

HRRC Salon
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The 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action thirty years on – Or, past, present and future perspectives on human rights in times of crisis

Abstract:

The Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 and the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted in the framework of the Conference may be considered as landmarks in the history of human rights. They fell in a period of fervent optimism surrounding human rights protection. Now, 30 years later, many argue that the landscape has changed. Challenges and backlash to human rights protection are omnipresent, up to a point that people invoke the “limits”¹, “twilight”² or “end-times of human rights”³, and ask “can human rights survive?”⁴. The talk explores the guidance which may still be found in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action to address these challenges. It explores the main take-aways of the 1993 Vienna Conference/Declaration thirty years on and argues that – next to the affirmed universality, indivisibility, interdependency and interrelatedness of all human rights – in particular the formation of a human rights culture, the “vernacularization of human rights within societies”⁵, seem important ways forward. In that respect, the “European Urban Charter III – Urban Living in the Era of Transformations” as adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in October 2023 is discussed as good example at local level.

Bio:

Dr. Christina Binder, E.MA, holds the Chair for International Law and International Human Rights Law at the University of the Bundeswehr Munich since April 2017. Prior to this appointment, she was University Professor of International Law at the University of Vienna and Deputy Director of the interdisciplinary Research Centre “Human Rights”. Christina was member of the Executive Board of the European Society of International Law (ESIL) 2014-2022 and also served as ESIL’s Vice-President. She is member of the Council of the Global Campus of Human Rights since 2019 and Co-Rapporteur of the ILA Committee on Human Rights in Times of Emergency. Her research focuses on a number of public international law issues, including human rights, the law of treaties, international investment law, democracy and political participation as well as international environmental law. She has widely published in these fields. Christina also acts as electoral expert for OSCE/ODIHR, the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Venice Commission.

¹ Fassbender and Traisbach (eds.), *The Limits of Human Rights*, Oxford, 2019.

² Posner, *The Twilight of Human Rights Law*, Oxford, 2014.

³ Hopgood, *The Endtimes of Human Rights*, Ithaca, 2015.

⁴ Gearty, *Can Human Rights Survive?*, Cambridge, 2006.

⁵ Engle Merry and Levitt, “The Vernacularization of Women's Human Rights”, in Hopgood, Snyder and Vinjamuri (eds.), *Human Rights Futures*, Cambridge, 2017, p. 213 ff;