Report of the UNESCO Asia-Arab Interregional Philosophical Dialogues on the Challenges of Globalization to Philosophy and Democracy

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Background

In recent times the teaching of philosophy in almost all regions of the world has been dominated by the writings of Western philosophers. This relates to the predominance of published works in European languages, to colonial ideologies, and to the higher output of postgraduate degrees in philosophy in North America and Europe, over the past two centuries. In order to strengthen local, regional and global awareness of the rich philosophical traditions of many regions of the world, UNESCO Social and Human Science Sector's program in philosophy has launched programmes on inter-regional philosophical dialogues in 2004. The programme currently has three working groups, and this one examines philosophy’s contribution to the potential and actual challenges of modern technology.

This was effectively the third meeting of the Asia-Arab Interregional Philosophical Dialogues working group on Challenges of globalization to philosophy and democracy. The working group is examining the emerging challenges to philosophy and democracy as a result of globalization. The Asia-Arab Interregional Philosophical Dialogues project had held a Conference on Democracy and Social Justice in Asia and the Arab World in Seoul in November 2005, jointly with the Korean National Commission for UNESCO. The second meeting had been held in 2006 in Rabat, organized by UNESCO Rabat. The philosophical dialogues are coordinated by the UNESCO offices in Bangkok and Rabat, in coordination with the Philosophy Section in UNESCO Paris headquarters. This meeting was hosted by the Regional Unit for Social and Human Sciences in Asia and the Pacific (RUSHSAP) of UNESCO Bangkok. This meeting was also held at the time of the 22nd World Congress of Philosophy.

This report also includes a report of the UNESCO Workshop: Asian and Arab Dialogues on the Philosophical Basics of Human Rights held as a panel on 31 July 2008 during the 22nd World Congress of Philosophy. Coinciding with the 60th anniversary of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this special World Congress of Philosophy (WCP) session was held to promote Asia-Arab philosophical dialogue on the topic of the Declaration.

Summary

There were over thirty conference participants from Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, France, India, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Mongolia, Morocco, New Zealand, the Philippines, Russia, and the USA. Participants attended in their individual capacity and in addition to philosophy, they came from anthropology, education, political science and international relations, ethics, law, and religious studies, as well as persons from civil society organizations. Female attendees accounted for approximately one-third of the participants.
The working group had extensive interactive discussion on the philosophy, democracy, human rights, and globalization. Presenters were asked to give 15 minute talks, followed by questions and discussion. The presentations will be made available on the RUSHSAP website (http://www.unescobkk.org/rushsap). The meeting of the working group was jointly chaired by Darryl Macer, UNESCO Bangkok and Souria Saad Zooy, UNESCO Rabat, the project coordinators. In the congress session the chairs were Professor Insuk Cha, Seoul National University, and Darryl Macer. The combined papers will be published later as an eBook.

Meeting Report

Dr Macer explained the role of the working group and noted that he wanted to bring philosophers back into relevance on the subject of war and peace. Dr. Macer explained the mission of UNESCO’s Social and Human Sciences (SHS) division, which is to advance knowledge, standards, and international cooperation to facilitate social transformations conducive to universal values of justice, freedom, and human dignity. He explained the background and providing an overview of the Asia-Arab Philosophical Interregional Dialogues project. He provided brief descriptions of the working groups currently in the project, which include:

- Challenges of globalization to philosophy and democracy
- Philosophy facing the challenges of modern technology
- The roles of philosophy in war and peace

One of the goals of philosophical dialogues is to discuss how to balance ethical principles, while recognizing that dialogue is not static with time. Another goal of dialogue is to develop an understanding of ourselves and others.

A series of presentations occurred during the working group meeting on 5 August. The first presentation was “Philosophy Education for Democracy: From Theory to Practice” by Dr Philip Cam, professor of philosophy at the University of New South Wales in Australia. Dr Cam began by reviewing Dewey’s ideals of a democracy, noting that a democratic community is inclusive and depends on reciprocal relations with each group entering into a free partnership with no one party or interest dominating. The goal of his presentation was to outline the kind of education for democracy which could be used in a globalizing community. He noted that democratic dispositions should be ingrained as educational objectives, and that we should still skills and values such as open-mindedness, taking a look at other perspectives, disposition to respond to differences on the basis of reason, involvement in the community, to think for oneself and take responsibility for one’s actions. To foster such skills and values, Dr Cam argued that students need to be engaged in collaborative, inquiry-based learning rather than the traditional modes of learning. In inquiry-based learning, the teacher is a facilitator and not just a conveyer of material to students; right answers are forsaken in favor of open questions; reliance is placed on different possibilities and perspectives rather than facts; and subject matter is contestable, rather than incontrovertible. In collaborative-based learning, students interact with eachother rather than with the teacher, they cooperate versus competing, and student performance is collective rather than individual.

Dr Sivanandam Panneerselvam, professor of philosophy at the University of Madras in India, asked whether there is a distinction between philosophy education and philosophy for education, and asked for clarification on the difference between knowing what, and knowing how. Dr Cam answered that it is not philosophy education, but rather philosophy of education which he was presenting. Both knowing what and knowing how are used in both (traditional
and collaborative, inquiry-based learning) types of classrooms, but the emphasis on knowing how is given greater emphasis in the latter.

The second presentation was “Democracy and Secularism: A Philosophical Perspective” by Dr Sivanandam Panneerselvam, professor of philosophy at the University of Madras in India. Dr Panneerselvam said that dialogue needs to provide human growth with a “human face”, which means that globalization should benefit the normal and average persons, rather than the most wealthy or well-connected. It is therefore important to be inclusive and tolerant of all major perspective (secularism). He drew heavily upon Indian philosophy to provide this rationale for secularism, especially secularism in India, where there is no disparity in religions. He drew from Amartya Sen when describing democracy from a philosophical perspective, noting that Sen argued that there is no conflict between political freedom and economic welfare. Therefore, there is no difference between economic performance and political rights from a philosophical perspective. Thus, he argued, we should accommodate different traditions and cultures as much as possible into direct democracies and policy-making. Dr Panneerselvam concluded that Sen has given a new methodology for democracy by relating it to freedom.

Dr Samuel Lee, secretary-general of the Korean National Commission for UNESCO, asked how economic performance is related to secularism in India. He noted that in countries such as South Korea in the 1970’s and 1980’s, economic performance and politics were separated. In other words, while democracy did not exist to a significant extent, economic growth was impressive. Dr Panneerselvam noted that secularism treated all religions as equal, providing religious freedom, and that it was related to new Indian economic policies. Economic welfare is also not the only measure of a democracy.

The third presentation was “Challenges of Globalization to the Cultural Identities of Nations” by Mr Urtnasan Norov, director of the Mongolian National Commission for UNESCO. He stated that local cultures and cultural identities are being threatened, but there was broad consensus on keeping them alive. “Culture” in this context embraces a wide and broad definition, but one definition is the one used in the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. He argued that different cultures bring variety and that they should be protected for their own sake. Mr Norov then showed that globalization was affecting Mongolian culture. Namely, many Mongolians live nomadic lives; for instance, each family may move between ten and twenty times annually. However, due to globalization (mainly through contact with China, India, and Russia) and environmental degradation, these nomadic civilizations were being threatened. He argued that they should be protected and safeguarded. Mr Norov provided another example using languages; of the 7000 or so that exist, about half are under threat of extinction.

Following Mr Norov’s presentation, there was some debate over how many nomads still existed in Mongolia and North Mongolia. Dr Masakazu Kitano, professor of economics at Hyogo University in Japan, believed there to be many, but Mr Norov replied that there were not very many and many were forced to settle or live in cities. Dr Kitano also mentioned that because there were many nomads, many were forced to settle into villages, and this added to economic growth.

The fourth presentation was “Poverty and globalization” by Dr Ali Benmakhlouf, professor of philosophy at the University of Nice in France. Dr Benmakhlouf inquired into the link between what is ‘due to people’ (in the sense of what is just for them to possess), and
the concept of possession itself. It is the ‘good life’, a life we choose for preserving our dignity, since we have to be able during a long time to enjoy goods as health and peace. The issue is to connect the question of capability, of possession and of being an agent doing freely things contributing to a good life, having rights and autonomy. We, now, understand how poverty can be understood: having a life under submission, not to be able to choice the life we expect to have, being deprived of capacities as Amartya Sen says. The issue is to evaluate social and political institutions on the basis of the distributive conflict. It is a question of ethical and political justification. Poverty is then a question of relationship between individuals, regarding to the wealth of nations. From the point of view of the concepts, the coming back to Aristotelian notions is useful: The pleonexia (the superfluous), the durable possession (aesthesis), the eudaimonia (Happiness) connected to each other give to poverty the main place in human relationship. Regarding to the rights, the issue is the acknowledgment due to the value to everybody, as everybody has its part of truth: to those who think that the notion of human nature is problematic and a question of controversy, we can answer that the main problem is not terminological, human rights have to minimize the sufferings of people, to avoid the sufferings which are socially possible to avoid. More than that, it is not only the question of having the choice to a worthy life, but also to pluralize the ways of life.

Dr Benmakhlouf then provided two examples. The first example involves the high cost of medical drugs sold in some developing countries. The second example involved immigration from developing countries to developed ones. The challenges that globalization poses to philosophy are twofold, involving education and democracy. However, we have to add respect (even if it is implicitly in democracy) because some of its features are often neglected. Respect is not merely to tolerate the opinion of others, it is also to take care of them, to facilitate their access to good life, good health, and affirmation of their dignity.

Dr Benmakhlouf stated that developed nations, which have relatively easy access to medicines and who have a long history of democracy, should not be selling drugs in developing countries at high prices and should not be restricting immigration on the basis of religion, nationality, ethnicity, sex, or other dimensions. One of the challenges of globalization is to recognise cultural differences without harnessing them for hostile purposes. Human rights can bridge these differences and should be nurtured and protected.

In the ensuing discussion, Dr Sirajul Islam, a philosophy and religious studies reader at Visva-Bharati University in India, asked (1) how one could solve the problem of poverty, (2) that there are gaps in utilitarian theory; whether there are many conceptions of justice, including distributive justice, and (3) what is a good life, and how one could measure this. Dr Benmakhlouf replied that he is not a policy-maker and was not there to solve the problem; he was merely providing a philosophical analysis. However, he noted that on this matter of capability this allows us to focus on law and development. There is no reason for companies to reject providing medicines to LDCs, and on immigration, there is no ground for swamping Europe by refugees; many countries are swamped by war. Dr Islam noted that medicines are expensive. Dr Benmakhlouf replied that we can progress and advance by providing free therapy to these countries.

Dr Charles Courtney noted human sympathy needs to be expanded beyond current boundaries. He suggested that there needs to be greater efforts to perhaps introduce poorer people into policy-making (making it a more participative form of democracy) to help solve the poverty crisis. Dr Benmakhlouf noted that as Dr Yamawaki said, perhaps philosophy should be engaged with the public sphere and agreed with Dr Courtney. Dr Cam expressed
his opinion that indeed local empowerment may be needed, and that the core of such
democratic development is education.

The next presentation was “Challenges of Globalization to Philosophy and Democracy:
Indo-Arabian Perspective” by Dr Sirajul Islam, a philosophy and religious studies reader at
the University of Visva-Bharati in India. The aim of the presentation was to meet the
challenges related to globalization and democracy of Indo-Arabian society. Philosophy, as a
quest for knowledge and truth, is not merely the negation of worldly life or a bundle of
abstract ideas. It is deeply entangled with the crisis of human civilizations, social problems,
and moral responsibilities. History attests that the crises are not new, but in the age of
globalizations there are many challenges that are varied from one region to another due to
their requirements and varied necessities. There is no doubt that globalization compressed
distances between nations. Globalization, however, has also been a factor in marginalizing
weaker interests and generating friction between cultures. Hence globalization is useful but
needs to be carefully harnessed. From an Indo-Arabian viewpoint, these challenges are much
more vivid. In these regions diversified cultures and social conflicts are very high, democracy
is not properly utilized and valued, and political leaders may often be corrupt. In the age of
globalization we will have to meet these challenges rational way so that real solidarity, peace
and sustainable development may prevail in the world at global way. Upgrading values is
necessary. Philosophers have greater responsibilities to reflect upon these challenges and
provide the policy guidelines in overcoming and solving the present challenges of those
regions; otherwise, these challenges will lead humanity towards destruction. There is an
urgent need to analyze and understand the root of these present challenges of Indian and
Arabian philosophers in logical manner so that the suzerainty of the big cultures may be
minimized and overcome. Such a democratic attitude in enjoying natural resources may lead
to a greater certainty of peace and prosperity.

The next presentation was “Indo-Arab Relations in the Context of Global Democracy”
by Dr Daniel Nesy, professor and head of philosophy at the University of Kerala in India.
She highlighted the importance of philosophy and philosophical dialogues by referring to the
Indian context. The Indian philosophical tradition consists of several elements. First, the
Upanishads recommend a three-level methodology of listening from the teacher (sravana),
reflecting on what one has heard (manana), and meditating on issues (nidhidhyasana). The
truth is not an intellectual conviction but an intuitive experience which is ‘achieved’. Second,
Jainism states that truth is multi-faceted (anekantavada), and therefore grasping the truth
requires examining it from multiple perspectives. Third, Gandhi recommended understanding
truth through non-violence (ahimsa) and progress (sarvodaya).

These philosophies were applied in various ways to the relationship between the Indian
Hindu and Muslim communities in 1940. Dr Nesy mentioned several such approaches. First,
the President of the Indian National Congress said that the two communities had borrowed
and exchanged ideas and values over centuries and evolved into a common nationality.
Second, the President of the Muslim League said that the two communities had not and could
not amicably coexist. Third, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, said that the
two communities have to work in a “civilized manner”, where they all benefit from the
“security and the rights of citizens in a democratic state”.

Dr Nesy noted that there were times when the two communities clashed and other times
when they coexisted harmoniously. In the present Indian Republic, every Indian is
guaranteed the same rights regardless of his or her faith or belief. We need an inclusive, more
specifically, a socially inclusive culture to develop not in the name of caste, religion, vote
banks or quotas. We have not been able to achieve in more than half a century of independence an all-inclusive social space where every Indian can mingle freely, where every Indian can study together or work together irrespective of his or her background. In this context the concept of introducing diversity in workplaces that has the potential to make our workplaces more socially inclusive, needs to be commented. The belief that a heterogeneous team will deliver much better than a homogeneous one has prompted the team leaders of IT companies in Bangalore to pick people from different castes, communities, cultures, genders and backgrounds. Such an approach encourages the spirit of working together and can dissolve the socio-economic boundaries that we have built and have selfishly fostered for centuries. We need to make our cultural diversity a virtue and strength and not a mere cultural showpiece. We need a new way of looking at things. Dr Nesy concluded that only a philosophical dialogue could contribute to this end.

The discussion began with some comments about India’s democracy, noting that it very representative and being the largest one in the world. It is also a secular state. There were comments noting that democracies in other countries, such as Japan, also suffer from many languages and sub-cultural divisions and challenges. In such systems, at least one commentator observed that polyarchy is perhaps more appropriate. Dr Nesy ended the discussion with some comments of her own, noting that education is for a complete personality, but that humanity studies are also important, but there has been decreasing interest in such studies in recent years. It is undesirable to imagine a future society where there are no writers and dancers.

The next presentation was “Localization, Globalization, and Hybridization” by Dr Rainier Ibana, professor of philosophy at Ateneo de Manila University in Manila in the Philippines. The processes of globalization and localization may be used to serve as antipodal conceptual tools to understand the phenomenon of cultural hybridization emerging among nations that have been exposed to the rapid exchanges of ideas and products a result of new transportation and communication technologies in our contemporary world. The integration of the work force around the globe within the context of the so-called "flat world," wherein labor is transmitted through telecommunication technologies optimizes production time lines as unfinished work is subcontracted and sent to other parts of the world that begin their working hours just as the ones sending them retire from their daily routines. While this process has transformed local cultures to initially adopt these new technologies by learning the language and customs of dominant economies; the former, however, are currently creating new ways of understanding their local identities in comparison and contrast to the latter. The preponderance of newly emerging philosophical insights from local cultures, as evident in the various regional meetings among philosophers today, augurs well for the democratization of reflexive thinking among peoples because these insights dig deeper into the wellsprings of the native sensibilities of ordinary people in their everyday lives while universalizing their ideas to address global issues. The Filipino concept of "katutubo," for example, which was used by the revolutionaries of 1896 against the Spanish regime in order to distinguish their identity from the conquistadors, was initially defined as “everyone who grew up in these islands”. This nationalist definition can be reinterpreted today to include other islands and other species beyond the geographical boundaries of the nation-state so that it can encompass and address global problems such as the effects and counter-effects of our activities on the environment. In the same manner that some exotic flora and fauna are being appreciated today for their medicinal values, local ideas can be found to have transversal solutions to the problems of our contemporary world. A reinterpretation of local ideas within
the context of global issues are therefore necessary, if we are to contribute to the development of a shared future instead of the impending ‘clash of civilizations’? that threaten our shared co-existence today. Our awareness of the hybridity of our everyday lives may eventually contribute to the realization of our shared participation in the co-construction of the future of humanity.

In the ensuing discussion, Dr Ibana noted that everyone is a hybrid as he has defined in the presentation, but when we are asked who we are, we have to look deep into our identities. Dr Cam was worried about hybridization, because it essentializes the indigenous; it is difficult to speak of the indigenous or aboriginals as one word, for instance, because they are more complex than that. Ms Uejima asked whether it is possible to impose a philosophical direction on hybridization.

Dr Abdessamad Tamouro, professor of philosophy at l’AMP Rabat in Morocco, noted that Dr Ibana made parallels between politics and philosophy. Our thinking is influenced by our political thinking and process, and this is influenced by the scholasticism of our nation. Only now are we beginning to think beyond the façade of western thinking. Dr Ibana noted that we are trying to update the teaching of social sciences.

The next presentation by “Philosophy: Challenge to Globalization and to Democracy” by Dr Abdessamad Tamouro, Professor of Philosophy at l’AMP Rabat in Morocco. Dr Tamouro’s presentation divided democracy into four systems: democracy as it exists now, countries transitioning to a democracy, former democracies (such as Chile or Rwanda, which have lost democracies), and other systems. He noted that democracy is not eternal, and likely not the solution to all of our problems. Democracy is not a story that is finished, but rather one which is ongoing. He then posed the question, how can globalization be a challenge to democracy?

Ms Marie-Pierre Grosjean asked whether such philosophical relativism is beneficial to society or desirable philosophically. Dr Tamouro replied that such relativism is beneficial. Dr Cam pointed out that whether relativism is beneficial or necessary or desirable depends on the context; if you have had a historical context of extremism in that country’s past, you may very well need relativism. However, relativism can also become a problem. Thus, it is a contextually sensitive issue.

The next presentation was “Are we sustainable?” by Dr Masakazu Kitano of Hyogo Prefecture University in Japan. The main theme of his presentation was whether Japan is sustainable as a society in the long-term. He noted such problems as the low economic growth rate after the bubble economy burst in the late 80’s, the declining birth rate, a male dominated society (such that females do no longer desire to work in the countryside and leave for larger cities), a rapidly aging society, increased lifestyle-related diseases (including cardiovascular and diabetes), declining self-food sufficiency rate, and extremely high debt ratios. He did note, however, that there were some bright spots for Japan, namely, its good health (measured, for instance, by its average lifespan), as well as potential for economic growth in precision manufacturing and several other high technology industries. He provided some suggestions on how Japan could become more sustainable than it currently is, including increased agricultural work and community-related work. He also suggested that the industry of each village should be managed more locally, rather than through bureaucratic and larger government channels.
In the discussion that followed, Dr Islam asked why the Japanese economy was growing so slowly, and on average, at zero, despite its high level of technology. Dr Kitano replied that the Japanese economy is built and focused on growing, but there was a lack of sustainability, the very theme his presentation was focused on. He also pointed out that high technology is not necessary correlated with high growth.

In the **General Discussion**, Ms Souria Saad-Zoy and Darryl Macer returned to the theme of defining the objective of the dialogues. Some of the suggestions made by the working group included: (1) creating a research network for philosophers, which may include policy-makers and other researchers; (2) involving a younger population in the dialogues; (3) the possibility of creating a weblog for the general discussions outside of working group meetings; (4) writing a report for policy-makers, perhaps drafting one by the end of September 2008; (5) defining the procedure of the dialogues in a more concrete form; and (6) creating panels on education, which could incorporate material the WCP produced on philosophy and education. Several members of the group volunteered to start working on these components so that drafts of these could be considered in the next meeting, to be held in Bangkok in 2009.

The discussion was resumed in the following day, in the working group on Globalization and Democracy (separate report). Dr. Macer thanked the assistance of the Department of Philosophy of Seoul National University in providing the room, and of the Korean National Commission for UNESCO for providing logistical assistance and drinks.

During the FISPH World Congress on Philosophy there was a **UNESCO Workshop: Asian and Arab Dialogues on the Philosophical Basics of Human Rights** held on 31 July, 2008. Coinciding with the 60th anniversary of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this special World Congress of Philosophy (WCP) session was held to promote Asia-Arab philosophical dialogue on the topic of the Declaration. Although the Universal Declaration states that everyone “shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction”, the focus of this WCP session was to discuss the philosophical fundamentals of human rights. This session was linked to the ongoing Asia-Arab Interregional Philosophical Dialogues project, as well as the SHS sector’s activities on promoting human rights and peace. After welcome addresses from Dr Darryl Macer, regional advisor for social and human sciences at UNESCO Bangkok, and Dr Insuk Cha, UNESCO Chair of philosophy at Seoul National University in Korea, six presentations of 15 minutes were made, and a plenary discussion followed.

The first **Presentation** was “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: 60 Years of an Evolving Discourse” by Ms Souria Saad-Zoy, Program Specialist at UNESCO Rabat in Morocco. She began by reviewing the history of the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, noting that one respected philosopher and commentator divided the views regarding the Declaration into two, one which believed in natural rights, and the other in cultural relativism. The main issue regarding such a Declaration was to incorporate different, and often antagonistic, viewpoints into one universal declaration. She also provided other comments submitted to the committee responsible for overseeing the creation and adoption of the Declaration. The main theme unifying these comments was the key debate of relativism versus absolutism.
Ms Saad-Zoy then turned attention to the discussions over the universality of the Universal Declaration after its adoption. Some of the criticisms immediately leveled at the Declaration included: the excess of individualism, the absence of community, the lack of duties and spirit of responsibility and the insubstantial enthusiasm expressed for economical and social rights, as well as how the Declaration would function in a culturally diverse world. She noted that there were also instances where some interests were not represented in subsequent debates and discussions surrounding the Declaration. For instance, in November 1965, UNESCO organized a roundtable in Oxford on different religious and philosophical traditions in human rights and the socio-economic conditions that facilitate their implementation, but only a fraction of the planet was represented, and some geographies, such as Africa, were not represented at all.

Ms Saad-Zoy also noted that following the adoption of the Declaration, international covenants on political, civil, economic, social, cultural rights were adopted, as were instruments on the rights of minorities, women, genocide, children, and cultural diversity. Finally she noted that there have been calls to update the Declaration to be more culturally inclusive; while some argue that such instruments exist elsewhere, Ms Saad-Zoy noted that one philosopher said that updating the Declaration would make humanity indicate its solidarity and create a common text which restricts itself to generalities and not does not enter into the details of all human rights.

The second presentation was “The Concept of Human Rights in the Context of the UN Declaration of Human Rights” by Dr Sivanandam Panneerselvam, professor of philosophy at the University of Kerala in India. Dr Panneerselvam’s presentation was an overview of some of the aspects of human rights, both fundamental and practical. He provided some of the accepted positions of international human rights scholars, including the fact that human rights are not universal and that they are not rights if society does not effectively recognize them. They are also a construct of law, and therefore a product of democracy. Human rights are not just natural rights, they need to be created, and the right to life and liberty are some of these rights. They can be used to protect individuals against arbitrary and abusive state authority, yet the role of the state is important in cultivating such human rights because human rights cannot exist without the rule of law. They are also essential for the development of human personalities. Finally, human rights are fundamental and natural for all human beings. Some of the fundamental human rights declarations in the past have included the US Constitution, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man, and the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The development of human rights and development reinforce eachother, revealing an interrelationship between rights and duties. Dr Panneerselvam noted that there were three basic freedoms: economic, social, and political. There are two issues left: we should increase awareness of human rights violations throughout the world, and the tendency of human rights discourse to become increasingly specialized.

The third presentation was “The Method of Description in Comparative Philosophy: Justice and Recognition” by Dr Ali Bennakhlouf, professor of philosophy at the University of Nice in France. He explained that the method of description in comparative philosophy allows us to compare, without ‘essentializing’. Dr Bennakhlouf briefly described and compared two situations of human rights, the first in the southern area of Africa (South Africa) and the second in the northern area of Africa (Morocco). In both of these cases, commissions to restore justice were created: in Morocco, a Commission of Equity and Reconciliation (2003) and in South Africa, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1993). Dr Bennakhlouf noted that the challenge here is to cure the divisions of the past by the
common recognition of human dignity. The question, he said, was as Paul Ricoeur puts it: “how to see and name the past and how to forgive in order to cure memory, to give a future to memory?”. Furthermore, how could these societies reconcile generations and renew lost, damaged, or broken social links? How could they permit the children of victims to live in harmony with others? Dr Benmakhlouf stated that we have to tell reality as it is because nothing is more therapeutic than reality itself. We can dream of a justice which will just give the evidence for stubborn facts. Dr Benmakhlouf noted that the challenge is, as Desmond Tutu says, human dignity. For instance, the TRC had to give an existence to the community of South Africa. For the commission, the crime against humanity is the crime against national unity and democracy. The commission is not the end of the violence, but the demonstration that the threat of a non-ending violence can inspire the mutual desire of dialogue between enemies. Desmond Tutu said: “reparation is the term used in the law. We find important that the law does not use the term of compensation. To speak of compensation seems signifying that we can quantify the sufferings, repay someone of the lost of his relatives. But how can we give a prize to that?” Dr Benmakhlouf concluded by noting that in Plato’s dialogues of Menexene, Plato imagines the dead addressing a message to the living; they do not ask them to mourn but to contemplate the their deaths.

The fourth presentation was “The Index of Infinity in the Discourse of Human Rights” by Dr Rainier Ibana, professor of philosophy at Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines. Dr Ibana’s thesis was that the discourse of human rights today point to an implicit index of infinity inherent in the subject matter. Noting that the Universal Declaration was resolved to restore the rights forgotten during the second World War, this discourse revealed an index of infinity of new rights. The Universal Declaration was constructed as a code of conduct, so that others can catch up with more developed nations and because we cannot impose universal rights. The precautionary principle leads to a “culture of care” and of peace, and for future generations. We can shape the future for ourselves from choices we have. Humans have to be able to therefore address collective concerns. Alienation and dissent can happen when people’s concerns are marginalized. It is impossible to include everyone in the decision-making process. We are always challenged by other options. There is a never-ending process of deliberation, but not of despair, which reveals many different perspectives. This concept of infinity shows that dialogues expand our shared values.

The fifth presentation was “Reflections about Moral Realism” by Dr Abdessamad Tamouro, professor of philosophy at l’AMP Rabat in Morocco. The traditional conception of development heavily emphasizes economic and social aspects, but in the Islamic world, there is more emphasis on morals, religion, culture, and identities. He outlined the principles for a new moral realism, through reflections on the situation concerning human rights and morals in the Arab world. He has two major sources. First, he drew from ancient Greek philosophy, and specifically Aristotle, whose moral realism associated politics with morals in one philosophical “system”. Aristotle believed in a practical form of philosophy, which was influenced by his practical activities – directing an institution and tutoring Alexander. The second source involved the Arab philosophical tradition, where there are many philosophies. For instance, one Arab philosopher was the director of hospital and also wrote a book on morals, and he said that we can manage ourselves, manage our family, and management of our feelings, and management of city, but also integrate religion. Dr Tamouro argued that we must have Islamic basis in politics and morals. In the 17th century, the Islamic world recognized politics and morals in development. Dr Tamouro argued that we need another reform in the midst of problems in the Arab world, namely intra-regional conflicts, risks of
fundamentalism, issues of development and democracy and capitalism. Dr Tamouro’s proposal is to associate cultures, morals, religions, etc. into one new moral realism. These are important for the lives of muslims, so we should isolate the bases for development and use what we learn to regulate relations between Arab countries. Finally, he proposed twenty principles to associate morals and religions and philosophies and civil society to regulate and solve the problems of development.

The sixth and last presentation was “Reflections on Philosophy and Human Rights” by Dr Daniel Nesy, professor and head of philosophy at the University of Kerala in India. She began by asking what the result of the UN Declaration on Human Rights has been. By 2015, the Millenium Development Goals need to be realized, and it is essential to take a human rights approach to achieve its goals. The Indian tradition suggests that realization of human rights can be possible from a philosophical perspective and not a factual perspective. Dr Nesy reflected on philosophy and human rights from sociological, economic, and philosophical perspectives. The social philosophy stressed individual and social happiness, and it debated the basis of a satisfactory life. It attempts to narrow the gap between the factual and normative: how has society been functioning, and how should it function? The sociological aspect is that questions regarding destiny in life, especially in times of crises. Problems in social philosophy are not defined very well. There are several problems. The first problem is multiculturalism and globalization. It attempts to construct harmonious relationships, but there are problems of language differences which are often neglected. This is a problem of the social philosopher. The second problem is inequality and justice. It is almost impossible to formulate the question of equality and justice on a factual basis. The third problem is development, the economic aspect of human rights. There are increasingly new dimensions of development, which are both quantitative as well as qualitative. Poverty now has many connotations. Freedom from poverty is a human right, and poverty can’t be abolished without human rights. Throughout these problems, active participation is required for development, and the human rights approach studies poverty reduction strategies, e.g. right to work, right to education, right to adequate housing, right to physical protection, right to access to justice. Dr Nesy argued that the denial of access to such things is a denial of human rights. She concluded by arguing that ethics and morality and science and technology cannot help us solve these problems, and that there needs to be more.

In the ensuing General Discussion, Dr Samuel Lee asked several fundamental questions regarding human rights. First, what is the moral argument for the universality of human rights? Second, how can we guarantee the universality of human rights? Third, how can we maintain such universality? Dr Benmakhlof replied that universality is to be avoided when it is merely hegemonic. The essential issue is how we can achieve universality which is composite and harmonized and not merely hegemonic. Dr Panneerselvam noted that in the Indian philosophical tradition, interrelationships between the universe and individuals are significant and respect for the other stressed. We should apply traditions and see how they apply but not make judgments about their results. We take the elements that are necessary, and see how far it is true. In the Indian tradition, there are “core” and “peripheral” elements. Core elements always remain the same. Whatever is irrelevant, we reject.

Ms Saad-Zoy noted that the universality of human rights is a major challenge admitted by all regions of the world. All debates we had before we have now. Many places lack resources for implementation, so universal rights are hard to achieve. Thus, it is hard to say they are truly universal. Dr Ibana said that one should ask what the meaning of ‘human’ is before discussing ‘rights’. By relating to other humans, individuals become ‘humans’ (at least
in the Philippines), so how one relates defines ‘humans’ and therefore affects ‘rights’. Dr Tamouro noted that we need human rights, and we need universality in human rights. In philosophy, the universality exists for the purpose of dialogue. We need to have differences to have debate universality.

Ms. Marietta Stepanyants noted that most of challenges to universality originate in the Asia and Arab worlds. Is this an argument against the universality of human rights? The participant also observed that while all presenters mentioned political, economic, and social methods of protecting rights, only Dr Nesy mentioned the important philosophical aspect. It is important to protect human rights from traditions which challenge them. There is a need to go back to traditions to find support for universality. Otherwise, traditions become obstacles for safeguarding human rights. Dr Nesy replied that society has experimented with economic and scientific (and other) disciplines to develop human rights, but they have not fulfilled their promises. Rather, they have only contributed to human rights development. A critical question is how society can explore its traditions and extract the fundamentals which human beings live by. These may involve the spiritual, religious, cultural, and other realms.

Mr Keisuke Tachiyama asked about the best solution for human rights for minorities, given that they are the least equipped? Dr Panneerselvam replied that Tamil Nadu tribes were neglected for education. The government has now included them. It is the duty of the government to listen to them. Only the government can do this.

Dr Sirajul Islam, a philosophy reader at Visva-Bharati University in India, noted that the role of philosophers in the face of atrocities is important, and Dr Ibana noted that all philosophers can offer are words. Dr Macer stated that discourse and dialogue are the only way forward for our future, and thanked all participants for their reflections.