

**Association of Human Rights Institutes (AHRI) Conference 2021**

**“Human Rights Strategies”**

**Organised by the Maastricht Centre for Human Rights**

*Thursday 26 August, 14:45 - 16:00 (CEST)*

Panel title:

**“Seeding Change for a Human Rights Economy: *Lessons from OHCHR’s Surge Initiative*”**

Panel description:

This panel will focus on the two-year experience of the Surge Initiative of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights that has recently entered into a partnership with the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (RWI). The aim of the Surge initiative is to connect human rights with macroeconomic analysis and policies with the objective of realizing economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR) and the Sustainable Development Goals for all, without discrimination.

The four panellists will discuss the lessons learnt from the Surge’s seeding change country projects to highlight the strengths, opportunities and challenges in engaging with contextualised macroeconomic policies to advance human rights, especially of the groups most left behind during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, by centering increase investments in social spending, including for the right to health, food and social protection. Issues of inequality, multidimensional poverty, and the cost of structural discrimination will be some of the framing elements of the discussion in this panel.

The COVID-19 multi-layered crisis has seriously impacted lives and livelihoods. It has placed severe strains on all economies and curtailed the ability of Governments to collect revenues, resulting in many instances, in negative economic growth. The challenge to mobilise resources for social spending in the short and longer term is immense, especially in low- and middle-income countries. Under international human rights law, States are duty-bound to guarantee the minimum essential levels of the enjoyment of the rights to health, social protection, nutrition and food security, water and sanitation, housing, and education for all people, even in times of crisis. All States,

even developing countries with inadequate resources, are required to mobilise maximum available resources for the progressive realization of these rights, including by introducing targeted programmes to assist those most in need.

The Surge Team has looked at how debt, revenues, budgets and corruption have either restricted or freed up fiscal space to provide for social spending on key ESC rights, as well as to fulfil the SDGs, with special attention to curbing discrimination and inequalities by avoiding further economic burden on already marginalized or vulnerable populations. This panel will share lessons from country-based studies on minimum essential levels of specific ESCR, resource mobilization strategies, analysis of stimulus measures, and IFI emergency financing. Importantly, the panellists will discuss concepts, tools and policies for supporting States to fulfil their human rights obligations by ensuring minimum essential levels of ESC rights, which are in conformity with international standards. These include, in part, analysis and advice on:

- \* Ring-fencing and/or increasing social spending during economic downturns;
- \* Implementing counter-cyclical fiscal policies to avoid retrogression of ESCR; Ensuring that other pressing obligations - such as servicing of debt - do not take precedence over human rights obligations that require social spending;
- \* Reallocating public expenditure (e.g. re-directing resources from defence);
- \* Expanding the tax-base and introducing progressive fiscal policies;
- \* Tackling illicit financial flows and corruption;
- \* Reviewing IFI financing and conditionalities; and
- \* Increasing budget transparency, participation and accountability.

Panellists:

- ✓ Dr Jyoti Sanghera, Senior Adviser/Consultant on Outreach and Partnerships for the Surge Initiative of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and RWI;
- ✓ Dr Marcella Favretto, Chief of the Sustainable Development Section at the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights;
- ✓ Dr Savi Bisnath, Senior Economist, Surge Initiative of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights;
- ✓ Pradeep Wagle, High Commissioner's Representative at OHCHR Country Office in Cambodia.

Moderator

- ✓ Dr Alejandro Fuentes, Senior Researcher, Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, Sweden.

## Panellists Bios

**Dr Jyoti Sanghera Sanghera** is the Senior Adviser/Consultant on Outreach and Partnerships for the Surge Initiative of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and RWI as this Project is currently proceeding in partnership with the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law. Until February 2021, Jyoti Sanghera served as the Chief of Section of the Human Rights and Social and Economic Issues at the UN OHCHR, in which capacity she was one of the two Initiating co-chairs of OHCHR's Surge Initiative, which started in August 2019. Previous to that, she was the Chief of the Asia Pacific Section at the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva, Head of Office of OHCHR in Nepal and also as the Senior Human Rights Adviser in Sri Lanka. Jyoti Sanghera has worked on human rights, especially ESC rights and protection issues of women, migrants and other discriminated groups in conflict and post conflict situations for the past three decades in various capacities, including with key NGOs in North America and Asia. Before joining the UN, Jyoti taught at the Department of Gender Studies at the University of Victoria in BC., as well at UBC, Vancouver, Canada. Jyoti Sanghera has a Ph.D from the University of California, Berkeley, USA, and a M.A in Women Studies and International Development from the ISS, the Hague in The Netherlands. She also has an M.A in History from the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, India.

**Dr Marcella Favretto** is the Chief of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Sustainable Development Section, with responsibilities for developing guidance and providing advice on mainstreaming human rights into UN development policies and practices and implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Marcella Favretto has over 20 years of work experience in human rights at the global and country level. From 2015 to 2019, she was the OHCHR Senior Human Rights Adviser to the UN Resident Coordinator in Kenya, advising the Government and the UN on measures to advance human rights in the context of realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). She served in other UN field presences, notably in Sierra Leone, from 2001-2003 and in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) from 2003-2008 with monitoring, protection and human rights investigation functions. In Sierra Leone, she was part of the UNAMSIL human rights advance team deployed to rebel areas during the early stages of the peace and disarmament process. In the DRC, she first led a special unit created to investigate incidents of large-scale human rights violations and then headed the strategic coordination of four thematic sections (Witness Protection, Analysis and Information, Special Investigations and HR & Natural Resources). Between 2009 and 2014, based in Geneva with OHCHR, Marcella Favretto led the office work on integrating human rights into UN peacekeeping policies and coordinated a landmark system-wide information management review launched under the Secretary-General Human Rights Up Front Action Plan. Marcella Favretto holds a

Masters in International Relations from the Institut d'Etudes Politiques of Paris and a PhD in International Relations with the Faculty of Political Science of Milan.

**Dr Savi Bisnath** is the senior economist working with the Surge Team at OHCHR, Geneva. She is a feminist economist with over 15 years' experience working on issues related to international trade, economic justice, women's rights, and conflict and natural disasters in countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Eastern Europe and the Middle East, as well as the UK and the US. Savi has worked with academic, civil society, philanthropic and multilateral institutions. Dr Bisnath has several publications on trade, globalization and development, including *Global Tensions: Challenges and Opportunities in the World Economy* and the *Gender and Development Reader Vols. I & II*. She has a Ph.D. from Cornell University and a first degree in economics from UCLA.

**Pradeep Wagle** is currently the High Commissioner's Representative at OHCHR Country Office in Cambodia. Before joining the Country Office in 2018, he was with the Asia Pacific Section at OHCHR in various capacities including as the Coordinator of the International Fact-finding Mission for Myanmar, Legal Officer (DPRK accountability project) and Desk Officer for Myanmar. Between 2016-2018, he was with the rule of law and democracy section in OHCHR Geneva. His previous United Nations assignments include transitional justice advisor in OHCHR Sri Lanka (2015-2016), head of the office in OHCHR sub-office in Gaza (2012 -2015), team leader in UNAMA regional office in Kandahar (2010-2012), coordinator of transitional justice and administration of justice unit in UNAMID Darfur (2008-2010) and human rights officer with UNMIS (2005-2007). Before joining the United Nations, Pradeep worked for several national and international human rights organizations and academic institutions in Nepal and South Asia. He also worked as a Protection Officer at the National Human Rights Commission Nepal, and as a Public Prosecutor for the Government of Nepal. Pradeep holds LLM from University of Hong Kong and LLM from Tribhuvan University. Pradeep is a qualified Human Rights Lawyer.

**Dr Alejandro Fuentes** is a Senior Researcher at the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law. He received his PhD (in International Law) and LL.M (in Comparative and European Legal Studies) from Trento University (It.), and Law degree from the University of Córdoba (Arg.). He is a regular lecturer at the Master's Programme in International Human Rights Law at the Faculty of Law, Lund University, where he directs the course on Human Rights and Cultural Diversity, teaches International Human Rights Law I and II, and supervises master theses. His research focuses on international human rights law, in particular on international and regional systems of human rights protection, cultural diversity and identity, groups, minority and indigenous people rights, and human rights education. He has authored a book on Cultural diversity and indigenous peoples' land claims: argumentative dynamics and jurisprudential approach in the Americas (Trento University, 2012).