



ANNUAL
REPORT 2020



CENTER FOR ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH HUMAN RIGHTS



Message From Our Executive Director.



“Only by building collective civil society counter-power do we stand any chance of realizing the hopes shared by millions of people across the globe that our post-pandemic world will be fairer, greener and more just.”

2020 was for most of us a year filled with extraordinary loss. Some two million people across the globe lost their lives to COVID-19, while some 200 million more were pushed into poverty as a result of the ensuing economic crisis. An invisible virus made all too visible the factors that fuel inequality in our societies. It made glaringly evident how weakened public services, precarious labour conditions, depleted austerity budgets, unequal care burdens, and entrenched gender and race discrimination directly determine who bears the brunt of ill-health and deprivation.

It also made starkly clear how wealth and resources are increasingly hoarded by those with the power and influence to skew the global economy in their favor. For a select few, 2020 was a year of spectacular profits. The combined wealth of the world’s ten richest men rose by more than \$500bn over the year, enough to pay for vaccines for all, according to Oxfam. These glaring inequalities have prompted more and more people to question the morality of an economic model which values the freedom of the market over the rights of human beings.

Within the human rights movement, CESR has been at the vanguard of efforts to bring about a paradigm shift in our understanding of the economy and who it should serve. Our new strategy, drawn up as the pandemic was unfolding, aims to envision a rights-based economy and catalyze action towards it. In this year of convergent global crises, we reaffirmed our resolve to harness the transformative power of human rights to advance collective struggles

for economic and environmental justice. Building on the collaborative, cross-disciplinary approach that is our hallmark, we’ve forged alliances across movements in support of a just and rights-based economic recovery from COVID-19.

This report highlights how we’ve done so and the success we’ve had so far. Our impact can be felt in shifting narratives and evolving norms about the economy and human rights, and in strengthened alliances and sharper tools for holding economic decision-makers accountable. We are under no illusion that any one organization or movement can single-handedly bring about systemic change on the scale required. That’s why collaboration across movements is at the core of our strategy. Only by building collective civil society counter-power do we stand any chance of realizing the hopes shared by millions of people across the globe that our post-pandemic world will be fairer, greener and more just.

If you are inspired by what you read here, there are many ways in which you can support our work - whether by subscribing, donating, or sharing ideas for collaboration and feedback on what we can do better. If you think a rights-based economy is worth a shot, we’d love to hear from you!

Ignacio



Building a Roadmap Towards a Rights-Based Economy.

“Everything is in flux right now and this is creating a lot of fear and insecurity.” This observation came from one of the many allies, partners, and supporters we interviewed at the start of 2020, as part of consultations to inform CESR’s new three-year strategy. It was made as the scope and scale of the COVID-19 pandemic and its global economic fallout was only beginning to emerge. But it turned out to be incredibly poignant.

The pandemic was a major new factor shaping our strategy. But it also brought the pre-existing concerns animating our work into even starker relief. At the beginning of 2020, we undertook a series of ‘listening and learning’ activities, involving a mix of internal reflection, external consultation, and engagement with our board and strategy reference group. Through these, we sketched out complex, interconnected, and sometimes paradoxical trends—both in the external environment and in the fields in which we work. These have been intensified, not shifted, by COVID-19.

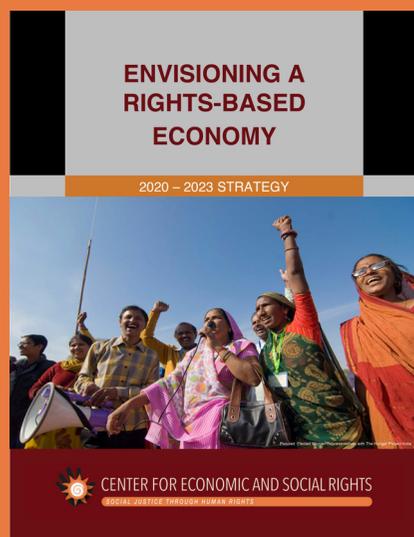
For example, debates about the failures of neoliberal policies such as fiscal austerity have become increasingly mainstream. Decades of deregulation, privatization, and financialization have concentrated economic and political power in the hands of a shrinking number of powerful individuals and corporations. The result? Without well-functioning public services and a proper social safety net, billions of people around the world are denied access to life’s essentials—a decent livelihood, sufficient food, proper sanitation, clean water, housing, and health care—which governments have a duty to ensure

to all people under international human rights law. COVID-19 has laid bare precisely how these failures play out in the realms of health and social protection.

Yet COVID-19 has also underscored another equally serious trend: the extent to which economic policymaking is captured by private sector interests, whose power is both pervasive and hidden.

As trust in democratic practices has declined, debates about inequality have become increasingly polarizing. A sobering message from our consultations is that, for the most part, the mainstream human rights community has remained marginal in efforts to respond to socioeconomic inequities. Despite obvious opportunities to connect with the growing economic justice and climate justice fields, the human rights field is “tied to and revolves around a relatively stable normative framework” and at times “the desire to stay true to it has meant we’ve been slow to describe inequities people experience in human rights terms that don’t feel abstract or technocratic.”

That said, our ongoing conversations throughout the year confirmed that a groundswell of activists within and beyond the human rights community—particularly in the Global South—see human rights as an important framework for advancing economic and social justice. There was a sense that the moment we’re in is “pushing activists to be really creative in terms of where to put their energies” and that strategies are evolving as groups become “increasingly





“In a moment ripe for mobilization towards systemic change, we launched our 2020-2023 strategy in June. Its ambitious goal is to envision a rights-based economy (RBE) and catalyze action towards it.”

systemic in what they’re trying to take on.” One opportunity flagged for more systemic thinking, critical in the COVID-19 context, is how human rights delineates the role of an effective state—in both regulating the private sector and delivering on the public interest. This, in turn, helps create a “galvanizing vision” of what should replace neoliberalism, as well as a “roadmap of how to get there.”

In a moment ripe for mobilization towards systemic change, we launched our [2020-2023 strategy](#) in June. Its ambitious goal is to envision a rights-based economy (RBE) and catalyze action towards it—taking into account the confluence of

political, economic, climate, and health crises we now face. It also sets out the steps we are taking to tackle the common root of these crises: the unjust distribution of wealth and power—within and between countries—that fuels inequality and deprives billions of people around the world of their rights.

We’re excited about the potential long-term impact of this strategy and the important work it has already spurred. The gravity of the context in which it was developed has strengthened our resolve to rise to the urgent challenge of putting rights at the center of our economies.





Envisioning a Rights-Based Economy Post COVID.

2020 not only saw us launch our strategy, but also advance it through three programs of work aligned with the strategy's specific objectives:

- To articulate a compelling vision for a rights-based economy and foster alignment with allied agendas for economic transformation and a just transition;
- To strengthen coalitions for human rights and fiscal justice, so as to influence how fiscal policymakers act on their duties to resource a just recovery from COVID-19;
- To expand the toolkit of methods shared among the human rights, economic justice and environmental justice communities, so as to build collective counter-power across movements

Here's an overview of how our work during the year pushed forward the objectives we've set ourselves to advance a rights-based economy, achieving great progress in turbulent times.

Our new strategy asks a simple, but radical question: what would our world look like if we had an economy based on human rights? We are working with partners across movements to co-design a blueprint for a Rights-Based Economy (RBE). Key pillars include: human and ecological well-being, including of future generations; effective provisioning of public goods; robust worker protections; meaningful democratic control over public finance; redistributive policies to redress entrenched inequalities; and reforms in global economic governance.

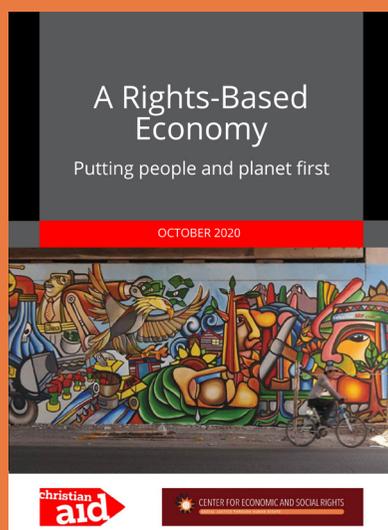
Highlights from the year include:

ARTICULATING THE VISION OF AN RBE: REPORT BY CESR AND CHRISTIAN AID

Our joint report with Christian Aid, [Envisioning a Rights-Based Economy: Putting people and planet first](#), is a stepping stone to build a positive, concrete vision on how to shape economic policies that have been traditionally decided in restricted decision-making spaces, where economic orthodoxies dominate.

The report explores how the standards of human rights law give force, flesh and specificity to fundamental values such as dignity, equity, fairness, solidarity, accountability, and justice, which are commonly invoked in debates about the economy (particularly in the wake of the pandemic). It looks at what it would mean to embed these values in our economies, painting a picture of how a rights-based approach would transform critical areas of people's lives, like social protection systems, labor and wage policies, public services, and more.

Written to be accessible for audiences from and beyond the human rights community, the report and its accompanying materials were viewed over 10,000 times, and received praise from policymakers, activists, and practitioners. To Philip Alston, former UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty, the report "is a major contribution. It deals with complex issues in an accurate, insightful, and accessible way". You can read the full version [here](#).





ADVOCATING FOR A RIGHTS-BASED ECONOMY: SPOTLIGHT REPORT 2020

Shifting Policies for Systemic Change: lessons from the global COVID-19 crisis was the focus of the 2021 Spotlight Report, the most comprehensive civil society assessment of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, co-published annually by eight international NGOs, networks and trade unions, including the Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR). CESR’s Kate Donald and Ignacio Saiz authored the section on redistributing power and resources, in which they argue for the vital importance of imagining how our economies could be reshaped if human rights and human dignity were put at their center, and to work together to make that vision a reality in the wake of the pandemic.

Available [here](#).

for a transformation of the economy that puts people and planet at the center. These guidelines are influencing advocacy on specific policy proposals from wealth taxes to basic income schemes, and shaping broader narratives around the values that should guide economic responses to COVID-19.

How in practice are activists and civil society organizations defending socioeconomic rights during a global crisis? Because times like this are ripe for cross-learning, we launched our [Confronting COVID blog series](#), in which we are providing a space for our partners and allies in different national contexts – from Scotland, to Uganda, to Brazil – to share how they are responding to the economic fallout of the pandemic, and what are the challenges and opportunities they see when trying to invoke human rights to transform our economic system for good.

ALIGNING VISIONS FOR A JUST AND RIGHTS-BASED RECOVERY: RECOVERING RIGHTS BRIEFS AND CONFRONTING COVID SERIES

[Our Recovering Rights brief series](#), launched in May 2020, translates human rights principles into concrete policy recommendations to transform the economic system in the wake of COVID. The briefs, co-authored with allied organizations ([Tax Justice Network](#), [Latindadd](#), [Business and Human Rights Resource Centre](#), [Treatment Action Group](#), [Migrant Forum in Asia](#), and more), include issues like governments’ obligation to invest “maximum available resources” on human rights, progressive tax measures, debt financing, gender equality, and more, laying the ground





Advancing Fiscal Justice in the Wake of the Pandemic.

—

The discourse around fiscal policies shifted profoundly during 2020. Proposals for fairer taxation, like the ones that CESR and allies have been promoting for years, have finally gained momentum to enter mainstream debates as we had never seen before. Disparate movements are increasingly converging around the call for wealthy individuals and corporations to stop gaming the tax system and pay their fair share, pushing for progressive tax and budget policies that are a cornerstone of the rights-based economy. To build greater momentum around this agenda, we are consolidating and expanding the coalitions for human rights and fiscal justice that we have helped build over many years, and strengthening alliances with labor and women's rights movements on these issues.

Here are some of the year's highlights:

STRENGTHENING COALITIONS: THE INITIATIVE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLES IN FISCAL POLICY

Through the [Initiative for Human Rights Principles in Fiscal Policy](#) (which we co-steer along with six other organizations in Latin America), we built broader convergence of human rights and fiscal justice organizations aimed at drafting a groundbreaking set of principles and guidelines to ensure tax and budget policies realize rights and reduce inequalities, particularly in fiscal responses to the pandemic. A series of dialogues with over 30 civil society organizations in and beyond the region, as well as renowned academics, representatives of the Inter-American Human Rights system, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the



Photo by Eud Neuhaus





“We embarked on a range of collaborative initiatives with human rights and economic justice organizations (...) who were keen to work with us to track fiscal responses to the crisis from a rights perspective.”



IMF Photo/Cory Hancock

Caribbean and other international organizations, discussed how the new Principles can help to build a narrative in which fiscal policy is understood as a social justice and human rights issue, and to provide specific steps that can guide the design and implementation of fiscal policies using this perspective.

SHAPING FISCAL RESPONSES TO COVID-19

One success of the movements fighting for greater economic justice is how proposals for progressive fiscal and social protection policies, such as expansive stimulus packages and universal basic income schemes, gained traction during 2020. While they were thought impossibly radical pre-pandemic, they have advanced center stage during the crisis. CESR and allies have played a key role in introducing the human rights rationale for these. Early in the year, Ignacio Saiz called for a rights-based global economic stimulus at Open Global Rights, and a proposal for a COVID-19 emergency basic income in Colombia, co-authored by CESR’s Sergio Chaparro, gained traction among academics, local government representatives, and politicians. We embarked on a range of collaborative initiatives with human rights and economic justice organizations, including Amnesty International, Latindadd and the Financial Transparency Coalition, who were keen to work with us to track fiscal responses to the crisis from a rights perspective.

REIMAGINING GLOBAL ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE

Even though COVID-19 shone a light on the brutal inequalities of the global economic system, key

international economic governance institutions such as the International Monetary Fund continued to adhere to failed dogmas on issues such as debt and fiscal austerity which deny the resources people need to guarantee their rights in the wake of the pandemic. However, and thanks to the continued work of activists and civil society organizations, 2020 saw the injustice of austerity measures and unsustainable debt policies questioned like never before. CESR raised the alarm about the IMF’s continued backing of austerity amidst pandemic, organized conversations around this issue, and called on States to undertake broad fiscal redistribution, and on multilateral institutions to free up fiscal space, in order to avoid dire human rights consequences. We also denounced in the media how austerity measures were resulting in increased deaths in places like Peru and Ecuador, and joined judicial action against the devastating Brazilian constitutional spending freeze.

We also took our arguments to key sustainable development forums where civil society groups can shine a spotlight on these global governance asymmetries. CESR’s Kate Donald acted as an external expert for the UN’s thematic workstream on “Responding to the economic shock, relaunching growth, sharing economic benefits and addressing developing countries financing challenges” in preparation for the 2020 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. The final background paper explores how economic policy should be transformed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals) and a just recovery from COVID-19.



Fostering Cross-Movement and Rights-Based Approaches to Economic and Environmental Justice.

To foster cross-movement collaboration across different strands and silos of civil society advocacy, we are building up literacy in linking human rights to economic justice. Whether with indigenous and Afro-descendant communities in the Andean region or groups affected by resource extraction in Southern Africa, we are deploying innovative methods to highlight the human impacts of specific economic policies in different settings. These methods - which range from new metrics of social progress to practical tools for assessing austerity and monitoring responses to COVID-19 - help reveal the systemic flaws fueling inequality and deprivation worldwide and how human rights can be deployed to tackle them.

Some of the highlights of this work include:

BUILDING A FIELD OF ECONOMICS AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN SOUTH AFRICA:

One of the biggest challenges in building a rights-based economy is creating greater collaboration and dialogue between the economics and human rights fields. During 2020, we worked with the Institute for Economic Justice and SECTION27 to build a community of practice working at this intersection, conducting research, interviews, and convenings. The results of this work are available in the report [‘Building a Field of Economics and Human Rights: Lessons from South Africa’](#), which details the lessons learned in this joint effort.

Photo by Neil Thomas





Photo by Mohd Aram

EGYPT SOCIAL PROGRESS INDICATORS

In 2020, CESR continued to work with four Egyptian organizations, one regional, and one international partner in updating Egypt's Social Progress Indicators (ESPI). Based on a multi-year co-creation process and inspired by the [OPERA](#) framework, the ESPI indicators measure progress on health, education and six other economic and social rights topics in Egypt. CESR worked with partners to provide a group of 23 national researchers with methodological guidance to strengthen the collective analysis of [gender](#) and [COVID](#)-induced inequalities on the topics being measured. CESR also coordinated the [communications and media](#) work for the initiative over 2020, and co-design a series of workshops with partners to ensure the successful transition of the project coordination and secretariat work from CESR to one of the Zregional partners, ensuring sustainable leadership of the ESPI project.

REVEALING HOW GOVERNMENT AND COMPANIES FAIL TO PROTECT THE RIGHT TO HEALTH IN BOTSWANA:

CESR worked with national organizations in different countries to expose how specific economic policies harm the rights of communities. Such partnerships were often in response to requests by activists for support in tackling the methodological challenges involved. In the case of Botswana, we partnered with the country's Labour Migrants Association (BoLAMA) and Northwestern Pritzker School of Law Center for International Human Rights to investigate the right to health of miners and ex-miners in Botswana.

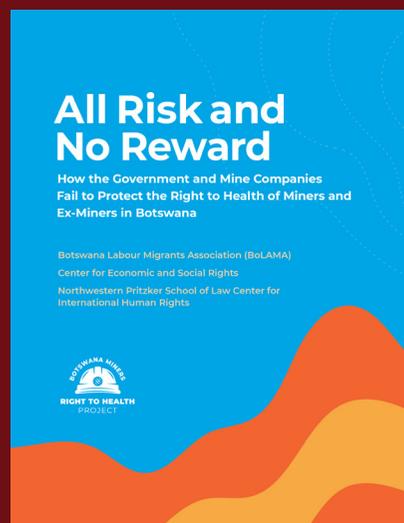
The resulting report, "[All Risk and No Reward For Botswana's Miners](#)", examines the critical health issues miners and ex-miners face, making extensive use of our OPERA framework for assessing socioeconomic policies through the lens of human rights.

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON SOCIOECONOMIC RIGHTS IN INDIA:

Our work with Nazdeek, a legal empowerment organization in India, and the International Human Rights Clinic at Harvard Law School, examined the impact of climate change on the right to water and inequality in Delhi. We supported the Human Rights Clinic in researching key questions around water quality, availability and accessibility; whether and how India's climate adaptation policies address water; and how climate change will affect the right to water for marginalized communities in the future

BUILDING DATA JUSTICE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Bridging fields of research requires standardizing just and effective ways to collect data. As part of the Monitoring Working Group of the International Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Network (ESCR-Net), we worked on developing a draft set of principles on data in economic, social, and cultural rights. The aim: to re-center conversations about data around affected communities and their lived experiences. Our work focused on researching and expanding on the human rights obligations associated with key principles such as data disaggregation, privacy, security, and data quality.



Safeguarding and Strengthening Our Organization During COVID-19.



An organizational priority under our strategy is to boost our capacities and diversify our capabilities, in order to grow as a global organization with deep connections to national groups.

This goal took on new significance in 2020, as we navigated the ever shifting COVID-19 context and adapted the ways we work in response to it. The year was undoubtedly filled with many challenges. For CESR, the rapid shift to remote work, while team members dealt with lockdowns, illness and loss, created stressors we never could have predicted. Despite this, we found solace in and drew inspiration from our work and our networks. The COVID-19 context deepened our commitment to collaboration and to working in solidarity with our partners around the globe, all of whom were experiencing the pandemic in their own ways. It also galvanized our efforts to build collective counter-power across movements, and to advance a propositional vision for a more just economy in the wake of the pandemic. In

the end, we have been able to adapt and grow, maintaining our highly-valued team cohesion and strengthening our internal systems and processes to continue to work effectively towards our goals.

Some of the highlights of this work include:

STRENGTHENING OUR LEADERSHIP AND STAFF TEAMS:

We boosted our organizational capacity, reconfiguring the leadership team to include our Executive Director Ignacio Saiz, Allison Corkery (Director of Strategy and Learning) and Kate Donald (Director of Program), who provide strategic guidance and support across our programmatic and organizational projects. The CESR Board's oversight role was further enhanced through a newly-appointed Executive Committee, chaired by Imad Sabi. Our development efforts were strengthened by the creation of the Development Manager



“We are deploying innovative methods to highlight the human impacts of specific economic policies in different settings.”

position (held by Rebecca Berger), and securing the ongoing support of experienced development consultant Anne Travers for the creation of a strong development plan to reinforce our financial sustainability. We also strengthened our in-house financial management with Paul Soobryan joining the team as Finance and Administration Manager.

REFLECTING OUR VALUES AND STRENGTHENING OUR LEARNING CULTURE:

We’ve developed distinct approaches for reflecting CESR’s values in how we establish and maintain our partnerships, allowing us to more intentionally reflect our organizational values, such as boldness, collaboration, creativity, and mutual learning, in our programming.

We’ve also set up more robust systems for tracking our progress and deepening our understanding of the impact of our work. This includes monitoring, learning, and evaluation (MLE) frameworks, data collection tools and learning questions that we collectively reflect on throughout the year, at the strategy and project levels.

STRATEGIC PLANNING DURING UNCERTAIN TIMES:

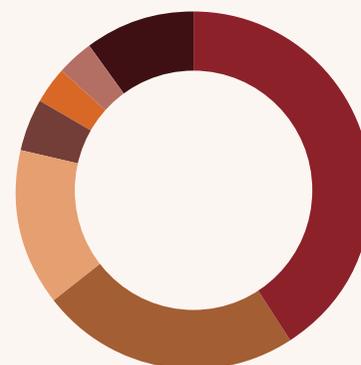
At the onset of COVID, CESR was in the process of finalizing our new strategy and developing the action plan to make it a reality. We found a set of ingredients crucial to completing this process successfully: being experimental with the traditional phases of planning; widening our aperture by seeking out new perspectives beyond usual stakeholders; tapping collective brainpower through active participation of team and board members at every stage of the process; being audacious and including a number of marked shifts from “classical” approaches to human rights advocacy in our strategy; tackling systems and not symptoms, though work on the submerged aspects of the “Advocacy Iceberg”; and flexing our collaboration muscle to put collective skill-building at the center of our strategy.



2020 Financial Snapshot

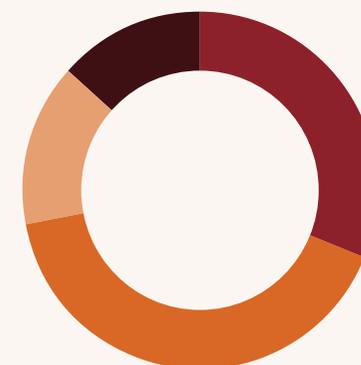
CESR was able to navigate the uncertainties of this turbulent year thanks to the steadfast support of several philanthropic foundations and governmental agencies, as well as funded partnerships with a number of international development NGOs. CESR is particularly grateful to new and existing funders who recognized the relevance of CESR's new strategy to the pandemic context, and provided timely support to enable us to get it off the ground. A summary breakdown of our income and expenditure in 2020 is visualized below.

INCOME
\$1,191,605



- Anonymous | 41,0%
- Open Society Foundations | 23,5%
- Finnish MFA via Minority Rights Group | 14,3%
- Fundación Avina | 4,6%
- Christian Aid | 3,4%
- Oxfam Novib | 3,2%
- Other | 10,0%

EXPENSES
\$1,191,605



- Operations | 31,3%
- Programs | 40,9%
- Communications | 14,5%
- Development | 13,3%



2020 Team

Leadership

Ignacio Saiz
Allison Corkery
Kate Donald

Program Officers

Sergio Chaparro
Mihir Mankad
Mahinour ElBadrawi

Communications

Terry Roethlein

Development

Rebecca Berger

Finance & Administration

Paul Soobryan

Interns

Laura Adriaensens
Terri Lim
Nina Haug
Ashley Ravins

Board

Imad Sabi | Chair
Senior Program Officer | Education Support Program | Open Society Foundations (OSF)

Karin Lissakers | Vice-Chair
Former President | Revenue Watch Institute

John T Green | Treasurer and Secretary |
Former Professor of Professional Practice/
Nonprofit Management | The New School

Lilian Gonçalves-Ho-Kang-You
Former State Councillor for the Council of
State | Netherlands

Roshmi Goswami
Feminist | Human Rights Activist and
Researcher

Miloon Kothari Independent Expert on
Human Rights and Social Policy Senior
Advisor, MIT Displacement Research Action
Network (DRAN)

Joe Oloka-Onyango
Professor of Law, Human Rights & Peace
Centre (HURIPPEC), School of Law| Makerere
University

Rosa Pavanelli
General Secretary | Public Services
International

Advisory Council

Philip Alston
Professor of Law | New York University
Geoff Budlender
Constitutional and Human Rights Lawyer

Manuel José Cepeda
Jurist | Universidad de los Andes

Sakiko Fukuda-Parr
Professor of International Affairs | The New
School Paulina Garzon
Director | China-Latin America Sustainable
Investments Initiative

Richard Goldstone
Honorary President | Human Rights Institute
of the International Bar Association

Chris Jochnick
Chief Executive Officer | Landesa

Irene Khan
UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of
Expression

Elizabeth McCormack
Adviser | Rockefeller Family & Associates

Carin Norberg
Former Director | Nordic Africa Institute
Roger Normand
Founder and Executive Director | Justice
Trust

Alicia Ely Yamin
Senior Fellow, Petrie-Flom Center for Health
Law Policy | Biotechnology and Bioethics,
Harvard Law School | Senior Advisor on
Human Rights, Partners In Health

Sarah Zaidi
Co-Director | Q Continuum Consulting