Conclusion

The importance of communication to the protection and the enjoyment of human rights is highlighted in the 2000 book, *Human Rights and the Internet* (Hick et al, 2000). Its efficacy has always had resonance with human rights campaigners and defenders, long before 'new' ICTs came into widespread use. Indeed this is exemplified by the iconic human rights organisation Amnesty International who marked their 50th anniversary in 2011 by conducting an 'old fashioned' letter writing campaign. As the Director of Amnesty International UK Kate Allen explained, "our original founding idea, of writing either to authorities that are abusing human rights or to people who are on the receiving end of that, can still be massively powerful" (Kappala-Ramsamy, 2011).

The chapters in this book provide evidence of the significance of communications – and information - for human rights in today's world. In exploring a range of contexts, both geographical and political, the authors provide positive and negative examples of their impact. However, whilst there is evidence of innovative adoption of ICTs in support of human rights, communications structures and information flows within the human rights community continue to reflect local political and socio-economic contexts, as well as global patterns of inequality and hegemony. ICTs are not – or never will be – the key driving force in the human rights community. But they can still be a powerful enabler of freedom and development.

In terms of opportunity, current trends follow a rich history of predecessors who have adopted and adapted mechanisms to use information and ICTs in their work. In drawing this book to a conclusion it is worth reflecting on the origins of some of this use of information and ICTs for human rights, as this provides not only a distant vision of the past but also the opportunity to understand how we devise our future strategies.

THE PIONEERS OF INFORMATION AND ICTs IN HUMAN RIGHTS – A VERY SHORT HISTORY

It is possible to start a review of the history of information use in support of human rights at many points. However, since this conclusion does not attempt to be definitive in terms of historical overview, we limit ourselves to providing a glimpse at the world as it unfolded from the late 1960s. This was an important time in terms of today's ICTs. Tools like the computer mouse, teleconferencing and email that are now commonplace were being demonstrated for the first time. And in 1969, Arpanet, the early research-oriented prototype of the Internet, was introduced.

In the period from the 1950s to the 1980s there was an exponential growth in the number of human rights organisation internationally - from approximately 38 in the 1950s to around 14,500 by 1984 (Pal and Alexander, 1998). This was undoubtedly a reaction to the then newly established United Nations and the enactment of the various human rights conventions. One such organisation was Amnesty International, who from their origins in 1961, understood and used information and communication to shine a light on abuses of human rights. For Amnesty the use of information as a campaigning and advocacy tool was central to protecting human rights, and it established the ground rules for their work and that of others. Credibility became a key to success, and information quality was therefore critical.

Metzl (1996) provides a clear account of expectations for information usage by human rights NGO's such as Amnesty International:

....accurate and timely information is an indispensable tool and an essential precondition for effective and responsive action and the promotion of human rights ...

The importance of timely, accurate, and verified information, communicated in an appropriate format, became a vital element of human rights action, and remains so to this day. Inaccurate or misleading information can shatter a human rights organisation's credibility, and once discredited their validity is difficult to regain. Even more importantly it leaves those subject to abuse, and the human rights defenders acting on their behalf, more vulnerable.

Martin Ennals, the first General Secretary of Amnesty International from 1968 -1980 recognised the significance of these values. He was a key participant in the creation of the Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems, International (HURIDOCS), as well as being the organisation's first President. HURIDOCS was formed following a meeting of key human rights organisations in Paris in 1979. The meeting participants noted that ICTs were being used by commercial companies and government agencies, and as HURIDOCS themselves now note, they saw that the community of non-governmental human rights organisations needed to familiarise themselves with these tools. If this was done collaboratively, resources could be pooled. (HURIDOCS, 2011a)

Ennals articulated the then thinking on information and technology as follows:

The rapid increase of interest in human rights coincides with the rapid development of information technology. Unless a common and universal system of communication is evolved, valuable information will be wasted, existing international machinery will not function, and implementation not monitored. (HURIDOCS, 2011b)

For three decades HURIDOCS has been a vital resource in providing tools and training to the rest of the human rights community. They have created thesauri and evidence systems, and built knowledge and capacity of frontline campaigners and defenders. Today they continue their role as an international NGO helping human rights organisations use information technologies and documentation methods to maximise the impact of their advocacy work.

As we can see in the chapters of this book, the vital nature of information, its communication, and the role it plays in advocacy, campaigning, recording abuses, defending victims, and holding perpetrators of human right violations to account remains paramount.

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS FROM THE CHAPTERS

One of the consistent messages in the first section of this book is the paradoxical nature of the use of ICTs for human rights. The authors provide evidence of the potential for both positive application and counter-balancing threats. Ultimately they indicate the need for care and critical engagement. The development, application and functionality of technology present opportunities to advance change in the political, economic, and social spheres of society. However these carry threats to economic well-being, social structure, freedom of speech and privacy. To try to counteract these, awareness of the positive and negative implications of technology is vital, as are opportunities for appropriation by civil society and the human rights community.

A number of the early chapters consider the role of corporations in the delivery of human rights, and in general they recognise that there are strengths and opportunities to be gained from their role in defending human rights. However Bowe et al. consider the consequences of providing such technology and the threat this may present to users, particularly young users within repressive states. Like the authors of the other two chapters in the opening section, their contribution highlights the question of balance and accountability in the use of technology. As new platforms and applications are adopted and appropriated, and the next generation of activists becomes engaged, it is vitally important to keep these in mind.

In their conclusions Dueck and Rempel consider the opposing paradoxes of digital utopia and dystopia, with promises of a wonderland or of chaos. They make the point that at the very least, organisations and their leaders must proceed with caution in today's technology wonderland. Their advice is reminiscent of the words of Brian Loader, who in his 1997 book, *The Governance of Cyberspace*, warned that we "avoid the hyperbole of both the utopian exhortations of the cyber-libertarians and the dystopian prophecies of the digital luddites" (Loader, 1997, p.ix).

Bowe et al. also draw attention to the need for sober assessment of the opportunities and risks posed by political organising via the Internet. Several chapters reflect the importance of this for human rights defenders and activists. Notley and Hankey demonstrate that while it is not possible to remove digital risks completely for human rights defenders, there are supports available to help them identify and address these risks. Other contributions, such as Douai's account of how YouTube videos elevate discussion of police corruption and human rights abuse to the public agenda, or Harrison's description of how statistical analysis of raw data can be used to shed light on mass atrocities, also demonstrate that creative solutions are being developed for and by the human rights movement using available technologies.

These trends show that the human rights community has, with the help of private sector companies, donors and specialist NGOs, appropriated ICTs for their effective use. Notwithstanding Weber's salutary reminder (in chapter 2) that economic inequalities need to be overcome for civil society to take proper advantage of the opportunities presented by ICTs, this bodes well for the future of human rights activism and advocacy.

In addition to the rich base of practitioner expertise driving the use of ICTs in support of human rights, there is now a growing academic discourse in the area. We are pleased to be able to bring these together in this book, and to contribute to further cycles of learning based on experiential insights. However, whilst patterns of ICT use and misuse are now becoming established vis-à-vis political rights and civil liberties, the trends and consequences relating to economic, social and cultural rights are more subtle and less well understood. According to Article 2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), state parties must undertake to take steps to the maximum of their available resources to achieve the full realisation of rights for everyone. These rights include the right to work,

fair pay, adequate housing, social security, an adequate standard of living (including food, clothing and housing), education, the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and the right to take part in cultural life. But while everyone is entitled to these rights without discrimination, existing social and economic structures inevitably play a role. Technological innovations tend to reinforce existing social disparities, as was noted by Pippa Norris in her 2001 book on the digital divide (Norris, 2001). So while ICTs may improve access to services like education and healthcare for some, they do not do so for everyone.

Cristina Ionescu notes in chapter 13 that the existing power relations in different societies determine the extent to which ICTs can be accessed and used. Women all over the world have restricted access, especially in rural areas where the basic infrastructure is missing and the costs of deployment are high. In such areas ICTs tend to be used almost entirely by the men. Women are excluded because of a lack of opportunities for training in computer skills, domestic responsibilities, cultural restrictions on mobility, reduced income, or the lack of relevance to their existence.

The application of a human rights perspective to the use of ICTs in areas like education and mental health (Martin and McKay) and social service provision (Strömberg-Jakka) highlight a range of other issues, including cultural background, language, stigma and disclosure of personal information. Both of these chapters are set in countries that are politically stable and economically well-developed, in which individuals enjoy a high degree of freedom and social justice. They demonstrate that ICTs are not a panacea for problems of disadvantage, even in environments where technological access barriers have largely been removed. Indeed the potential of ICTs to eradicate inequities can sometimes even lead to violations of other human rights such as the right to privacy, as outlined by O'Hanlon (healthcare, chapter 14) and Rodrigues Filho (e-government, chapter 6). Such unintended consequences must be addressed at policy level by taking steps to minimise the gap between human rights standards and reality in relation to the enjoyment of human rights. One way for states to achieve this is through the development and use of appropriate human rights impact assessment (HRIA) tools. These are already used to measure the impact of policies, programmes, projects and interventions on human rights in a variety of settings including development projects, the activities of multinational corporations, trade agreements, and the activities of public authorities (Harrison, 2011). HRIAs include assessment of activities which directly and intentionally aim at changing a human rights situation as well as activities which may have unintended human rights consequences. They can assess activities that have happened in the past (ex post) as well as planned future activities (ex ante), and for this reason they are ideally suited to the evaluation of existing ICT policies and programmes, and the development of new ones.

The availability of applicable human rights impact assessment instruments to assess ICT policies would help to ensure that states not only secure the protection of human rights but also refrain from violating them – a point emphasised by Weber in chapter 2. They would also provide civil society with mechanisms, including context-specific indicators, to perform meaningful, evidence-based assessments of policy. Such assessments could lead to a deeper understanding of how ICT policies and programmes – including infrastructure investments and services deployment - impact on human rights in practice.

Finally, it is clear from the chapters in this book that research and development is still only at an early stage in terms of human rights and ICTs. Several areas requiring further work were identified – for example the enactment of policies to force technology companies to comply with their human rights commitments (Bowe et al.); studying the advantages and disadvantages of e-government in relation to human rights and democracy (Rodrigues Filho); assessing the efficiency of crowdsourcing in human

rights monitoring (Heinzelman & Meier); and understanding how technology can be used to improve human rights in specific areas like healthcare (O'Hanlon). We hope from an academic perspective that the funding and resources required are made available over the coming years to address the many challenges already identified.

What of the Future?

In the introduction to this book we noted that the ubiquitous nature of ICTs means that government policies, private sector investment and civil society innovation can all impact on human rights, and that this trend will continue with both positive and negative consequences. However it is always difficult to predict the events that will shape such trends. Could we have envisaged the appalling 2001 attack on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York that sparked the U.S. lead "war on terror"? Or could we with any certainty have predicted the 'Arab Spring' and the role that technology would play in it?

There are some things that we can predict however. It remains likely that oppressive regimes will continue to exist, as will torture, disappearances, false imprisonment and ongoing threats to freedom of speech and privacy. Poverty will not be eradicated in the near future, and denials of economic, social and cultural rights will continue to create inequality and suffering.

The world of technology and ICTs is a fast-changing and dynamic one. There are illustrations throughout this book of new and emerging applications and approaches that ten or even five years ago were still in their infancy. Human rights organisations and activists have always been early adapters of technology (Brophy and Halpin, 1999), with pioneers like Amnesty International and HURIDICS taking a lead in the past. Today the access to ICTs is perhaps easier for many people, notwithstanding the digital divide, economic and educational deprivation and the malign acts of some states in denying access. As a result, organisations, activists and even ordinary citizens can now use interactive and instant communications media to try to hold rights violators to account in real-time, or very nearly real-time.

As Web 3.0 become reality it brings with it opportunity for greater use of data in accessible and available formats for human rights activists. Key enablers are a maturing infrastructure for integrating Web data resources and the increased use of and support for the languages developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) according to Hendler (2009), who notes that

The base of Web 3.0 applications resides in the Resource Description Framework (RDF) for providing a means to link data from multiple websites or databases. With the SPARQL query language, a SQL-like standard for querying RDF data, applications can use native graph-based RDF stores and extract RDF data from traditional databases (Hendler, 2009)

One of the keys to leveraging this technology in any domain is what information scientists refer to as an ontology. This is the representation of knowledge as a set of concepts within a domain, and the relationships between them. The languages that allow meaning to be introduced can infer relationships and bring together information accurately, thereby allowing the integration of data from more than one source in a useable and effective way. For the human rights community, the opportunity to obtain data in such a way and to distribute it effectively have the potential to be of great benefit, if the challenges identified by Dueck and Rempel in chapter 1 can be overcome.

Beyond Web 3.0 which is really only emerging, there is talk of Web 4.0. With this we can expect information to be sent to a cloud, located in some unknown part of the world where it will be analyzed, filtered and responded to as needed. And we can look forward to increased real-time integration between individuals and the virtual worlds and objects they interact with (Kambil, 2008). These developments have the potential to be of even greater benefit to civil society whose real-world actions are curtailed by oppressive regimes. But they will also almost certainly be used by governments and corporations for purposes of manipulation and control.

Castells (2011) presents a stark analysis of the threat presented by current possibilities:

The expansion of Internet networks and the development of the Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 offer extraordinary business opportunities for the implementation of the strategy I call the commodification of freedom: enclosing the commons of free communication and selling people access to global communication networks in exchange for surrendering their privacy and becoming advertising targets (Castells, 2011, p. 782)

If we return to the thoughts expressed in the early chapters of this book (Dueck and Rempel, Weber, and Bowe, et al.) we can see the reasons for the concerns expressed and the warnings to be vigilant. Echoing the need for the technology to be accountable and accounted for, Ekine (2010) argues in *SMS Uprisings: Mobile Activism in Africa* that the technologies described

...do not follow the traditional development model, where technology tends to be shaped by the economic forces that created it. Instead the social change model is driven by the forces of people's local needs and is therefore more able to respond quickly and appropriately to specific events and political change. (Ekine, 2010)

The social change model is one that should sit comfortably with human rights activists and NGOs as early adopters and adapters of new technologies. For them it ensures that the new and exciting applications that are developed to support the protection and enjoyment of human rights are appropriate to their needs.

Moving beyond the technology, it is important to look at one of the most significant agendas for human rights, the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These provide a road map to address many of the major elements of structural violence within the world. However while there is acknowledged progress in some areas, the United Nations state in their own MDG Report of 2011:

Although many countries have demonstrated that progress is possible, efforts need to be intensified. They must also target the hardest to reach: the poorest of the poor and those disadvantaged because of their sex, age, ethnicity or disability. Disparities in progress between urban and rural areas remain daunting. (United Nations, 2011, p. 4)

There is a point of view that not only are the MDGs not achieving the required change, but that they are not even fit for purpose. Vandemoortele (2009) points out, for example, that instead of the MDGs targets being missed they are in fact missing the point.

The global MDG canon has not yet accepted that growing disparities within countries are the main reason why the world will miss the 2015 targets. Cognitive dissonance seems to prevail regarding growing inequalities. Instead, the global discourse has been dominated by a money-metric and donor-centric interpretation of the global targets. It has not yet started to mind the disparity gap. (Vandemoortele, 2009)

Against this background what can we expect of ICTs in addressing the continued inhumanity and the ongoing abuses of human rights? The trends evidenced in this book indicate that there is both grounds for optimism in the role that technology can play in addressing human rights abuses and violations, but also that there are dangers and difficulties. The early advice of Dueck and Rempel, which is echoed in different ways in other chapters, advises us that technology can be of benefit but that we must ensure it is used with care. We must also hold to account others who might use it or abuse it to deny human rights. Borrowing from Charles Dickens it might be said that the world of human rights is a little like the introduction to his work; *A Tale of Two Cities*:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way- in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only. (Dickens, 1859)

Whatever the future brings, it will be the responsibility of those who defend and campaign for human rights to be the noisiest authorities. As the rapid development of ICTs continues, there is a responsibility on everyone to ensure that they enhance human dignity rather than diminish it. The human rights community, which will always be an active stakeholder in ICT policies and possibilities, must ensure that this is so.

Edward F. Halpin
Leeds Metropolitan University, UK

John Lannon
University of Limerick, Ireland

REFERENCES

Brophy, P., & Halpin, E. F. (1999). Through the Net to freedom. *Journal of Information Science*, *25*(5), 351–364. doi:10.1177/016555159902500502

Castells, M. A. (2011). Network theory of power. *International Journal of Communication, 5,* 773–787. Retrieved December 23, 2011, from http://ascnetworksnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/IJoC-Network-Theory-2011-Castells.pdf

Dickens, C. (1859). *A tale of two cities*. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from http://www.literature.org/authors/dickens-charles/two-cities/book-01/chapter-01.html.

Ekine, S. (Ed.). (2010). *SMS uprising: Mobile activism in Africa*. Cape Town, South Africa: Pambazuka Press.

Harrison, J. (2011). Human rights measurement: Reflections on the current practice and future potential of human rights impact assessment. *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, *3*(2), 162–187. doi:10.1093/jhuman/hur011

Hendler, J. (2009). *Web 3.0 emerging*. Retrieved December, 23 2011, from http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/stamp/stamp.jsp?tp=&arnumber=4755170

Hick, S., Halpin, E. F., & Hoskins, E. (Eds.). (2000). *Human rights and the Internet*. Houndmills, UK: MacMillan Press Ltd.

HURIDOCS. (2011a). *Our history*. Retrieved December 19, 2011, from http://www.huridocs.org/our-history/

HURIDOCS. (2011b). *Vision, mission and goals*. Retrieved December 19, 2011 from http://www.huridocs.org/mission-vision-and-goals/

Kambil, A. (2008). What is your Web 5.0 strategy? *The Journal of Business Strategy*, *29*(6), 56–58. doi:10.1108/02756660810917255

Kappala-Ramsamy, G. (2011, 27 November). Amnesty: Why the pen is mightier than the sword. *The Guardian*. Retrieved December 27, 2011, from http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/27/amnesty-international-50-write-rights

Loader, B. J. (Ed.). (1997). *The governance of cyberspace: Politics, technology, and restructuring*. London, UK: Routledge. doi:10.4324/9780203360408

Metzl, J. (1996). Information technology and human rights. *Human Rights Quarterly*, *18*, 705–746. doi:10.1353/hrq.1996.0045

Norris, P. (2001). *Digital divide: Civic engagement, information poverty, and the Internet worldwide*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Pal, L., & Alexander, C. J. (1998). *Digital democracy*. Toronto, Canada: Oxford University Press United Nations. (2011). *The millennium development goals report 2011*. Retrieved December 23, 2011, from http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/11_MDG%20Report_EN.pdf

Vandemoortele, J. (2009). The MDG conundrum: Meeting the targets without missing the point. *Development Policy Review*, *27*(4), 355–371. doi:10.1111/j.1467-7679.2009.00451.x