

Hong Kong's Youth Protests and US Position

By Manana Swanson, Adjunct Professor and Visiting Scholar at S-CAR, mgnolidz@gmu.edu

The recent youth protests expressed through civil disobedience, boycotting of classes, and blocking of government offices in Hong Kong have captured international public attention. These protests were dubbed "Occupy Central" (named after one of its organizing bodies) or the peaceful Umbrella Revolution. The expression of discontent through peaceful demonstrations is not unprecedented in the recent history of



Protest in Happy Valley, Hong Kong Island. Photo: Flickr user Aaron Hui.

Hong Kong. Protests in 2003 in regards to the attempt of Hong Kong's Government to introduce national security legislation - Article 23 - can be called successful as they achieved the aim they intended. The unprecedented support for the unofficial referendum launched this summer by the Occupy Central movement for the universal suffrage in Hong Kong is not surprising, given the recent developments in the city's political life.

Understanding current events is easier if examining the history of Hong Kong. In 1997, Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region (SAR) in the People's Republic of China, administered by the Legislative Council and the Chief Executive who is elected by the Electoral Council comprised of 1,200 representatives from a broad range

of permanent residents of the city. Hong Kong became a British colony after the first Opium War (1839-1842) when the Nanjing agreement was signed between China and Great Britain. The second agreement was signed in Beijing in 1898, when Great Britain, while extending Hong Kong's territory to the main land, leased Hong Kong for 99 years, until June 30, 1997. Hong Kong was declared a Special Administrative Region (SAR) within China on July 1, 1997.

The major documents regulating current relations between the Hong Kong SAR and the central government in Beijing are: (1) "Sino-British Joint Declaration on the Question of Hong Kong" (1984) and (2) "Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China (PRC)."

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"Many Notes, One Symphony": Reflections from the 14th Annual ACR Conference

By Kwaw de Graft-Johnson, S-CAR PhD Student and Newsletter Editor, kdegraft@gmu.edu

The Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR) is a "professional organization enhancing the practice and public understanding of conflict resolution." The organization also looks to provide "a voice to the choices for quality conflict resolution." This year, the ACR annual conference which is in its 14th year, was held in Cincinnati, Ohio from October 8-11, 2014 under the theme "Many Notes, One Symphony: Conflict Engagers in Harmony." To emphasize the significance of this theme, ACR President Cheryl Jamison Esq., in her introductory remarks said, "This conference will provide a wonderful time learning together, building long-lasting connections, and collaborating on future opportunities for growth in the conflict resolution community."

One of the new highlights of this year's conference was the addition of the 'New Voices-Emerging Professionals' initiative. According to Jamison, "this initiative is designed to give new practitioners an opportunity to present their research and story at the conference." The seven finalists who presented at the conference were Kim Cowgill, whose presentation was titled *Intractable Conflicts in Local Sustainable Development Projects*; Asif Majid – *Conflict Energy*; Dana Caspersen – *Choreographic Conversations*; Mary Novak – *Harnessing the Power of Story*; Sharon Silbert – *Cultivating Mindfulness in the Conflict Resolution Practitioner*; Paul Charlton – *Changing Hidden Curriculum of Medical Education*; and Kerri Schmitt – *Restorative Dialogue: Healing the Heart of Conflict*. More information on their presentations can be found at: <http://www.acrannualconference.org/new-voices---emerging-professionals.html>

The keynote speaker at this year's conference was Tim Wise, a prominent anti-racism writer and educator in the United States. Some of the books he has written are *Dear White America: Letter to a New Minority* and *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*. Utne Reader also recently named Wise as "one of the

25 visionaries who are changing your world." In his keynote address, he spoke about how class, race, sexuality, and gender are all shaped by power dynamics that create systems that are very difficult to navigate. According to Wise, "when one is a member of a dominant social group, with disproportionate power in any given social setting, the ability to empathize and to even understand not the

other persons lens, but to acknowledge ones own lens and to understand that it is somehow mis-shaping ones understanding of a conflict is hard to come by." To conclude his address, he asked that all those who advocate on behalf of groups on issues such as gender, race, and class among others, should start to build bridges and work together rather than work on separate projects. "It is only through cooperation that real and lasting change can happen."

This year, the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution was represented at the conference by faculty

members Sara Cobb and Mara Schoeny, adjunct faculty David Smith, and PhD candidates Allison Castel and Sarah Federman. Sara Cobb, Sarah Federman, and Allison Castel conducted a panel titled "Narrative Practices for Conflict Resolution – Externalization and Circular Questioning." Their session focused on inviting participants of the conference "to experience narrative as a conflict resolution practice." David Smith and Mara Schoeny hosted a panel titled *Full Immersion Simulation as a Means to Building Career Ready Skills in International Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding*. This session focused on the creation of a full immersion training exercise called "Atlantic Hope" and the lessons learned from the exercise.

The conference also marked a change in the leadership of ACR, as Cheryl Jamison handed over her presidency to Nancy Flatters, a non-sitting Calgary Family and Youth Court Judge. Next year, the ACR conference will be held at the Atlantis Casino Resort Spa in Reno, Nevada from October 7 through 10, 2015 under the theme "Thinking about our thinking: from emerging research to practical application." Proposals for the conference can be submitted up to December 15, 2014 at www.surveymonkey.com/s/ACR2015_CallForProposals. ■



Downtown Cincinnati where the 14th Annual ACR conference was held. Photo: Flickr user Kabir Bakie.

The Center for the Study of Gender and Conflict at S-CAR: Events and Projects for 2014 - 2015 Academic Year

By Alice Peck, S-CAR MS Student and Program Officer, Center for the Study of Gender and Conflict, apeak2@gmu.edu

The Center for the Study of Gender and Conflict is proud to announce its exciting program of events this academic year. We are thrilled that Dr. Cynthia Enloe will give the keynote address at our annual conference in April 2015. Dr. Enloe is the Director of International Development, Community, and Environment at Clark University, and faculty in the Women's and Gender Studies, and the Department of Political Science. She is a visionary in the field of feminist international relations and the author of numerous books, including *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (2000), *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (2004), and recently *The Real State of America: Mapping the Myths and Truths about the United States* (2011). The CGC invites abstracts for the conference 'Critical Intersections: Conflict, Gender, and Power' by December 1, 2014.

The conference marks the culmination of this year's program at the Center for the Study of Gender and Conflict (CGC). Our Brown Bag series began on October 9, 2014, with Dr. Jennifer McCleary-Sills, a Gender Based Violence (GBV) specialist at the World Bank Group, who presented on GBV and the overlapping deprivations that increase a woman's risk of experiencing violence. On November 9th, the series welcomes Dr. Supriya Bailey, Assistant Professor in International Education at George Mason University, who will speak about grassroots gender empowerment in India. This series will continue in the spring with Dr. Aisling Swaine, who will lead a discussion on gender violence and security.

As well as Brown Bags, the CGC also hosts monthly Gender Salons – an informal event that provides students an opportunity to discuss and debate contentious issues in the field, practice skills, and develop relationships in a casual environment. The format of the salon is intended to provide an open space for dialogue and debate around a given topic. The first salon of the semester last month was titled *Ferguson, Masculinity and Violence*. Our next Gender Salon will meet at S-CAR on the 29th of October to discuss reproductive justice and reproductive rights.

Finally, CGC is holding two panels this year. The first addresses the challenges facing women in STEM fields, and will take place on January 12th. The second panel, on February 12, 2015, will look at legal responses to sexual violence. Both panels feature speakers from diverse fields and backgrounds. For more information about the CGC's program of events, visit gmu.edu/gender.

Background to CGC

Conceived during a discussion over lunch, the Center



Alice Peck. Photo: Alice Peck

for the Study of Gender and Conflict (CGC) was founded in 2012 at the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (S-CAR). CGC is an intellectual community of faculty, students, and professional practitioners committed to addressing the gendered dynamics of conflict, including the direct violence of war, sexual assault, and genocide and pressing issues of political and economic marginalization. Drawing upon a decade of intensive engagement in gender-related work at S-CAR, the CGC serves as a link between the academy and the field to deepen and expand our understanding of the gendered dimensions of conflict. Recognizing that gender impacts all facets of life for both women and men, the CGC offers innovative and comprehensive

approaches to understanding and transforming gendered conflicts.

Staff

CGC is composed of both students and faculty. The Director of the center is Leslie Dwyer, Assistant Professor of Conflict Analysis and Anthropology at S-CAR. Her academic expertise focuses on violence, gender, post-conflict social life and transitional justice. Dr. Sandra Cheldelin, the Vernon M. and Minnie I. Lynch Professor of Conflict Resolution, is the principal. A specialist in group and organisational conflict, Dr. Cheldelin has worked on gender-related issues and conflict interventions in Bosnia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Georgia, the Middle East, Turkey, Liberia, and China. Elizabeth Mount, a PhD student at S-CAR, is the Executive Director. Elizabeth manages programming, development, and public/private partnerships, and her research focuses on masculinity and sexual violence. Lisa McLean is the Dean's Fellow at CGC and a new PhD student at S-CAR. As the director of CGC's program, Lisa's goals are to broaden the awareness of feminist and gendered analyses of conflict, and to directly contribute to the body of knowledge and scholarship concerning these issues. Alice Peck is a Master's student at S-CAR and the Program Officer at CGC. Responsible for overseeing the financial and administrative programming of CGC, Alice's research interests include gender and access to justice, masculinity in humanitarian intervention and discourse surrounding victimhood and vulnerability. Mel Weyant, a Master's student at S-CAR, is the media intern at CGC and works to publicise the work of CGC within S-CAR, GMU and to the broader DC community, as well as students and external partners in our projects. Mel is interested in domestic community building and the intersection of race, gender, and poverty, as well as juvenile-justice issues. For more information on events and to get involved with our work, please visit scar.gmu.edu/gender or email us at scarcg@gmail.com.

initiatives

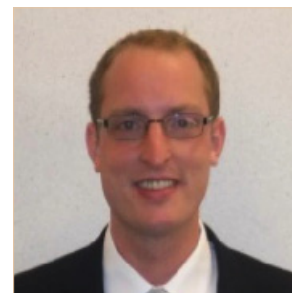
S-CAR Student Association Elections: Profiles of the New Elected Executives for 2014-2015

EVENTS



Ellen Galdava is a current MS student at the School of Conflict Analysis and Resolution. Ellen graduated from American University in Bulgaria with a dual degree in Political Science and International Relations and Business Administration. Her past work experiences were in the Foreign Ministry of Georgia, Chancellery of Prime Minister of Georgia, Parliament of Georgia, and International Peace and Security Institute (IPSI) in Washington, DC. Currently, she is program assistant at Women in International Security (WIIS) and research assistant at the Fund for Peace. Her academic and professional interest is in conflict resolution, international negotiation, identity, and narrative. She speaks Russian and Georgian fluently. You can contact her at egaldava@masonlive.gmu.edu.

William Johnson, newly elected Treasurer of the S-CAR Student Association, is in his first year of study in the Master's Program at S-CAR. Originally from Des Moines, Iowa, he received his undergraduate degree in Political Science from Iowa State University. Professionally, William works to encourage private sector engagement in post-conflict and developing regions, as well as with programs designed to increase workforce readiness and skills programming for youth. He looks forward to engaging with students, faculty, and the greater Washington D.C. community in order to build the network and capacity of the S-CAR student body. Feel free to drop him a note at wjohns16@gmu.edu.



Alaa Kamel is a second year student in the M.S. program. In her undergraduate years she was the president of Model United Nations and Model Arab League, while participating in organizations such as Take Back The Night and Student Voice. The skills and experiences she acquired have been invaluable to her and assisted her in extending her services to her communities in Los Angeles and Egypt, and she hope to utilize these skills to strengthen the student body. Last year she was the Secretary for the Africa Working Group and came to learn about the many difficulties faced by a first year graduate student, all the working groups, and networking in DC. Currently she is working at the Food Research Action Center, and focusing on labor issues for her thesis. Contact her at akamel2@masonlive.gmu.edu.

Upcoming Events

Tuesday, October 28, 2014

Movie: The Betrayal - Nerakhoon
3:00pm - 5:00pm

Thursday, October 30, 2014

Brown Bag - Liberia: Challenges to Managing the Ebola Outbreak
12:30pm - 2:00pm

Tuesday, November 4, 2014

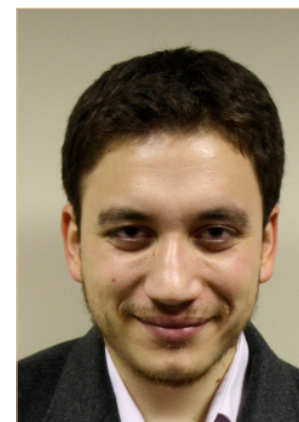
Ukraine: The Way Forward
7:00pm - 9:00pm

Friday, November 7, 2014

Research Workshop: The Arab Uprisings in Comparative Perspective
9:00am - 5:00pm

For more, visit: scar.gmu.edu/events-roster

Hilmi Ulas hails from the island of Cyprus and is a PhD candidate. He holds a double BA degree in political science and French from Grinnell College, where he enjoyed the cold weather and tornadoes, as well as a fun campus life. Wanting to learn about how to contribute to conflict resolution in his home country (and admittedly in search of better climes) he came to S-CAR - which used to be ICAR in those ancient days - and stayed there because he fell in love with the city and the institution. Nowadays he pretends to be 'dissertating' and hopes that it will write itself by sheer willpower and hope. He would love to help S-CAR folk be more integrated and contribute to the way things work as he sees lots of potential for mutual learning and gains there. Contact him at: hulas@masonlive.gmu.edu



Opinion: Liberia's Ebola Pandemic: A Case of Institutional Failure

By Samuel Wai Johnson, Jr., S-CAR PhD Candidate and Graduate Lecturer, sjohnsl@masonlive.

As the Brussels Airlines flight lifted from the runway of the Roberts International Airport in Margibi, Liberia on the evening of September 29, 2014, I became anxiety-stricken – happy and relieved that I was finally on my way back to the US to continue my studies, but sad that I was leaving my family and my country. Liberia is once again being decimated, not by bullets this time, but by the Ebola Virus pandemic. The pandemic that first hit Liberia temporarily in February - March returned in July with renewed vigor, bringing down the entire country's healthcare system, a scenario that was unthinkable a year earlier.

Liberia was celebrating its first decade of peace following one of the most destructive civil wars in modern history. The civil war that ended officially in June 2003 left 10 percent of the country's population dead, and a quarter million as refugees or internally displaced persons. So in June 2013, Liberians celebrated what might have been an unthinkable feat – 10 years of no war! Their country was now on a steady course of peace, progress, hope, and development. Liberia's president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf remarked during the celebrations: "The gains we are making are irreversible. Liberia is enjoying sustained peace and stability, and is experiencing robust growth and improvement in social and economic well-being." From Johnson-Sirleaf's standpoint, Liberia was a post-conflict statebuilding success story. "That is something for which we should all be proud! It means that with every passing year, we are putting the dreadful spectre of war further and further behind us," she added.

But data from the Liberia Institute for Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS) and the UNDP Human Development Report seem to paint a rather different picture about the social and economic wellbeing of Liberians. According to a recent report by LISGIS, about 79 percent of Liberians of employment age are working in "precarious circumstances" with no social protection and limited possibilities for attaining economic security. Besides, the country's human development index (HDI) remains low. Liberia ranks among the last 15 of 186 countries in the world listed in the UNDP Human Development Report 2013. With an HDI of 0.388, Liberia is below the average HDI of 0.466 for low HDI countries and below the average of 0.475 for Sub-Saharan Africa. When discounted for inequality, Liberia HDI falls to 0.251, a loss of 35.3 percent of its human development potential due to inequality in education, life expectancy, and income.

All of these difficulties are happening in the wake of a rather favorable economic growth with growth rates

of 5.3%, 6.1%, 7.9%, and 8.3% in 2009-12, respectively. Since 2006, Liberia has attracted about \$16 billion in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Liberia also received the World Bank Doing Business 2014 survey's designation as the 31st place globally and the fifth easiest place in Africa to start a business. President Johnson-Sirleaf believes that these indicators are excellent testimonies to the progress the country has made in building robust state institutions that address the contextual gaps created by the civil war – the capacity, the security, and the legitimacy gaps. These gaps impede the state's ability to deliver the public goods that guarantee the socioeconomic wellbeing of its population through long-term political protection for both the strong and the weak, performing statutory obligations that ensure both physical and economic security of its citizens and the existence of legitimate political institutions.

For the ordinary Liberian, the Liberian state has failed in the delivery of these public goods. Prior to the Ebola outbreak, the government was unable to meet its statutory obligations outlined in its annual budget with several reports of budget shortfall, as the legislators successively demanded the increase in their emoluments over the welfare of the general population as a pre-condition for the passage of the national budget. At the same time, the Liberian dollar depreciated against the US dollar, jumping from 79 Liberian dollars to one US dollar in April to an all-time high of 90 Liberian dollars to one US dollar by July. This decline in the strength of the Liberian dollar did have serious implications for the wellbeing of Liberia's poor who constitute the majority of country's population. It also indicated the extent to which Liberians have come to distrust their government as the guarantor of economic stability, and keeping the Liberian dollar as a stable store of wealth and economic security. There has also been the issue of corruption dogging public officials.



Police in Liberia looking for Ebola patients who fled a clinic. Photo: Flickr user Ogbodo Solution.

Recent S-CAR Articles, Op-Eds, Letters to the Editor, and Media Appearances

Go After Super Pollutants

Rep. Scott Peters (D-Calif) and Michael Shank, S-CAR Alumnus
The Hill 10/20/14

Police Militarization Must be Halted

Michael Shank, S-CAR Alumnus
Politix 10/13/14

Responding to Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Is Religious Freedom the Answer?

Marc Gopin, S-CAR faculty
Berkley Center 10/7/14

Conflict Analysts from S-CAR have appeared on 16 occasions since the last newsletter. These 3 represent a sample of those publications. For a complete list, please visit: <http://scar.gmu.edu/media>

OPINION

Dylan Bates, S-CAR Undergraduate Student

By Amber Bergeron, S-CAR Undergraduate Student, abergero@gmu.edu

Dylan Bates has been an enthusiastic member and heavily involved with the S-CAR community since joining the program two years ago. Having learned about S-CAR from his hometown of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, he moved to Fairfax in order to join the program.

Since his acceptance at George Mason University, he has become a founding officer of the undergraduate student organization Agora sponsored by S-CAR, which emphasizes discussion, community, and student-led initiatives. He has also volunteered for the Center for World Religions, Diplomacy, and Conflict Resolution (CRDC), has received training from Peer Mediation Partners (PMP), and works as the Program Assistant



Dylan Bates. Photo: Dylan Bates.

for the Center for the Advancement of Well-Being at George Mason University.

Dylan has a concentration in international conflict with particular interest in Latin America and hopes to be able to apply what he has learned in the program as a Peace Corps volunteer in Latin America following his graduation this upcoming spring. As someone who is always excited to be involved and try new things, Dylan has completed multiple marathons, enjoys swimming, and has recently taken up rock-climbing.

He is looking forward to these next semesters and seeing just how much Agora will be able to accomplish. He credits much of his drive and passion to his family who practice values of working hard and aiming high to achieve goals. He is excited to continue his conflict education through practice after graduation and to pursue a graduate degree after the Peace Corps. ■

Rochelle Arms, S-CAR PhD Student

By Kwaw de Graft-Johnson, S-CAR PhD Student and Newsletter Editor, kdegraft@gmu.edu

Rochelle Arms, a PhD student at S-CAR, first became involved in the field of conflict analysis and resolution, when she volunteered for a kick-start mediation program at her undergraduate school. “What started out as an extracurricular activity soon evolved into a full time profession, and after completing my undergrad program, I got a job as a mediator and restorative justice practitioner in Lexington, Kentucky,” she said. “We worked with homicide offenders and victim survivors throughout Kentucky, preparing them for dialogues. This was very difficult and intense work, because there was so much pain on both sides.” The intentions of the two groups critical to this work - victim advocates and defendant advocates – also made her work more challenging as they often disagreed on the meaning of “mending the harm.”

Rochelle’s work, though, earned her a Rotary Peace Fellowship from the Rotary Foundation to study in Argentina, where she focused on the application of conflict resolution methods to disagreements between indigenous people and the government. She became interested in the “cultural broker,” an idea inspired in part by Kevin Avruch, the

Dean at S-CAR, in determining the ideal profiles of cultural brokers in Argentina, “who could navigate comfortably and effectively amongst indigenous activists and government officials.” After completing the fellowship, Rochelle returned to the United States, where she set up and managed the New York Peace Institute’s restorative justice program. She trained mediators and established a referral system from the criminal court for misdemeanor cases (mostly minor assaults).

Although Rochelle was very happy with her career choice, she wanted to have more of an empirical understanding of why certain methods were chosen in mediation practice, as it seemed more like a “trial and error process.” “I also want to understand how our biology affects the conflict experience and what types of interventions result with a better understanding of this. I think we need more serious study of the biopsychology of conflict so that we can improve our processes for supporting people in conflict.” This assessment led Rochelle to S-CAR. After she completes her degree, she will look to combine her two passions, teaching and mediation, toward becoming a true scholar-practitioner in the field. ■



Rochelle Arms. Photo: Rochelle Arms.

Hong Kong's Umbrella Revolution and US Foreign Policy

Continued from page 1

Signatories of the agreements respected the statements declared in the documents and the promise from the Chinese Government that the “one country, two systems” approach would not be affected for fifty years, with eventual universal suffrage for the Chief Executive and the Legislative Council of Hong Kong. The electoral reform was scheduled to take place in 2007 for the Chief Executive, but the Legislative Council failed to manage the process or to pass the law. The electoral reform was postponed until 2017 (for the Legislative Council, and 2020 for the chief administrative body of Hong Kong).

The United States Government expressed its position in the 2007 Hong Kong Policy Act through the US Department of State – “The United States has strong interests in the protection of human rights and the promotion of democracy throughout the world. In Hong Kong, the United States is committed to promoting democratic values, facilitating the development of democratic institutions, and generally supporting the advancement toward universal suffrage in accordance with the wishes of the Hong Kong people.”

The Occupy Central movement began in response to the decision of PRC to screen candidates proposed by the Nominating Committee for the position of Chief Executive. The initial organizers of the movement were the Hong Kong Federation of Students, joined by Scholarism – a movement of secondary school students and Occupy Central with Love and Peace – founded by Benny Tai Yiu-ting, Associate Professor of Law at the University of Hong Kong. The similarity to the Occupy Wall Street movement is in name only. Occupy Central is a political movement and does not target capitalism or the increased income gap. The protesters' main demand is for the people of Hong Kong to have the choice to nominate their own candidates without screening by PRC. The second demand from the protesters is for the current Chief Executive to resign. The negotiations intended between the students and the Hong Kong Government were called off on October 6. It is not clear what will happen next, though as the Chief Executive has refused to resign. Currently, the demand of the protesters for him to step down is becoming



Manana Swanson, Adjunct Professor and Visiting Scholar. Photo: S-CAR.

even more vocal. The actions of the movement and its members' highly organized behavior (cleaning, organizing garbage, hotline for students for legal assistance in case of arrest, etc.) are reflective of the history of Hong Kong and the identity of its people formed under the influence of many factors. Hong Kong has been a part of British Empire for 150 years, has enjoyed economic prosperity and boom since the 1980s in particular, corresponding with the creation of political parties, and experienced a peaceful transformation into the Special Administrative Region under China.

The position of the U.S. Government, according to its Consulate General Statement (September 28, 2014) on the contemporary development of Occupy Central, is “consistent with the support for Hong Kong's well-established traditions and Basic Law protections of internationally recognized

fundamental freedoms” and “the U.S. Government does not take side or supports any group or individual participating in the Occupy Central movement.” The U.S. Government called for dialogue: “We encourage all sides to refrain from actions that would further escalate tensions, to exercise restraint, and to express views on the SAR's political future in a peaceful manner.” The US position regarding Hong Kong was again highlighted during the meeting of US Secretary of State, Kerry, and China's Foreign Minister, Wang Yi on October 1, 2014 in Washington DC.

Kerry expressed support for universal suffrage in accordance with the Basic Law, open society “with the highest possible degree of autonomy and governed by the rule of law.” The Foreign Minister framed the issue as an internal affair of China, and that Hong Kong authorities were capable of properly handling the situation in accordance with the law. The Government of China and administration of Hong Kong, are trying to contain the protests through peaceful means, and only limited incidents of violence when the police sprayed tear gas and pepper spray and an aggressive mob attacked some protesters, have been reported.

The US position in Hong Kong for now, is calling for the respect of human rights and freedom simultaneously, and is not rushing to support or condemn either side. This is a sensible approach from the US, in particular on the eve of the upcoming meeting of US and Chinese Presidents in November when China hosts APEC Economic Leaders' Week (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) in Beijing chaired by the President Xi Jinping. ■



Police attacking demonstrators with tear gas.

Photo: Flickr user Pasu Au Yeung.

The Liberian media have been awash with reports of financial malfeasance by government officials, with little or no legal action against these officials. In a recent meeting with members of her cabinet, President Johnson-Sirleaf acknowledged the declining trust of the public in her government's commitment to the fight against corruption. Liberia is ranked 83rd among 177 countries on the Transparency International's 2013 Corruption Perception Index, an index based on public perception of how corrupt a country's public sector is.

When people are denied economic security and political participation, they will pursue every action collectively in order to regain these basic human needs. However, if such collective action as public protest or civil upheaval are not possible, people will either absent themselves from the state or governance system or the state becomes absent in their lives, even at the perils of their own lives. This has been the nature of the relationship between the state and its people in Liberia. By the time of the Ebola outbreak, the Liberian state had lost its legitimacy, become absent, while its authority continued to wither away. Nothing demonstrated this better than the huge disbelief and contempt that greeted the government's announcement of the outbreak in July. At the time, many Liberians believed that the announcement was only a ploy by the government to attract donor monies. It took weeks of reports of a rising death toll, including among members of the same families, and an intensive community-sensitization effort by local community leaders to rectify this disbelief, though the contempt for the government remained ever present.

The Ebola crisis has therefore been only a tipping point, highlighting the uneasy calm that has characterized the state-society relationship and the institutional crisis of the statebuilding process in Liberia. While the government and its international partners paint a picture of Liberia as a country with beautiful and enviable statebuilding architecture, the focus on the institutional landscape alone – the presence of a market economy, the successive elections, the operations of a criminal justice system, etc. – has negated the significance of the institutional arrangements in the country's statebuilding process. The phrase "institutional arrangements" refers to the inner workings of state institutions in addressing the issues of the distribution of political power and economic wealth. Institutional arrangements indicate whether state governance is producing fundamental changes in the lives of the population

that are conflict-sensitive – addressing the root cause of the conflict.

The focus on the institutional landscape alone makes statebuilding intervention a superficial process. Emphasizing institutional arrangements over the institutional landscape ensures that the focus of the statebuilding is concerned not only with the immediate impact of the conflict on state institutions, but extending statebuilding to addressing the root cause of the conflict. In Liberia's case, this emphasis on the institutional landscape over the institutional arrangements has ignored the significant micro issues of inequality, poverty, and deprivation, as well as whether the governance of state institutions has produced fundamental changes in the lives of most Liberians. The Liberian government has consistently increased its budgetary allocations to institutions believed to have direct and significant relationship to the wellbeing of its population: health, water and sanitation, education, and public works (i.e. physical infrastructure). The social and economic development impacts of these commendable increases in budgetary allocations are not clear, however, and there are concerns in the population that the implementation of this fiscal policy tool is extractive and not inclusive. More than 60 percent of the population live in poverty and lack access to basic social services such as healthcare, safe drinking water and sanitation, and quality education.

For a country whose conflict was generated by structural inequality, poverty, and bad governance, the emphasis on the institutional landscape is good, but the focus on the institutional arrangements should be paramount. As the country and its international partners intensify the fight against this deadly scourge, Liberia needs a serious rethink about the functioning and arrangements of its state institutions. The Liberian state needs to reorient its governance towards emphasis on the arrangements of its institutions away from the preoccupation with the institutional landscape. This is not about designing institutions beautifully on paper and announcing them at public ceremonies or in reports to international partners. This is about ensuring that the functioning of these institutions produce positive fundamental changes in the lives of Liberians, changes that address the root cause of the country's conflict. Papers and reports do not bleed, people do! And only a statebuilding intervention that is conflict-sensitive and inclusive can prevent this bleeding. ■



School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution

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