals are not accustomed to top-down leaders and hierarchies. It was agreed that we cannot always give what we want to others using our framework of thinking. In short, one should be wary of Westernisation.

The same logic can be applied at the local level. The Bishop emphasised the importance of listening to what the communities need, instead of telling them what to do. This can be as simple as asking what to prioritise in the peacebuilding process, but on a wider scale means ensuring their voices are heard rather than replaced by outsiders. Bringing together different communities requires patience, support and above all trust. The school in the Peace Village first attracted more educated elites from further away and only over time, after seeing its success, did neighbouring communities start sending their children to school. Once this trust is



established, it facilitates the creation of role models – people who can return to their communities as examples of a different outlook, and more peaceful future perspectives.

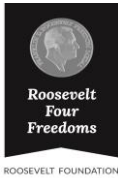
An important approach taken in the Peace Village is using traditional means to transmit new messages. Once peace is the mission, traditional songs that used to encourage fighting and cattle raiding for instance are changed by locals to promote education and harmony. Drama and theatre can play a crucial role in this regard. One of the programmes in the Kuron Peace Village is the Theatre for Peace. The local pupils have put together a play about a dilemma the communities often face and perform this in the nearby villages. In the play, a young man has to decide if he should revenge for his brother's death; but if he himself dies, no one would be left to look after the family. Instead of telling the communities what the right choice is, the play is paused and they are asked what they would choose. The villagers aren't simply told violence is bad but they can see through the play how awful the loss of a child would be. In this way, a play becomes a means of listening to local needs as well as offering new perspectives. Such informal education is as significant as the formal avenue of increasing the number of children in schools.

Other avenues for creating a harmonious space for learning and growing include a community centre that offers language lessons during the dry season when locals have the time. This leads to more cross-communication between the communities. Similarly, shared responsibility projects where people have to work together to reach an outcome can be an effective means of instilling a sense of collaboration, which ultimately leads to less violence.

Gaining the trust of the people is essential, and often far easier achieved at the grassroots level than top-down from the government. A testament to the success of the Peace Village method is how the number of its inhabitants has grown significantly since its establishment in 2005. What at first was unknown and thus unloved, has now become an exemplary story of what can be achieved when differences are set aside for harmony.

By way of concluding the roundtable, the conversation zoomed out to the importance of the freedom of worship. A participant noted how after meeting a number of religious leaders in South Sudan and elsewhere, he realised they all teach the same message, namely to not be self-centred. Once one sees the suffering of others, it becomes impossible not to take action. Bishop Paride reaffirmed the importance of selflessness by calling on everyone who wants to follow in his footsteps and to build peace to put people first. This path requires one to be ready to risk, to risk either one's life or simply to accept the risk of failure, but to not give up in the face of adversity. In other words, peacebuilding takes commitment and dedication, first and foremost to other people. Hence, firm in his belief in the power of a grassroots movement, Bishop Paride has remained with his community and intends to do so in the future.

Round Table 4: Freedom from Want



Chair: Mr. Arjan Hamburger
Rapporteur: Beier Lin, MA

The ‘Freedom from Want’ round table, chaired by Mr. Arjan Hamburger, a former Dutch diplomat and human rights ambassador, gathered together students of various academic backgrounds and five national origins. Since the Laureate for the Freedom from Want Award, Mr. Emmanuel de Merode, could not be present at the round table, the participants engaged in a broader exchange of their views on freedom, the freedom from want, and key issues of social and economic rights, with a particular focus on addressing and eradicating global inequality.

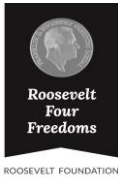
Mr. Hamburger opened the round table with a question on solidarity, which became one of the keywords in later discussions and priority needs identified by the participants. Following his lead, the participants touched upon a wide variety of theoretical and practical issues, such as the universality of human rights, the global supply chain, the security-freedom dichotomy, political engagement among young people, and information flow in a globalized, digitalized world. The close link of these issues to current affairs and ongoing global agenda sparked concrete ideas and steps forward. As a result, the participants identified three practical priority needs to better address inequality and advance social and economic rights globally.

Priority 1: Enhance global solidarity

Solidarity was a recurring word throughout the discussion and was identified as the prerequisite for joint steps forward in eradicating inequality. For the participants, this means solidarity from both private individuals and major stakeholders. On a broader scale, the participants agreed that inequality needs to be placed higher on the agenda. Media coverage and political debate, for example, should give greater voice to the inequality gap that exists both globally and domestically. The participants also identified several actions to be taken by private individuals. It is important for individuals to develop an ethic framework where solidarity plays a key role. This requires individuals to look beyond their own interest and take other people’s needs into account. Based on such a framework, individuals would be more willing to engage in discussions on issues that concern people of different social, economic, cultural, or geographic backgrounds, as well as to support human rights defenders abroad. It is also important to realize the impact each individual could create through daily activities. For example, consumers could influence corporate behaviour in the global garment sector by making conscious buying choices and supporting brands that source responsibly.

Priority 2: Enhance information flow

Solidarity will not be achieved if information on abuse of rights and inequality could not be adequately spread. In this regard, it is crucial for both governments and citizens to protect the freedom of speech and the safety of journalists. On the other hand, the participants agreed that the quantity of information is only one necessary element. To make sure that the information flow carries messages in an effective manner, it is also crucial to streamline it so that decisions could be more easily made based on the information available. The label of “fair trade”, for example, clearly communicates the message that the product a consumer is buying is harvested responsibly. The participants argued that similar practices could be adopted in other sectors



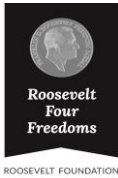
such as the garment sector, so that a shopper could more easily determine whether a shirt is produced at the expense of garment factory workers' human and labour rights.

Priority 3: Enhance effective communication

Throughout the round table discussion, communication was repeatedly identified by the participants as one of the most important tools in safeguarding social and economic rights, especially in the digital age that we live in. While citizens across the globe seem to become more cosmopolitan with the aid of the Internet and the ease of air travel, the participants worried that people of different economic status, ethnicity, age groups, religions, and geographic locations could be increasingly living in their isolated bubbles, as manifested in the most recent presidential election in the United States. Against this phenomenon, the participants highlighted the need for dialogues based on mutual respect and empathy. It is particularly helpful, in this regard, to get to know the strangers, to listen to their stories that might differ greatly from our own life experience, and to be aware of our preconceived judgements. One participant said, if the wealthy would listen to the stories of the distressed, they would be more likely to realize that freedom and prosperity are fragile and that nothing should be taken for granted.

The participants also highlighted the need to communicate to different people in languages that are tailored to their needs and habits. The Millennials, for example, are more susceptible to graphics and digital platforms, whereas the older generations might feel more comfortable receiving messages in different ways. This requires advocates and campaigners to tailor their messages to the recipients, but also to innovate and benefit from new technologies in their campaign methods. A combination of different methods and platforms could ensure that a message is heard by the widest number of recipients, and hence reach a greater impact.

Last but not the least, the participants also welcomed the sharing of success stories and positive role models. This is especially helpful for local actors and communities to sustain morale in their own struggles. One participants said, what we need to hear is not only doomsday scenarios and grotesque violations, but also the fact that the Millennium Development Goals were successful, and that changes can be made.



Round Table 5: Freedom from Fear

Laureate: Urmila Chaudhary

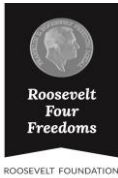
Chair & Rapporteur: Dr. Romyana Grozdanova

The conversation in this session began with a more detailed outline of Urmila's personal experience as a child slave. She was first sold off at the age 6 (!) for 15 euros. By the time she was 17/18, the particular landowner she was working for felt that she was now too old and told her to go back home; in other words – as she was more difficult to control and discipline than a young child, her services were no longer required. While sending her off, the landowner instructed her to send back another girl in her place – preferably not older than 8/9 years old. Urmila explained that girls are kept compliant through a combination of lies, verbal threats and intimidation (*the police will not help you, your family do not want you anymore, you will not find your home*), physical violence and distance (*many girls are sold off / taken very far away from their homes – 14/15 hour bus journeys – without any access to money*).

*There are girls who are also subjected to sexual violence as well as beatings however due to the sensitivity of the matter, we did not delve too much into this topic.

It was only young girls who were sold off as slaves – boys would either stay home and work at the family farm/land or would be able to go to school. The price for a child slave can be “as high as 50 euros – depending on the intensity of the bidding”. While 50 euros may not seem like a lot from the perspective of European living standards, Urmila stressed that this was quite a substantial sum within Nepal. The middlemen involved in the bidding on behalf of a landowner do not provide any information, either about themselves, their employer or the responsibilities required of the child. Children with any kind of disability are not accepted as slaves. Orphaned girls and girls from vulnerable backgrounds are regularly preyed on. However, the situation is gradually changing, as more and more boys are now sold off for slavery. There is a key distinction between girl and boy slavery – the middlemen are instead targeting employers such as hotels or factories than farming/trade as the work is safer. Urmila did not elaborate whether ‘work is safer’ in fact equated to ‘safer working conditions’. There was – and still is – gender discrimination in terms of access to schools: while girls would be sent to the free governmental school, boys would be enrolled in private schools. This is the case even within the higher castes. If a girl has been sent off as a slave, returning to school can be very difficult. Urmila herself struggled to convince her family of the relevance of education and was not allowed to go to school before she was sold off as a slave. When she tried to go back to school at 17, the teacher did not want her in the classroom as she was older than everyone else; there were several occasions on which she was expressly asked to leave because she was older. Thus, girl slaves suffer multi-layered discrimination in terms of access to school and as a result many struggle to move on from their lives in slavery.

The big question of why parents sell off their daughters as slaves has a complex answer. Intergenerational debt is at the core of the entrenched child slavery. Grandparents/grandparents/parents who take out a loan from a landowner, tend to repay that debt by selling off their daughters' labour for as long as necessary. As the loan arrangements

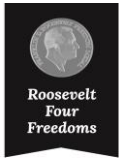


are not in writing, landlords regularly alter the terms of the loan – for example by constantly increasing the amount that needs to be repaid. Thus, fighting child slavery now includes emphasis on documentation as well as educating communities on why any loan arrangement must be in writing. The more written information available about where a child is sold off to, the easier it is to save her. Further, the cultural (caste) system in Nepal itself fosters slavery; the richer castes who exclusively benefit from the child labour, have an inherent interest in preserving the system as it is. According to Urmila, it is cultural and educational barriers that hinder society-wide changes to child labour/child slavery; she stressed that religion plays no role as Nepal is very religiously tolerant.

Urmila herself was rescued from slavery in 2007. Between 2000 and 2007, only 37 – 40 girls were rescued by her organisation – the Freed Kamlari Development Forum (FKDF); by now they have saved nearly 100 000 girls. As she puts it: ‘Unity is Power’. What she stressed as particularly helpful in changing attitudes within communities is the reliance on local Street Drama which was used to illustrate what child labour/child slavery actually entails. Street Drama has proven to be a very effective tool within rural communities. *In this context, we discussed the importance of finding tailored, culturally and socially sensitive solutions rather than one-size-fits-all approaches to resolving problems. International organisations can very much be a hindrance if they only engage with policy makers and governmental bodies and not the affected communities.* Urmila expressly stressed that donating money is simply not enough. What is required is on the ground assistance with supporting the Street Drama, psychological assistance, documentation and technology training, educational help (reading, writing, maths, languages, etc.). Financial support is of course welcome, but the importance of on-the-ground voluntary support cannot be overstated.

The international media focus on the 2013 protests of the Nepalese Kamlaris (domestic slave labourers) and the outcry over police brutality (Urmila herself suffered serious injuries and was unconscious for 49 days) has led to a positive political and legislative shift. The police and local mayors are now much more willing to engage with organisations like Urmila’s (FKDF) and enforce the legislation which prohibits child labour and child slavery. We discussed the importance of remembering the true value of the media in today’s world of ‘fake news’ and the significance of engaging with news stories and developments beyond our immediate environment.

Urmila was asked about her future plans and she stated quite strongly that there is still so much work to be done to change societal perceptions on child labour and child slavery AND many more young girls to save. While the political and police approaches are changing, the lack of education and related opportunities, intergenerational debt, caste inequality, poverty and lack of job opportunities, which drive child slavery, are still there. Further, child marriage – of children as young as 12 – has become common practice and it seems to be replacing child slavery. International organisations have not offered any support; international legal documents do not provide any practical legal protection on the ground. There are additional issues such as the porous border between Nepal and India – clear implication that many more children are exported as slaves than known figures suggest. As such, her focus is on sustaining and expanding her local operations and continuing to shift attitudes within rural communities. Access to education, persuading families/communities of the value of education (at any age),



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continuing to find local solutions and finding more psychological and logistical support for child slavery victims will continue to be her priorities.