

Human rights perspective adds value to climate change discussion



Leading scholars and practitioners in the fields of international human rights, climate change and philosophy came to Athens this spring to address the further incorporation of a human rights perspective

into talks about climate change.

The goal of the International Human Rights and Climate Change Conference was to advance this discussion and provide policymakers with the necessary tools to make more informed decisions.

The three fundamental issues identified by Associate Dean and Woodruff Chair in International Law Daniel M. Bodansky, a conference moderator, were: “How would we analyze climate change from a human rights perspective?” “What does a human rights perspective add?” and “What are the limits or problems – the costs to analyzing climate change from a human rights perspective?”

During one of the panel sessions, Wake Forest University Professor of Law John H. Knox noted that the United Nations found that climate change has serious implications for human rights, but that it does not necessarily violate human rights.

Nonetheless, according to Knox, there are obligations on the part of states to respond to these implications to human rights. This is particularly important when “climate change is expected to cause

millions of people to leave their homes in coming decades,” Knox added.

The Environmental Protection Agency’s Elizabeth O’Sullivan later expanded on this saying that environmental degradation will have a disproportionately large impact on poor and vulnerable populations through drought, heat, flooding and other environmental catastrophes.

“No people should bear a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences,” O’Sullivan said.

Also weighing in on the debate was Yale University Leitner Professor of Philosophy and International Affairs Thomas Pogge. His keynote address focused on the interrelation between poverty, overpopulation and climate change.

Pogge said that, unfortunately, inequality has been on the rise, even in developed countries.

A solution he proposed was structural reform of the reward system for innovation, i.e., patents that “offer [inventors] an alternative reward that is conditioned on the ecological impact – the ecological benefit – of the invention.”

Despite having elicited a number of novel ideas during the day-long conference, the question of whether a human rights perspective will be incorporated into the climate change discussion remains uncertain.

Several panelists noted that while a human rights perspective may not be the perfect answer to an approach to climate change, it offers several benefits that other approaches lack.

- CHRISTOPHER BLAKE McDANIEL, THIRD-YEAR LAW STUDENT AND GJICL EXECUTIVE CONFERENCE EDITOR

Gaps in nuclear security addressed

International experts convened in Vienna, Austria, in January to discuss ways to reduce the risk of nuclear terrorism and to ensure the security of nuclear materials and facilities worldwide.

Co-sponsored by the Dean Rusk Center and UGA’s Center for International Trade and Security, the workshop was designed to address current gaps and inconsistencies in nuclear security and to yield specific recommendations for improvement. More than 100 international experts in the fields of nuclear law, antiterrorism and nuclear security participated.

The proposed changes from the symposium focused on critical areas in the existing international legal framework designed

to strengthen nuclear security and combat nuclear terrorism. For instance, there was agreement on the need for the accelerated ratification of the 2005 Amendment to the Convention on Physical Protection of Nuclear Material, which would create a legally binding international standard for securing and transporting nuclear materials and safeguarding nuclear facilities.

This and other recommendations were submitted at a three-day meeting held in The Hague in preparation for April’s Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, D.C.

“Although elimination of nuclear weapons and materials for their development remains a long-term goal, ensuring the security of nuclear materials and facilities remains

the only means we have for now to prevent a possible nuclear catastrophe,” CITS Interim Director Igor Khripunov said.

The workshop also spurred a follow-up event held on the UGA campus during March titled April 2010 Nuclear Security Summit: Expectations and Realities. This latter symposium focused on the role of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 in providing an umbrella mechanism for further developing a legal framework designed to reduce the risk of nuclear terrorism and strengthen overall nuclear security. The current role of the International Atomic Energy Agency, as well as proposals to expand and further support the organization’s mandate and resources, was also discussed.