

EVAP Ep. 52 Eric Tistounet

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SPEAKERS

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall, Eric Tistounet

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Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 00:00

Welcome to Expert Voices on Atrocity Prevention by the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. I'm Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall, Deputy Executive Director at the Global Centre. This podcast features one-on-one conversations with practitioners from the fields of human rights, conflict prevention and atrocity prevention. These conversations will give us a glimpse of the personal and professional side of how practitioners approach human rights protection and atrocity prevention, allowing us to explore challenges, identify best practices and share lessons learned on how we can protect populations more effectively. Today, I'm speaking with Eric Tistounet, founder of the Lake Room Initiative, a platform for building bridges between ambassadors at the Human Rights Council. Eric previously served as chief of the Human Rights branch at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva, thank you for joining us today Eric.



Eric Tistounet 01:02

Thank you very much. Jackie, it's it's a pleasure for me to be with you.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 01:08

Eric, you've spent decades working closely with the UN human rights system, including before the creation of the HRC in 2006 when the HRC was established. What problem was it meant to solve and what were states hoping it would do differently from its predecessor?

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Eric Tistounet 01:25

Well, it was established in 2006 as you know, there were many reasons why, actually, this former Commission on Human Rights ought to be abolished. There was a question of time. It was in the early 2000s when there was already a crisis with the UN coming from the other side of the ocean. There were many different issues after Durban, after 2001 but for me, the main reasons were why this Commission on Human Rights are to be abolished were twofold. The first one more procedural than the second one. The first one was mostly because it was a very rigid body. The Commission on Human Rights was a very typical United Nations body, very formal and changing anything was almost impossible. It would take ages for the Commission on Human Rights, just to adjust its speaking time limits, for instance, which is a very trivial matter, and not to mention anything of substance concerning, special rapporteurs or dealing with human rights, which is the core of the work of this this body. So very, very opaque, complex to decipher, and rigid body which was doing good work, but certainly had reached its limit.

E

Eric Tistounet 02:49

The second one which I studied recently, when I published my book, I think to do with the way it tackles massive human rights violations. If you look, and that's very important for me, if you look into the 90s, which was which were considered as the glorious years for the United Nations, with South Africa, which was freed from apartheid, with many different breakthroughs, the decolonization process in the southern Africa with independence of Namibia and so on. Well, there were, unfortunately, massive human rights violations and genocide Rwanda, or former Yugoslavia. And if you study Rwanda, what is appalling for the Commission on Human Rights and for the rest of the UN, is that it actually didn't do much. And that's a euphemism to say it didn't do anything in relation to the Rwanda genocide, and that was the same with many other situations of massive human rights violations. So I think that when we got to the middle of the 2000's, the first decade, when there was a thinking about the role of the UN when, there was a thinking about the Security Council, and eventually, this reform didn't fly. Then, of course, everyone turned the eyes to the Human Rights Commission, and that's why the commission was eventually abolished, and there was a try with a great group of friends, moderate country, what nowadays maybe the Prime Minister of Canada would call the middle powers. There was a call to try to address this situation by creating a much more substantive body much more agile, flexible at a higher status the Commission on Human Rights was ECOSOC, was a super subsidiary body of ECOSOC, whereas the Council is now subsidiary body of the GA, and with a stronger type of possibilities in relation to human rights violations. So we were there, thus equipping the Council with more important tools, and more important ability to address these massive human rights violations. That I believe are the main reasons why the commission was eventually abolished, replaced by the Council.

J

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 05:19

You know, in terms of these massive human rights violations, where do you think the Council has genuinely made a difference over the past two decades? Are there specific events or circumstances that have shaped your view of the role of the human rights system in addressing atrocity crimes?

E

Eric Tistounet 05:35

It is very much linked to what I just said in terms of addressing the situation with agility, with flexibility and the possibility to look into all sorts of human rights crisis. What I usually say is that there is not a single human rights crisis which is not considered in a manner of another by the Human Rights Council, if you look into the commission, just to make a comparison to Commission was created just at the start of the UN and was abolished in 2005 in all this year, the Commission managed to organize five special sessions, five special sessions, and remember that the commission was meeting only six weeks per year. So it was only in five occasions that the Commission managed to organize a special session in between the yearly sessions in March, February, March. The Council has been established 20 years ago. Now we are commemorating the 20th anniversary, and it has already organized 39 special session. There was a year immediately after covid, where it organized five special sessions during one specific year. And these special sessions, which initially were conceived as dealing with all type and sets of issues, eventually gone into country specific situation, mostly, with few exceptions, only two or three, and the rest were situations of human rights violation, gross and massive human rights violations. There is, of course, a question whether all of them were touched, which is certainly not the case, but there is at least one assessment to make, which is that the Council address these issues. The Council created something which is called urgent debates. That is to say, if a human rights situation arises during a Council session, it can do that. He can set aside part of its program to deal with an urgent situation, and it held, so far, nine urgent debates, which is not too bad. Also comparing with the Commission on Human Rights, the Commission created, and that is something people usually don't realize, only two Commission of Inquiry during its 75 years of existence, two. The Council has established since its creation, around 40 commissions of inquiry, whatever the names. And currently in existence are, I think, if my memory serves me well, around 12 to 13 such commission of inquiry, fact finding mission, they find whichever name is most appropriate. But that's what matters. And there are, of course, plenty of other opportunities when the Council is looking very seriously into human rights violations. Thematic Special Rapporteurs, which have grown in importance and number, they have the possibility to travel in the field, and they very often address situations which otherwise would have remained muted or silent. So I would say that all in all, the Council has done a significant progress in addressing mass atrocities. The question which remained is, of course, and what we are seeing now is a question of double standards. Are we facing a situation where we can fairly say that all human rights mass atrocities are addressed? I would not conclude in this manner if I simply draw attention to what the ICRC President or the High Commissioner for Human Rights are saying regarding the crisis in the world, well, and if you try to see how many such situations are dealt with by the Council, there is a gap. And that gap is, of course, a huge problem, not only for the Council, but for all the UN system, because it leads to accusations of double standards and so on, and this is undermining the Council as such.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 09:48

Yeah. I mean, we've seen from the outside that political polarization is often blamed for the Council's weaknesses when there are, you know, visible cracks in the system. From the inside, how much does politics actually constrain what the Council can do?

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Eric Tistounet 10:06

You see, well, I don't like the word politics or politicization of the Council, because I, from the very start, considered that human rights are political in nature. So I find it having spent almost four decades, 35 years, in the system and with my activities, now, I find it absolutely normal that human rights are dealt with in a political manner. And if it were not to be politicized, I would say that this would be genuinely problematic. I would not anticipate any debate on human rights going smoothly anywhere, be it at the UN or at the domestic level. Look at any human rights debate of a serious importance in any of our countries, north, south, east, west and namely, one case where a debate took place in a very civilized, orderly and intellectually savvy manner. In most cases, there are emotions. There are very strong opinions, shape change and so on. So politicization is normal. Polarization is when group of states, states operate in groups and they oppose, not as a matter of human rights interest, but they oppose as a matter of principle, just to block the initiatives of the other block. And that's where we got into system. And they are into a problem. And this is exactly where we get into your question, Jackie, that is to say, the polarization it is affecting the Council more than before? Strangely enough, the response is not straightforward. The early years of the Council, people have forgotten that, but the early years of the Council were extraordinarily polarized. In the years between 2006 and 2011 there was a very clear polarization, and the Council couldn't really move ahead. And if you are focusing on mass atrocities, you would see that during these years, the Council didn't do much because there was rigidity between the groups, and the initiative of one group were automatically, sort of undermined by the others. But then there was the golden age, golden years between 2011 and I would say 2020-2023, where many mechanisms were created, and where there was genuine wish for almost all players to try to get to a common understanding about this massive human rights violations. Now we are getting into a third phase, where with the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, and few years later, the situation following the seventh of October with Gaza. And now what is happening in the OPT and everything else we are seeing really, really case, a real case of polarization and double standards and reaction by the public at large as to requiring a better understanding of what the UN is doing in this regard. And there, we are facing issue of polarization, and this is basic polarization. Why are we facing ourselves in this situation? Is very simple. People don't realize that it's so simple. In order for a situation to be considered and leading to a commission of inquiry, Special Rapporteur, or whatever, you need a resolution, that resolution needs to be placed tabled by a state. It needs to be agreed by others, and that leads to some form of outcome. So guess now, what happens if situation of human rights violations, mass atrocity happened in a country which is, let's say, in term geopolitical terms, is a weak one, a country which doesn't have really international means, which is economically speaking, without much power, well under all likelihood, if it is not supported by one of the major powers, this country may find itself on the agenda of the Council. And everyone would say, rightly so, because there are mass atrocities, if you have gross great, grave and massive human rights violations in a country which is a powerful one, which has a strong economy, which is close to one of the major power in the world, who is going to raise a finger and say, listen, That suggestion should be this topic of attention by the Council with the Commission of Inquiry, a fact finding mission or whatever. Who is going to dare offending one major power and potentially find itself facing new tariffs, find itself facing sanctions, or God knows what. And this is where the problems appears. And this is something which is probably different than polarization. It's the absence of will to commit the international community to do exactly the same thing when two situations very comparable arise, depending on which country is concerned.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 15:20

It's interesting that you mentioned the absence of will, and also the different phases of kind of cooperation in the Council, because there was a moment a few years ago, it wasn't, they weren't willing to put forward a commission of inquiry, but there, there was some willingness to consider putting situations like the Uyghur situation in China on the agenda of the Council. There was kind of a push and an effort by some states, and I don't think we're seeing that kind of level of will anymore. The High Commissioner put out a report on China that said some really critical things. States wanted to debate the report. And then there was momentum in that moment, and then it kind of dwindled, which is interesting to see how that aligns with the different phases you've noted. I also want to pick up on, you know, one of the interesting things about those different phases is that we have similar timelines in New York, but it's almost the opposite that, you know, there was this very polarized period in the Security Council that started roughly around that kind of 2011 maybe a little bit later that you noted earlier, and during that time period, what we saw was very little coming out of the Security Council and the Human Rights Council really rose as the place where you could get something accomplished on situations facing mass atrocities. Do you think that that kind of progress in the HRC was a direct result of the tensions in New York, or was there more going on that really contributed to the HRC being particularly effective in that time period?

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Eric Tistounet 17:20

Well, you're right in pointing it, pointing it in that way, Jackie. I would say there is another word which you should pronounce, is COVID. During COVID, the UN bodies, especially New York, suddenly became muted. They didn't do much. They did absolutely nothing. They were not in a situation to address anything, and in most cases, they only met when it was really extraordinarily urgent and it was very painful for them to address any type of human rights violations, any type of situations, including human rights violations. The Council had its own way to deal with the matter. It created, I'm not getting into details, but it created and used tools which enable it to actually work normally during this period of time. Normally meaning holding three sessions during the year, organizing several special sessions. And since there was almost no other UN bodies which were in a position to meet or do anything, then a lot of issues which should have been taken by other bodies came to Geneva, the Human Rights Council. It concerns mass atrocities, but it concerns so many other issues. Look at the work which has been done in terms of themes, very often now we say the Council has expanded too much. Yes, it has expanded too much, but this is also due to the fact that if you are a delegation, if you are an NGO, if you are simply the public at large, you need to turn to a place where someone will get you issues. If you are turning to a body which is becoming obsolete, as the Security Council is now, or if you are turning to a body which has become atrociously bureaucratic as so many other UN bodies, then you prefer to get to the Council where you raise your finger, you will be given the floor at one stage or the other, and you can make your statement addressing a specific violations. And you can turn to delegation and try to get your issues elevated to that of a resolution, and then later on to a tool or mechanism or whatever. So COVID helped in the sense that it was a savior. These are the words of the Secretary General, the Council saved the organization in 2020, and 2021, because it was the body which could deal with anything, whereas the others were silent. But if you add to this what you are mentioning the crisis of multinationalism and the obsolescence of some of the New York bodies. Then the two together made the Council, gave it a boost, and you have the Council as it is.

J

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 20:09

Now I know you've you've mentioned the urgent debates and the special sessions in situations of mass atrocities or escalating violence, what can the HRC do, or what tools does it have that other UN bodies often don't have access to?

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Eric Tistounet 20:25

Well, it can do a lot of things, but it is missing the last ones, in terms of timeline. It can actually, as I mentioned, it can refer a matter to the Council plenary in terms of an urgent debate or special sessions, it can consider report by Special Rapporteurs and thematic Special Rapporteur may alert on case of massive cases of torture, IDPs, summary executions, famine, or whatever that would be discussed by the Council. You would have the High Commissioner, you mentioned him, the High Commissioner is in a position to introduce matters at the Council by through its various updates, three times per year and any impromptu reports he may provide to the Council. So he has, it has, it does have massive set of information about a lot of things which is happening in the world now. That is very clear. From there on, it can create a lot of different tools and mechanisms which are very complex to figure out, because they sometimes

bear different names. You do have special rapporteur working group, independent experts. You do have Commission of Inquiry fact finding mission. You have group of human rights expert, group of eminent experts. You have forums. You have a lot of things. Sometimes we lose ourselves with this, but this is a way for the politics to sort of be reduced in importance, because you can have a resolution adopted depending on the wording you use. So all this gives the Council a panoply, a toolbox, which is much more impressive than many others. And compared to other UN bodies, this body doesn't hesitate to vote. What we are seeing now is that there is a huge reluctance from many UN bodies to get to a vote when there is a threat of a vote or a threat of an amendment, some of this organization will devote weeks, if not months, to avoid such a possibility, because they want to show that there is consensus behind issues. In the world of today, getting to a consensus around human rights issues, mass atrocities or whatever they are, this is a dream which is very hard to see materialize. It's a goal which is very difficult to reach. So the Council is just voting. You do have 10 amendments. So be it, the Council will automatically vote on them and eventually dismiss them or agree with them, there will be action, and that will go to the end, and there will be resolution and bodies established, and mechanism established. I said earlier on that the problem is not at the beginning or in the middle, it's at the end. And the problems are basically twofold. The first one is, well, if you want to operate a commission of inquiry, or if you want to operate a special rapporteur, or whatever, you need funding. And if you don't get that funding you are in a dire strait. And you have the perfect example with the Commission of Inquiry on the DRC on the northeast DRC, Kivu, after a special session that commission of inquiry was established in terms of setting up the three members of the COI. But unfortunately, the budget didn't go with it. And if I'm correct to this date, the Secretariat is not yet in a position to put it up in motion. And it would be, let's say, simple consequence of an economic crisis, and no one would talk much about it if it were not hundreds of thousands of human beings affected by this. And that, I find a huge problem, which sometimes the UN bureaucracy is not really always understanding, because it is facing so many problems, liquidity crisis, budgetary crisis that it doesn't see it in this manner. The Council being more closely related to human rights violations, can feel it more than the others. But when you are in a budgetary body somewhere in New York, you will consider that the Human Rights Council is similar to one of the 100 or 40 or 50, other subsidiary bodies, and all deserve attention. And there is no reason to spend more attention to the Human Rights Council than to another body. And you may not get the budget to this to this Human Rights Council. The other problem is that, well, the Human Rights Council is not a charter body, whatever it does as a huge potential for being implemented. However, it still is not in the same category of action that the Security Council could take. The Security Council is not going to take any action on anything anytime soon. When this P3 the three main powers will not agree on anything, well, don't expect them to suddenly rush to the to Human Rights Council resource, and say, okay, we are here to help. And this is what we could do. It's absolutely not going to happen that way. And probably the opposite will happen. They may eventually discuss issues really, which are human rights connotations, but they will not invite the High Commissioner or rarely, so they will never invite the president of the Council. They will very rarely invite Special Rapporteurs or commission of inquiry. So there is a disconnect, and that disconnect is of the greatest importance.

J

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 26:19

Since you brought up the budgetary issue. How do you assess the gap between New York and Geneva? There's obviously this question of budget and operationalization of HRC mechanisms happens in New York, and the fifth committee. But there are also challenges in bringing HRC experts or even OHCHR to brief the UN Security Council and brief other bodies in New York.

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Eric Tistounet 26:44

I could speak for hours on this topic. What I can say is, what you see and what you do not see. What you see is that there are budgetary issues, and what you don't see is that there is very often reluctance to have the Council having an impact, and therefore pretenses that this is a liquidity crisis or budgetary crisis, or God knows what. It goes from the most ridiculous example, which is a recent one, where I understand that, for instance, sign language was interrupted for a short while due to so called liquidity crisis, which would have deprived hundreds of thousands of people access to the Council. Just to know at the end of the day that the cost related issue was around, US Dollar, 77,000 which is a drop in the ocean when you consider the overall budget of the organization, even in time of serious budgetary crisis. So what I mean by this is not related to mass atrocity, but what I mean by this that sometimes you use the budgetary crisis and the liquidity crisis as sort of keywords to avoid the organization doing stuff. This may be bureaucratic challenges. This may be other type of challenges, but you have them. It's very clear. Then you have the political elements, political issues which are connected to that. It's very hard, I suppose, for some well, nowadays it's less hard than before, unfortunately, but in the past, it would have been very difficult to say and oppose directly the Human Rights Committee Council to do things in terms of protecting human rights, because these keywords are the very strong importance. Now that you have one of the major, if not the major, global predominant power doing stuff, which is clearly assuming the fact that it's in violation of human rights and not really giving damn, if I can use this word about it, and claiming it in a powerful and public manner. Well, there is much less of a reluctance to hide human rights objection behind the nice curtain of budgetary crisis, but to still have these for many other countries. So the budgetary crisis, the issues of the fifth committee or the General Assembly are very often used, actually to try to reduce the potential reactions by UN human rights bodies. And let's be very frank, when you are in a words in 2026 where you read any newspaper, and you see that billions of dollars are invested in so many different categories of things, from the most mundane to the most trivial ones, and especially when in concern, defense, oil or whatever, and you see what very little which is asked for, coping with human rights violation is really a shame for, of our civilization, our society. So that's where two of the elements I wanted to raise. The third one is obviously that it's very clear, very, very clear that you are not going to see anytime soon, the Security Council asking the Human Rights Council to get there to brief and to present its position. What I do remember, which is an anecdote, but it's very, I mean, you can find it in the records, is when, in I would say, 2019, the then president of the Council, Human Rights Council, just managed to get to visit New York and organize and be invited to a breakfast, informal breakfast, organized by the monthly president of the Security Council. It was a nice one, where everyone attended. It worked quite well. It was never supposed to be a formal meeting or whatever. But as a courtesy, when he got back to Geneva, he sent a letter thanking the president of the Council for having organized this breakfast.



Eric Tistounet 31:13

However, in the UN kafkaesque world, when a letter is being sent and addressed to the president in exercise of the Security Council, even if this letter is a thank you letter, it becomes a public document. And by doing that, automatically, several members of the Security Council, including two permanent members, immediately reacting by savaging this, by saying that this was not a formal meeting, that it should never have happened, that there should be nothing like a formal link between the Security Council and the Human Rights Council, and they would object to any further breakfast, and so on. This is something which is going counter intuitively to what us human beings do. You offer me a coffee. I like coffee, and I will say, thank you. Well, in this world of ours, you offer me a coffee and I say nothing, and everyone will find it normal. I don't find it normal.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 32:14

Why is there such a resistance to bridging that gap between the two? And, you know, I know there's this, this very rigid emphasis on New York is for peace and security, and Geneva is for human rights, but the two impact one another.



Eric Tistounet 32:31

They do.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 32:32

And states know that.

E

Eric Tistounet 32:34

Of course they know. I think it's almost philosophical. It's, it gets not, I mean, it's not only states, it's also internal. I mean, we should also confess that the UN is working in silos. You will fight for it, but you will never overcome this. The fact is that any of the crisis you will ever face and see and meet in the world, whatever it leads to, not necessarily mass atrocity, but serious problems internally in a country it is under all likelihood linked to human rights violations, under all likelihood. Nowadays, what you see in the western hemisphere or the global north, whatever you call it, is a reshuffling of the budget allocations, simply because there is a request by the global predominant power to have to move up the defense budget from two to three and then three to five persons when you do that, of course, you have to take the money out of other departments. And the other departments are, of course, those dealing with social and economic and education, and whatever else you do have to try to address the good of your societies. And when you do that, you create further social inequities. You create vast array of economic, social and cultural rights violations. This will lead to demonstrations. This will lead to violence. This will fuel racism. This will fuel reactions against minorities and in terms it may, lead to violence of a high level, and eventually leading to atrocities which may be of a massive scale. So by admitting that there is a link between human rights and anything happening at the level of societies and that you have to cope with them, that means that instead of saying that the human rights pillar should be one of the should be one of the three pillars. It actually should be the predominant pillar of the organization, whereas now it is not a third pillar. It is simply half a pillar, contrary to what is being said, with a 10th of the budget of the others. And therefore, in order to justify all this, you simply say that it's disconnected. It has nothing to do, and so on. And that's what you are seeing unfolding all the time. And it is supported by massively supported by many. They don't say it in this manner, but they want a disconnect. They want a disconnect not to confess and admit that human rights, and therefore everything else should be connected to economic, social and cultural rights, should be given its proper standing. And you have a reluctance to admit this, and we see it everywhere.

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Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 35:39

Even given this, this reluctance to make that connection between economic, social rights and bigger rights violations with atrocity situations, do you think that in its its current form, the HRC is still structured to be better at reacting to atrocities than preventing them? And seeing that sort of long term trajectory of, you know, violations of civil, political rights and how they connect with atrocity situations?

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Eric Tistounet 36:13

Prevention will always be very difficult, because the Council is not coping with all the existing crisis. So first of all, the Council has to be able to cope with all the crises in the world, and that also lead us to say, that all violations committed anywhere in the world should be addressed, including in the Global North, which is not the case at the moment. And the fact that it is not the case at the moment leads to perception that there is unfortunately double standard. And when this is being unfortunately growing as a perception, eventually it gives us criticism. It leads to criticism that human rights are politicized in nature. What I mentioned should not be said, and that eventually it's the north against the South. And that's very troubling topic and a very troubling set of conclusions. The prevention is what should be done. Of course, it should be done all the time. But how can it be done in the current circumstances, when you do have statements anytime at the Council of one minute and 30 seconds on any issue at stake. When we are being asked to rationalize everything. When the world is actually I wouldn't use the word collapsing, but when the perception of human rights in general terms is collapsing, unfortunately, you would need far more than what we are doing. We would need to consider everything which is happening, and there is simply no time, no money, no priority and no intention to do that, and this so called discrepancy between, you know, economic, social and cultural rights on one side and civil and political rights on the other side. Well, to my mind, this is one of the most profoundly ridiculous statements ever. No one can be so wrong in saying that I'm very often saying it and because people are still using this distinction civilian, political rights, economic, social and cultural rights. And I once in one of the meetings I was organizing, I was saying to this audience, I was saying, just look at the 10 mandates which have been established by the country. I'm talking about thematic mandates, and try to categorize them. Tell me please, where they belong. And they looked at the list and they realized that none of them can be categorized as clearly civil, political, economic, social or cultural rights, because in our world of today and even in the past, things are so complex that you cannot categorize them anymore. Speak about the rights of women. Where do you place them? You touch all the gamut of human rights. It touch everything, and much more, all the persons touch everything, albinism, everything. And everything is, I mean, deeply interconnected. Mass atrocity may start with a demonstration or a series of demonstrations. This is civil and political rights. But this may, this demonstration, may arise out of hunger may arise, out of cuts in the social services, out of the deprivation of children to go to school, out to measures taken regarding various issues, regarding sexual reproductive rights, about measures concerning freedom of whatever. Everything is interconnected, and that is a real cause, but people will try to segment it and present it in different manners, finding scapegoats. And that's the troubled society we are living in now. And unfortunately, what it requires is a coalition of what the Canadian prime minister called middle powers. I call them moderate, countries which are willing to do something about it and just call it a bluff and oppose the global predominant powers, and try to say, okay, let's try to work on this and try to ensure that mass atrocities are looked into. They are considered everywhere, anywhere, and that the causes of the atrocities are also addressed, including in the north, including in the north.

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Eric Tistounet 40:53

And no one, and no one can say, in future, there will be no mass atrocities in the north when we see the decline and the speed at which our societies are declining in terms of acceptance of others, the measures which have been taken, which we are seeing on our TVs, provided these are still to be considered as objective media, but what we are seeing unfolding in front of our very eyes is very troubling.

J

Jaelyn Streitfeld-Hall 41:21

Absolutely, I agree with all of that. And you know, your example just now, of, you know, protests could lead to atrocities. Our last episode was on the situation in Venezuela, where it's such a multi dimensional crisis. Where the initial attacks on populations started with protests, and the protests weren't in response to an economic crisis, and the economic crisis is still ongoing. Civil and political crisis is still ongoing, and it's resulted in widespread atrocities for over a decade. It's all so interconnected.

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Eric Tistounet 42:03

It's exactly the case.

E

Eric Tistounet 42:05

You see now most of the far right movements in the world, they are attacking minorities. The refugees are responsible for everything. The foreigners are responsible for everything. Islamophobia is really rising up. We don't talk too much about it. We talk and rightly so about anti semitism, but Islamophobia, we don't talk about it enough. And all this is deeply interconnected. But what, what is going to happen in five or 10 years from now, when in certain countries, all these people will have been thrown out, when poverty will be spreading through Africa and South and Central America, when there will be increasing social inequities at the scale unheard of since the beginning of the last century. What do you expect to see happening, but further hatred, dealing with lots of internal violence, domestic violence, leading to possibly conflicts and certainly mass atrocities. This is coming, and this is very sad to say, but, this far right movement, this is what they are up to, and that's what they want, actually, because they want, they are much more clever than we think, and they know the world is complex. What we are talking about is extraordinarily complex. And if you want to put it in simple words, you fail, miserably so. And we always fail. I fail, and all of us, we fail. However, if we are extremist, is very simple. You put, you try to get two or three keywords, and you use these keywords ad nauseum. And at the end of the day, you make it very simple. It's binary. It's us against, it's them against us. And those listening which are lost in their private life, in their social life, in their family life, they have difficulty to cope with it. Well, they hear that, and in the same manner, in the 30s, they would blame the Jews in the in these years now, they would blame, I don't know, the Latinos, or they would blame the Muslims. And we have seen horrible things being written down on X/Twitter, by parliamentarians, and everything seems to be accepted. But these people don't realize that all these have a cost. I'm coming, my family comes from the northeast of France, which was the subject of two World Wars and was deeply affected by these war, wars and I lost but I was not born there, but I lost many of my relatives in atrocities is committed in those years. And I have heard plenty of stories about how it degenerated, started with words. These words then channeled and snowballed into something else, and then something else. And eventually, those who came into power, they implemented things which were so horrible, but the humanization had been taken in store and was deemed possible in those years, and we are paying a price now, so we should be extraordinarily careful with what is happening now, because it paved the way for the next generation to pay a huge price.

J

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 45:37

Given that you've mentioned the liquidity crisis at the UN and we're also, you know, closely following the UN 80 process and how there's, you know, along with kind of these far right movements around the world, there's also a contraction and kind of push against multilateralism. So as the Council looks ahead, what adaptations or reforms would make it more effective in a world marked by all this fragmentation and widespread rights abuses?

E

Eric Tistounet 46:12

I think that, well, there are many, of course, there are many things which should be done. There are things, first of all, we should learn to speak differently. When you read UN reports, frankly speaking, very often, they are not easily readable, full of acronyms and UN jargon and all these things. So that's that's purely details, but it's important, because we must use a language which is understandable and understood by all, otherwise, people just don't read anymore. They are looking into their mobiles, and if the second sentence doesn't make any sense and the third sentence is full of jargon, the fourth sentence will never be read. So we have to learn and adjust ourselves to the 21st Century and 20, past 2020 was the arrival of new technologies, which, that is important and that doesn't need a lot of money. It needs a new way to deal with our communication skills. The second issue, which is more in substance, and that's related to the mass atrocities, where there are so many violations happening everywhere, but there is this issue of who is going to initiate the consideration of these cases. Now it comes from always the same group of countries. How can you ensure that others step in? It's very hard, because the others, in order to come up, they need to raise their fingers, and if the country is close to the global predominant power, they may be immediately sanctioned with tariffs and God knows what. So they will not dare to do that. So you need to actually broaden those who can be initiators of new considerations, either in the thematic world or the country specific words. And there, there are several possibilities, first of all, of an increased role to be played by the High Commissioner. The High Commissioner for Human Rights, to my mind, should be able to do what the Secretary General is doing with the Security Council, raising a case to it. The High Commissioner should not hesitate for a second to say, okay, this is my update to you, because he does these three times per year, and I think that you should focus your attention in the next six months to the following crisis: 12345. We should be able to do that, and the Council should be, should have to actually follow up, and that would be far more neutral and objective than whatever exists now. Secondly, in terms of geographical issues, I think we should have some form of I know it doesn't go very well, and I've been told several times that it is not going to fly, but I don't mind. I'm raising it again and again, because when you say it, it becomes Pavlovian, and at the end it may eventually resurface and be implemented. But we should have regional Special Rapporteurs. Special Rapporteur focusing on everything happening in the region which has not been dealt with by a separate mechanism, and that would ensure that everything is looked into. We have been told the UPR is doing that, but the UPR is a good mechanism. It's a great tool, but it is not looking in details into what is happening in a country, and it is done via a very sort of strange combination of procedure which is kind of light and kind of, I would say, very speedy process, which lasts three hours and 15 minutes, and end up with 300 recommendations which a state is not in the position to implement, whatever the circumstances. So regional, sort of special rapporteurs, these are sort of possibilities, giving special rapporteur thematic ones, more say into the issues which are being considered. Because if you do have five or six Special Rapporteur issuing a press communicate, saying that they considered that massive violations have been committed, or that there are crimes against humanity, or whatever, they should be taken very seriously and immediately taken into consideration by the Human Rights Council. So these sort of measures could be taken, and I think could lead to some remediation by the Council and would have an impact, because the Council is really followed by a lot of people. It is followed by various sort of groups, including groups which hate the Council and wants to have it destroyed, but it is followed by a massive number of people who wants it to succeed, and I think we should really focus on these people and move ahead.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 51:01

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