

Conference on Denialism and Human Rights



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Maastricht, the Netherlands

Maastricht Centre for Human Rights
Faculty of Law, Maastricht University



With key-notes by:

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Submissions on various relevant topics are still welcome, but we especially encourage abstracts on the topics of climate change, slavery, colonialism, discrimination and contemporary violent conflicts.

*“In 2001, the House of Representatives passed a bill that would have required United States importers and manufacturers to certify and label their products “slave free.” The defendants and others in the chocolate industry rallied against the bill, urging instead the adoption of a private, voluntary enforcement mechanism. A voluntary enforcement system was eventually adopted, a result that, according to the plaintiffs, “in effect guarantee[d] the continued use of the cheapest labor available to produce [cocoa]—that of **child slaves**.” (Doe V. Nestlé USA, Inc. 2014)*

*“Recently many people have said that the earth is facing a crisis requiring urgent action. This statement has nothing to do with science. There is no compelling evidence that the warming trend we've seen will amount to anything close to catastrophe. What most commentators—and many scientists—seem to miss is that the only thing we can say with certainty about **climate** is that it changes.” (Lindzen 2010)*

*When asked about the peculiar Dutch tradition of **Black Pete (Zwarte Piet)** by a foreign journalist Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte stated: “I said Black Pete is Black and I cannot change that. Sinterklaas is an old children's tradition; it's not Green Pete or Brown Pete and I cannot change that [...] My friends in the Dutch Antilles are very happy when they have to play Sinterklaas, because they don't have to paint their faces, and when I am playing for Black Pete I have for days try to get that black stuff off my face” (Rutte 2014)*

*“The majority of civilians in **Syria** continue to bear the brunt of the ongoing conflict, the head of a United Nations-appointed human rights panel said today, noting that violence has escalated to an unprecedented level, humanitarian aid is arbitrarily denied and perpetrators of crimes have no fear of consequence.” (UN News Centre 2014)*

The cases above illustrate that the **safeguarding of human rights remains problematic**, despite the proliferation of human rights instruments and the many actions taken by a variety of actors, such as governmental and non-governmental organizations, (individual) states and the international community over the past decades. Human rights violations do still occur and injustice remains rampant. Central to this problem appears to be that social, economic, cultural and political structures in societies provide for denialist defense mechanisms. Such **deeply embedded denialism causes and/or facilitates human rights violations**, because the true nature of the problems involved remains fully or partly unacknowledged and as a result appropriate action remains absent. In order to safeguard the effectuation of human rights it is thus pertinent to acknowledge and address this problem of denialism and develop strategies to move beyond it.

We challenge all scholars, practitioners, and students from various disciplines and fields to unearth and **address denialism in the context of their own particular area of research**. We especially invite them to consider and deal with the following issues:

- Firstly, **a clear conception and definition of denialism should be developed**. What does denialism exactly entail? On what social, economic, cultural and political structures and mechanisms in societies does it operate and how? What ideologies and prejudices are involved?
- Secondly, **denialism operating in practice should be investigated** and its relation to and particular relevance for human rights issues should be clarified. In which concrete cases do we see denialism ‘at work’? What are the implications in terms of human rights? How is the effectuation of these rights blocked or obstructed? Is denialism only destructive or can it also be constructive? Can human rights discourse itself be in denial?
- Thirdly, **how should we deal with denialism** and move to a situation of human rights consistent behavior and change? Is it always possible to move from denial to compliance? What are suitable strategies or policies? Is legislation required? Which factors obstruct human rights change in denialist situations?

The conference format will be a mixture of small panels with plenary keynote sessions. The Maastricht Centre for Human Rights welcomes abstracts and suggestions for panels related to the questions raised above and the conference theme more generally. To this end, scholars, practitioners, field workers, and students from various academic disciplines (such as law, psychology, political science, international relations, criminology, anthropology, sociology, etc.) and other relevant practice based fields are encouraged to apply. **Submissions are still welcome, but we encourage abstracts on the topics of climate change, slavery, colonialism, discrimination and contemporary violent conflicts.**

The **deadline** for submissions of abstracts and panel descriptions (max. 300 words) is extended to **31 October 2014**. You can email them to: roland.moerland@maastrichtuniversity.nl. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to inquire. Notification of acceptances will be sent by e-mail by 15 November 2014. Note that after the conference a selection of papers (max. 8500 words) will be published in an **edited book**. All other contributions will be made **available on-line**. More information about the programme, the conference fee and the details on the submission of abstracts and suggestions for panels can be found on the following website: <http://law.maastrichtuniversity.nl/denialismandhumanrights/>. For more information about the project, see also our [Facebook](#) page as well as the [website](#) of the Maastricht Centre for Human Rights.