

The Medical Humanities, Arts, and Ethics Series

# INFECTING RIGHTS

A Lecture by  
**Kate Gilmore**

Thursday, March 11, 2021, at 4 p.m. PT  
Live via Zoom  
University of Southern California

## WHAT TO KNOW

- Kate Gilmore was the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights from 2015 to 2019.
- She has been an advocate for the advancement and application of human rights norms and standards for more than three decades, and is a fellow at the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School.

**“The COVID-19 pandemic infects a world already afflicted by many contagions.”—Kate Gilmore**

## KATE GILMORE

Kate Gilmore was appointed United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2015, and served in the role until the end of 2019. She previously served as Assistant Secretary General and Deputy Executive Director for Programmes with the United Nations Population Fund, Executive Deputy Secretary General of Amnesty International, and National Director of Amnesty International Australia.

Gilmore started her career as a social worker and government policy officer in Australia. She helped establish Australia's first Centre Against Sexual Assault at Melbourne's Royal Women's Hospital, and her work over a number of years focused on prevention of violence against women. In Australia, she was granted honorary appointments to provincial and national public policy and law reform processes, including membership on the country's first National Committee on Violence Against Women.



## HUMAN RIGHTS IN A PANDEMIC

There are many, and complex, issues at the intersection of public health and human rights amid a pandemic, including:

- the human right to health, which includes the right to access healthcare, the right to access information, the prohibition of discrimination in the provision of medical services, the freedom from non-consensual medical treatment, and other important guarantees.
- discrimination and xenophobia.
- censorship and suppression of information that affects public health.
- harassment and intimidation of people trying to share information about the virus.
- freedom of speech and expression.
- freedom of movement.
- the human rights of incarcerated people.
- freedom of assembly.
- freedom of religion.
- health and economic disparities that lead to disproportionate impacts on communities of color, working-class communities, and others.

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

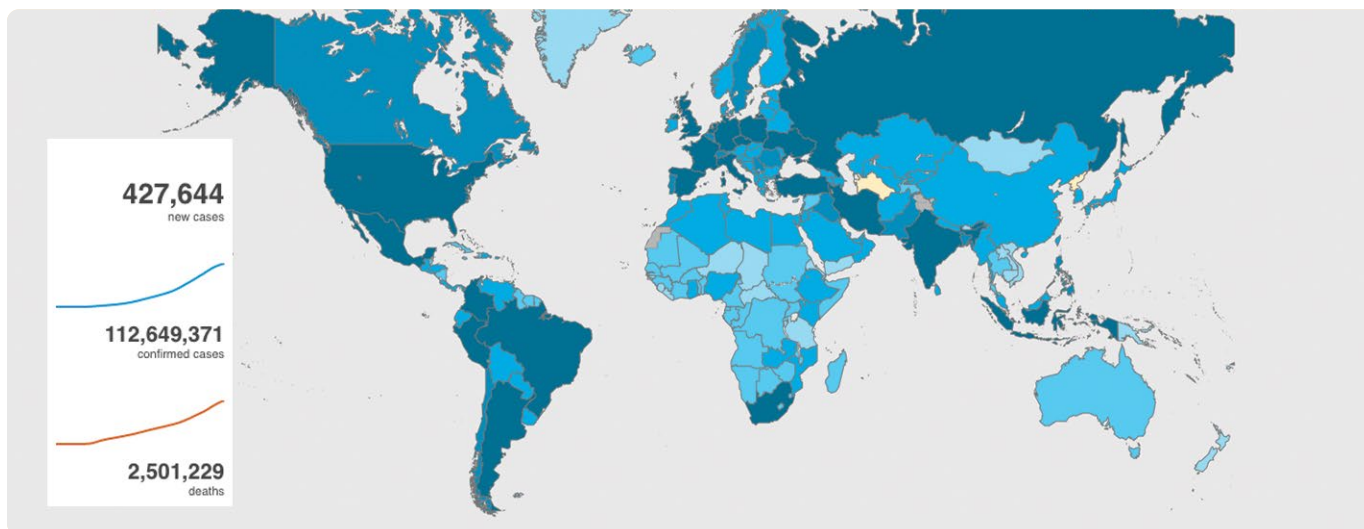
- In April 2020, the UN put out a report saying, “Human rights are key in shaping the pandemic response.” Did human rights appear to be a priority in the pandemic response as you witnessed or experienced it? Why or why not?
- Gilmore has said, “The shaping of the world’s COVID-19 response and recovery efforts is a time to be expansive in our human rights expectations.” What might this expansiveness look like?
- How has the COVID-19 crisis been exacerbated by racism, misogyny, and hostility to poor and working-class people?

## VOCABULARY CORNER

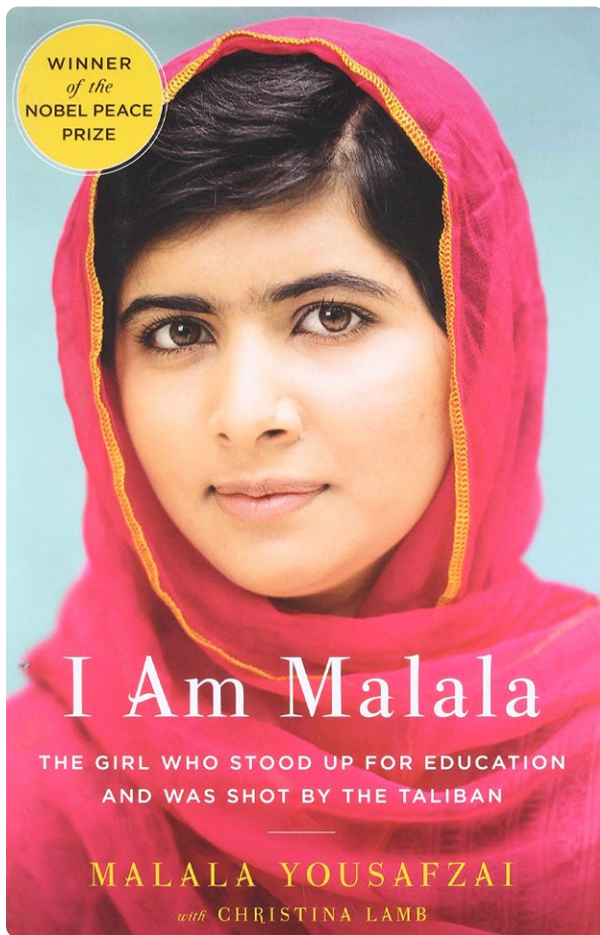
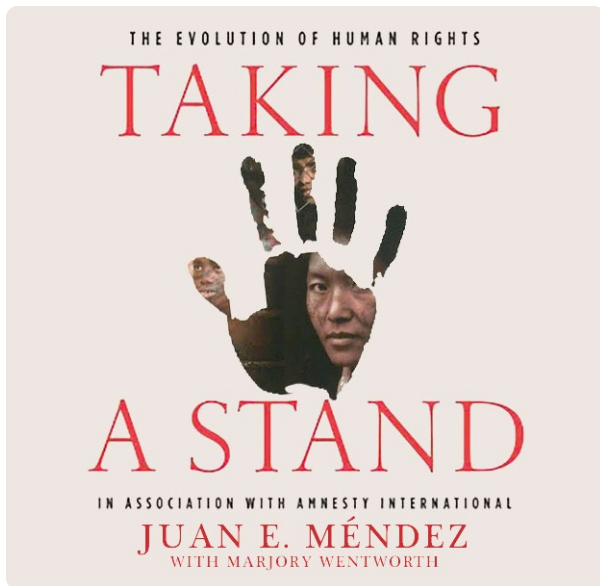
The phrase **human rights** became common in the post-World War II era, after the founding of the UN in 1945 and the adoption of the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

**“[W]hat the 2020 pandemic has revealed, in a harsh light, is just how unwilling and ill-equipped the world’s systems of power . . . are to confront and address the ongoing injuries of historical inequalities. COVID-19 poses again interrogations long awaiting conclusive answer. What will we do about the palpably unsustainable environmental and social costs of our greed and selfishness? When will we comprehensively end our tolerance of intimate and public hatefulness and violence? When will we definitively say enough already with the imposts of prejudice and bigotry? How can we end the power-hunger games of leaders willfully playing politics with global norms, universal values, and incontrovertible evidence?”**

—Kate Gilmore



World Health Organization Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19): Globally, as of February 26, 2021, there have been 112,649,371 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 2,501,229 deaths, reported to WHO.



- Who should be tasked with sorting out how to most expansively uplift and protect human rights during a pandemic? How should a society, or interconnected societies, navigate possible tensions between various rights and freedoms?

### IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights [un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights](http://un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights)
- Kate Gilmore's TEDx Talk [youtube.com/watch?v=eHYuE6Qc\\_ol](https://youtube.com/watch?v=eHYuE6Qc_ol)
- UN Human Rights interview with Kate Gilmore [youtube.com/watch?v=udiuBDeyfoA](https://youtube.com/watch?v=udiuBDeyfoA)
- The OHCHR's COVID-19 guidance [ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/COVID19Guidance.aspx](https://ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/COVID19Guidance.aspx)

### DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

CHRISTY KANE of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this evening's event. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at [libraries.usc.edu](http://libraries.usc.edu) but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

#### BOOKS

- Juan E. Méndez and Marjory Wentworth, *Taking a Stand: The Evolution of Human Rights* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
- Malala Yousafzai, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by The Taliban* (New York: Little, Brown, 2013).
- Vera Chirwa, *Fearless Fighter: An Autobiography* (New York: Zed Books, 2007).

#### ARTICLES

- Wade Cole, "Human Rights as Myth and Ceremony? Reevaluating the Effectiveness of Human Rights Treaties, 1981-2007," *American Journal of Sociology* 117, no. 4 (2012): 1131-71.
- Judith Schrempf-Stirling and Florian Wettstein, "Beyond Guilty Verdicts: Human Rights Legislation and its Impact on Corporations' Human Rights Policies," *Journal of Business Ethics* 145, no. 3 (2017): 545-62.
- Samantha Besson and Carmen Pavel, "The Bearers of Human Rights' Duties and Responsibilities for Human Rights: A Quiet (R)evolution?" *Social Philosophy & Policy* 32, no. 1 (2015): 244-68.

#### JOURNALS

- Human Rights Quarterly*
- Health and Human Rights*
- Journal of Human Rights Practice*

#### DATABASES

- [Human Rights Studies Online](#)
- [UN iLibrary](#)
- [Security Issues Online](#)