Call for Papers

The Bernard and Audre Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice at The University of Texas at Austin School of Law invites submissions for an interdisciplinary conference on the theme “Inequality and Human Rights,” to be held April 7-8, 2016.

Since the current global financial crisis began in 2008, income and wealth inequality both within and between countries has come under attack from multiple perspectives. While there is much methodological debate about how best to measure economic inequality globally, many of the figures are alarming. According to a recent report by Credit Suisse, half the world’s wealth is now owned by just 1% of the population, while the least well-off 50% own just 1% of global wealth.

Poverty, wealth and economic inequality are neither natural nor innate. Processes of impoverishment and uneven accumulation are produced, stabilized and sometimes challenged through legal and institutional arrangements, market competition, and social struggles. To date, human rights approaches to social and economic rights have primarily focused on poverty alleviation and the guarantee of basic rights. While not insignificant, these approaches have rarely attended to issues of extreme wealth or the social distribution of wealth.

We invite papers from any discipline that consider whether international human rights law, movements, and discourses have, could or should engage with the problem of economic inequality nationally or internationally. Are human rights frameworks equipped to address economic inequality? Might their promotion foreclose other, more effective, vocabularies and strategies aimed at economic justice? How might human rights frameworks need to change to contribute to a more egalitarian world?

We particularly encourage papers that consider these questions through contextualized examination of key sites of struggles over the distribution of income, benefits, access, decision-making power, and risk-exposure. Such sites might include policies and practices around taxation, money and finance, debt (both sovereign and personal), development, natural resources and the environment, education, intellectual property, criminalization, borders and migration, labor, housing, land ownership, and military intervention. Although our focus is on economic inequality, we also encourage papers that attend to the ways in which it interacts with other forms of inequality, such as those based on gender, race, nationality and physical and mental ability.

Please send an abstract of under 600 words to Julia Dehm (jdehm@law.utexas.edu) by December 1, 2015. A limited number of travel grants are available to support travel costs for selected participants who are unable to receive financial support from their home institutions. If you wish to apply for a travel grant, please complete an application form (available at https://goo.gl/jTRszZ).