

# Towards 2122 and Beyond

Citation for published version (APA):

Coomans, F. (2022). *Towards 2122 and Beyond: Developing the Human Rights of Future Generations*. Maastricht University. <https://doi.org/10.26481/spe.20220902fc>

## Document status and date:

Published: 02/09/2022

## DOI:

[10.26481/spe.20220902fc](https://doi.org/10.26481/spe.20220902fc)

## Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

## Please check the document version of this publication:

- A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
- The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
- The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

[Link to publication](#)

## General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

If the publication is distributed under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license above, please follow below link for the End User Agreement:

[www.umlib.nl/taverne-license](http://www.umlib.nl/taverne-license)

## Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at:

[repository@maastrichtuniversity.nl](mailto:repository@maastrichtuniversity.nl)

providing details and we will investigate your claim.



**Prof. dr. Fons Coomans**

Faculty of Law

**Towards 2122 and Beyond:  
Developing the Human Rights of Future Generations**

## **Towards 2122 and Beyond: Developing the Human Rights of Future Generations**

**Prof Fons Coomans, Farewell Address, Maastricht University, 2 September 2022**

Mevrouw de Rector,

Gewaardeerde collega's en overige toehoorders,

On 1 September 1985, I started my career as Wetenschappelijk Assistant at the Faculty of Law of Maastricht University. I was recruited by Kees Flinterman, one of the founding fathers of the Faculty. Soon after that Kees and Theo van Boven set up a Project Group on Human Rights Research. I became a member and after some time it was agreed that I should write a PhD-thesis on the human right to education, which I defended in 1992. Since then a lot has happened in human rights law and human rights research. The Maastricht Centre for Human Rights was established in 1993. It became well-known for its research on economic, social and cultural rights, at the time a set of rights, under-developed and under-researched and sometimes called the stepchild of the human rights family. Already back in 1986 the Limburg Principles on the Nature of State Parties Obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights were adopted at an expert meeting in Maastricht to clarify these rights. I attended that meeting as a very junior researcher.

Since then economic, social and cultural rights have never left me. They have been the source of inspiration for my own research, many collaborative projects, PhD-research by young colleagues and cooperation with academia and non-governmental organizations.

I have always been intrigued by the question how human rights law can be pushed further with a view to responding to societal changes and challenges and contribute to a society that is more fair. In other words, normative legal research about how the law should develop, *de lege ferenda*.

In this address I want to look back at this period since 1985 by highlighting a number of key achievements from the perspective of this process of progressive development of the law on economic, social and cultural rights. In the second part I want to discuss the latest developments on this ongoing process of pushing the law further, namely developing the human rights of members of future generations.

When we follow the news, it is abundantly clear that the planet is in crisis: the future of mankind is at stake in light of the ongoing and very serious threats: climate change, the reduction of potable water supplies, depletion of natural resources, the lack of renewable energy stocks, the risk of nuclear conflict, loss of biodiversity, a severe burden of financial debts on future generations and the continuous stimulus to reach higher levels of economic growth instead of trends towards de-growth.

The Global Footprint Network has calculated and reported that everything the Earth has to offer this year in terms of resources and food has been “consumed” in less than seven months. On 28 July last it was Earth Overshoot Day, the day on which humankind had run out of its annual stock. Our carbon footprint is the total amount of greenhouse gases that are generated by our actions. The average carbon footprint for a person in the United States is 16 tons, one of the highest rates in the world. Globally, the average carbon footprint is closer to 4 tons.

What do these risks and threats mean for members of future generations, and can the law, and in particular human rights law, deal with these challenges and risks?

Close to home, there is a hot debate about the need to reduce nitrogen emissions to save nature and the planet for future generations, but at the same times this probably means expropriating land and farms from farmers, thus interfering with their right to property. Is this legitimate and justified from the perspective of intergenerational justice and equity? These are tough questions to deal with. Is it possible to strike a balance between the different interests at stake, or should one be courageous and forward-looking with a view to preserving life on Earth? What role can human rights law play in this discussion?

In my work I have been inspired by the mission of the Maastricht Centre for Human Rights, namely that research carried out by members of the Centre aims to be at the cutting edge of global human rights research and to be forward looking in its choice of research themes. Research should be about subjects that raise fundamental questions about human rights, as opposed to mere technicalities. But also that human rights are about the daily lives of human beings, as expressed in an apt way by Eleanor Roosevelt:

*'Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.'*

As academics we have our academic responsibilities for sound legal research. We should not be led by 'wishful thinking' and preconceived conclusions about how human rights law ideally should develop. There must always be a solid basis in existing sources of human rights law to be able to develop it further. However, we also have our responsibilities towards society. Academics often contribute to technically analyzing international norms and procedures which has occasionally become an end in itself. People often ask the legitimate question: 'what do your human rights do for me?', so as academics we have to be aware of the societal role and impact of human rights standards and procedures in particular for those whose rights are at risk.

Two issues have always been appealing to me in my life as a researcher, namely the question how vague international standards on human rights can be clarified and do justice to the object and purpose of the legal instrument of which they are part of. And secondly, how human right law should deal with challenging societal phenomena, such as poverty and climate change, where clear standards are missing.

Over the years, I have found and created a niche area in which for a long period of time only few researchers had been working, namely the international protection of economic, social and cultural rights and underlying general issues, such as the nature of obligations, identifying violations, international monitoring and supervision by UN procedures and mechanisms. There is a number of rights on which I have worked in particular, namely the right to education, the right to food, the right to health and the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress. What these human rights have in common is that their normative content has been obscure for a long time. They have been seen as aspirations, aims of governmental programs and policies which could not be put in the law. This has changed since the late 1980s when academics began to show an interest in these rights and the ensuing state obligations. The work by scholars, such as Henry Shue, Asbjorn Eide and Philip Alston has inspired me and influenced my own thinking and work greatly.

This normative approach with a focus on the implementation and protection of economic, social and cultural rights has led to important expert opinions that were adopted under the auspices of the Maastricht Centre for Human Rights, but in collaboration with other academic partners, and, I want to stress this, key international NGOs working on these rights. I want to mention here long-standing collaboration with Food First International Action Network (FIAN), the International Commission of Jurists and more recently the Centre for International and Environmental Law. These expert opinions have had an impact on the academic discourse, but also on soft law documents adopted by UN Treaty Bodies, in particular General Comments. The latter constitute authoritative opinions on how human rights and obligations should be interpreted and implemented at the domestic and international level. As examples I would like to mention the 1986 Limburg Principles, already referred to, the 1997 Maastricht Guidelines on Violations of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the 2011 Maastricht Principles on the Extraterritorial Obligations of States in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The latter expert opinion deals with the activities of states beyond national borders that have an impact on human rights and the nature of their obligations. This is about the need for global justice in an era of unfettered economic globalization. This was also the subject of my inaugural address back in 2007.

But let's now look ahead: what does human rights law have to say about the huge challenges mankind is facing today, such as climate change, loss of biodiversity and the

depletion of natural resources? It is well-known that a number of domestic and regional courts have paved the way for an approach which would encompass the human rights of future generations. An example is the Dutch *Urgenda Case*. In that case the District Court of The Hague ruled that ‘the possibility of damages for those whose interests Urgenda represents, including current and future generations of Dutch nationals, is so great and concrete that given its duty of care, the State must make an adequate contribution, greater than its current contribution, to prevent hazardous climate change’. The human rights at stake were the right to life and the right to private and family life included in the European Convention on Human Rights. Another major step was the recognition and the adoption of the right to a healthy environment as a human right by member States of the UN Human Rights Council<sup>1</sup> and the General Assembly in a recent resolution.<sup>2</sup> These are important steps, however quite fragmented and limited to climate issues and the environment. What is needed in my view is a more comprehensive document which states and explains the human rights of members of future generations and the obligations of present States that flow from it.

In the second part of this address I will explain the rationale for a set of Principles laying down the human rights of future generations; what are the underlying legal, moral and ethical notions; who are entitled to these human rights; who has obligations and what type of obligations, and which legal sources can and should be used in support of the recognition of these human rights.

What will follow next is a bit of history to describe the background of the Maastricht Initiative to explain in a legal expert opinion the human rights of future generations. In 2017 Rolf Künemann from FIAN and I took the initiative to bring together a number of academics, representatives of human rights NGOs and civil society organisations with a view to discuss and agree on a legal expert opinion on the human rights of future generations, similar to the other three human rights expert opinions that were adopted in Maastricht in 1986, 1997 and 2011. A Steering Group was established composed of academics from Lancaster University, Maastricht University, FIAN and the Centre for International Environmental Law. We reached out to experts and organizations in different branches of

---

<sup>1</sup> UN Human Rights Council resolution 48/13, 8 October 2021.

<sup>2</sup> UN General Assembly resolution 76/300, 28 July 2022.

law, such as environmental law, constitutional law, human rights law and public international law from the North and the South and asked for their opinions and input. Over the years we organized meetings and consultations and established an on-line interactive data-base where resources and working materials have been posted. In 2021 the decision was taken that time had come to establish a small group of 7 experts with as terms of reference to draft a set of Principles which explains the human rights of future generations. The group is composed of legal experts coming from different regions and backgrounds, including one expert with an indigenous background. The Principles should be drawn from existing human rights law and other branches of law, but also build upon it to contribute to the progressive development of the law. The text should not propose new human rights and it should have a solid legal basis.

So far the group of experts has produced a draft text which will be open for consultation in October. Next a meeting of the expert group is planned for February 2023 in Maastricht. At that meeting the final draft text will hopefully be agreed upon, finalized and adopted.

The perspective from which the human rights of future generations should be approached is the understanding that what is at stake presently is an existential threat to humankind and the planet in light of the need to protect and preserve life and nature. How will people living 100 years from now, in 2122, look at us? I have been inspired by the book by the philosopher Roman Krznaric, *The Good Ancestor*, who has asked a number of uneasy and worrying questions: have we behaved like good ancestors? What do we leave behind for future generations? How will future generations remember us? Will they hold us accountable?

Recently Dutch Prime Minister Rutte, talking about the period of Dutch colonial slavery in the past, asked the question: Can you hold people that live today responsible for something that happened generations ago? For our topic that question can be rephrased as: Can you hold people responsible that live today for something that will happen generations from now in the future? My answer would be yes, because there is ample scientific evidence about the future effects of our current conduct.



Thinking about life in the distant future has always been a source of inspiration for writers and artists. When I was a teenager there used to be a very popular song on the radio, called In the Year 2525. One of the verses of the song went like this:

In the year 9595

I'm kind of wondering if man is gonna be alive

He has taken everything this old earth can give

And he ain't put back nothing.

Why do we need a set of Principles on the Human Rights of Future Generations? The most obvious and simple reason is to make sure that the basic human rights of future people are recognized today as part of the law and be given effect now and in the future. A set of Principles would fill a normative gap: laying down the substance of human rights of people that do not exist yet; Principles would clarify who is to be held accountable when the human rights of future people are jeopardized. Thirdly, which protection mechanisms and remedies exist that can be used to vindicate the rights of future generations.

Why should we bother about the human rights of members of future generations? Is it our responsibility? There are a number of underlying principles that provide a legal, moral and ethical justification for accepting and confirming the human rights of future people. First of all there is the principle of universality of human rights: in my view this is a dynamic concept; its essence it means that human rights apply always, everywhere and for everyone. In my view this includes people who are not yet born. If not, universality would be time-bound and qualified. So universality has an intertemporal dimension. Secondly, there is the principle of human dignity which is said to be inherent to the human person. It would not make sense and be illogical to deny future people the right to live a life in dignity. Thirdly, the principle of intergenerational justice and fairness requires present generations not to burden future generations with situations and conditions that jeopardize the enjoyment of human rights which many of us have been fully enjoying without much obstacles. The right to food and water are an example.

Another difficult issue to tackle is how doing justice to the human rights of future generations relates to the notion of progressive realization of social, economic and cultural

rights which is the key notion of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966: is the idea of achieving higher levels of realization of social-economic rights and consequently the depletion of natural resources for the production of goods, compatible with the notion of intergenerational justice and transgenerational responsibility?

Linked to idea of fairness between generations are more recent notions, such as planetary health and sustainable development. The Sustainable Development Goals and its 2030 Agenda refer to future generations, however one may ask the question what the ambition and plan of action is beyond 2030. Does the Agenda for Sustainable Development stop in 2030?

Then there are a number of basic legal principles that underlie relations between states and provide guidance for the conduct and policies of governments. These include the 'do no harm' principle, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and obligations between states in environmental law and climate law in particular. Another basic idea is the so-called Public Trust doctrine, developed in the USA which requires US federal and state governments to hold vital natural resources in trust for the public beneficiaries, both present and future generations.

Of fundamental and key importance is the precautionary principle. It aims at protecting the environment from serious and irreversible harm by taking timely measures even if there is no or not yet hard scientific evidence that the negative effects on the environment will occur. This principle has a solid basis in general international law, international environmental law and domestic law. The principle is linked to the general duty of care according to which states have to protect their citizens from harm resulting from environmental degradation now and in the future.

So far I have mentioned ideas and principles that mainly have Western roots and backgrounds. It is interesting to note that indigenous concepts, knowledge and principles may also guide the protection of the rights of future generations. One example is the so-called Seventh Generation Principle which dates back to old Indian Indigenous notions in North America of hundreds of years ago. It entails the idea that the decisions that we take

today about the use of water, energy and natural resources should result in a sustainable world seven generations in the future.

We can also be inspired by the work and ideas of classical and well-known legal scholars, such as Hugo de Groot (Grotius). In his time Grotius filled a vacuum by legally defining natural law and areas that are beyond the national acquisition and sovereignty of states (The Commons – nature, air, high seas, the polar regions). What and how can we learn from the author of *Mare Liberum* to protect the Commons, the planet and prevent natural and man-made disasters? Can we formulate a new natural law that not only centres on human nature, but also involves nature itself as an unconditional part of existence? How do we protect, safeguard and restore the Commons, forests, rivers and natural resources for our future generations if we are not able and willing to use and share these equally and responsibly today?

If we talk about human rights of future generations, whose rights do we have in mind? In other words, are these individual rights, or rather collective rights belonging to future generations as groups? This is a difficult question. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights refers to 'all members of the human family'. It is impossible to identify individual people by name who do not exist yet. However, we know for sure that the human family at large is and will be composed of different generations: present and future ones. These must be treated on an equal basis. Each future generation is composed of individual human beings who should be seen as right-holders who are however unable to claim their rights right now. That is why they need to be represented by members of present generations, such as Ombudspersons or trustees who can speak and submit claims on their behalf. Examples from Wales, Hungary and Israel show that this is possible and that practical arrangements can be made to give future generations a voice.

A sensitive question is whether present children should be considered as members of future generations. Many social movements against climate change have been initiated by children and indeed, they can be seen as powerful advocates for a change of governmental and human behaviour. It is also true that most children under 15 years of age will live in the future for many years to come and will probably have difficulties in enjoying all human

rights, such as the right to a healthy environment. However, in my view they are not part of future generations, because they already exist. In addition, they can rely on current human right law to secure their rights.

Which human rights do we have in mind in connection with future people? In principle, the idea of universality of human rights implies that all the rights of the Universal Declaration apply to future people. However, there are a number of rights that are particularly relevant in light of present dangers. These include the right to life, subsistence and security; the right to food, water, housing and health, and the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. These rights must be protected to secure human life in a sustainable way in the future, both at the short term and the longer term. If these conditions would be ignored, the idea of human rights as such would lose credibility as legal and moral directives.

Is there a legal basis for recognition of the human rights of future people in law?

There are quite a number of treaties and national constitutions that contain a reference to (human rights of) future generations, usually in the Preamble, not in the operative parts. Examples of treaty provisions come from different branches of public international law, such as environmental law, the law on the conservation of natural species, and human rights law.

An important new development is currently taking place within the framework of the Council of Europe. Its Parliamentary Assembly is proposing to add the right to a clean, safe, healthy and sustainable environment to the European Convention on Human Rights. It defines this right as:

- “the right of present and future generations to live in a non-degraded, viable and decent environment that is conducive to their health, development and well-being.”<sup>3</sup>

This means that future generations are recognized as right-holders. States have duties towards these future generations.

---

<sup>3</sup> Draft Protocol on the Right to a Safe, Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment, Council of Europe, 29th of September 2021, available at: <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=29409&lang=en>

The extension to future generations as right-holders is motivated by the principles of transgenerational responsibility, equity and solidarity. This is a promising development.

When the rights of members of future generations are recognized as human rights, it is self-evident that other actors have obligations. There is no doubt that present governments today have obligations towards those living in the far future. This is difficult to accept and implement for politicians, civil servants and policy-makers who usually act for the short term and for immediate results. In particular politicians often do not look beyond the date of the next elections. Recent case-law has shown that domestic courts increasingly rule that also companies have obligations and responsibilities to make a contribution to the protection of the environment, for example by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, it should not be forgotten that Article 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that everyone has duties to the community. Article 30 stipulates that States, groups or persons do not have a right to engage in any activity aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms of the Universal Declaration. The considerations just mentioned imply that, from a general perspective, States have an obligation to respect, meaning that they must do no harm themselves by violating the rights of future generations; they have an obligation to protect by regulating, monitoring and sanctioning the conduct of private actors; they also have an obligation to prevent by taking precautionary measures as a duty of care. Finally, they have a duty to fulfil by creating an enabling and constructive environment aimed at securing the human rights of future generations at the short, medium and long-term. The latter can be done by establishing a prior permanent impact assessment test on the effects of bills for new legislation and new policy measures on the human rights of future generations.

Being a member of a global society means that one's human rights may be affected by conduct of actors who are outside of the territory where one lives. Transborder pollution of water, air and soil and the effects of climate change are clear and well-known examples. This means that present States do not only have territorial obligations, but also extraterritorial obligations that go beyond national borders and are also of a global nature on the basis of the principle of solidarity and international cooperation aimed at securing world-wide sustainability.

I now arrive at a number of concluding remarks about the human rights of future generations:

It is abundantly clear that there is an urgent need to act now to safeguard the human rights of members of future generations. Let me quote Grotius personal motto: which may inspire us: *Ruit hora*, which means: Time is running away. This is appropriate for our times as well: we have to use the present time to the best of our abilities to preserve human life in the future and protect the planet.

The notion of human rights and human rights language is appealing to many all over the world, in particular the marginalized and vulnerable.

The basics of a legal framework to protect the human rights of members of future generations is there. It already consists of rights and obligations. However, it needs to be progressively developed. The challenge is to extend its scope and apply it to human beings that do not exist yet. A set of Maastricht Principles as a legal expert opinion can contribute to this process. States need to be conscious of and contribute to this development which is the common concern of humankind. This requires political will, determination and courage.

It makes sense that we take responsibility now for our present and future conduct that may affect the lives of our offspring. In this way we are able to act as representatives or guardians of those who do not exist yet as human beings, but who will have to deal with the effects of our present conduct.

As most of you will know, the Chair that I have occupied for almost fifteen years is a UNESCO Chair on Human Rights and Peace. That means that the Chair has been established by UNESCO Headquarters in consultation with the Netherlands National UNESCO Commission. UNESCO has a constitutional mandate to contribute tot the promotion of human rights and peace. The Preamble of UNESCO's Constitution stipulates [quote] *since*

*wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed* [unquote]. The focus of UNESCO is on the right to education, the right to participate in cultural life, the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including the right to seek, receive and impart information, and the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications. The idea was and still is that these rights will contribute to a culture of peace, freedom and justice between and within states and societies.

UNESCO Chairs have a role to play in achieving these goals through education, research and international collaboration. Human rights education for students is essentially about explaining that human rights are about the inclusion of people, not their exclusion on discriminatory grounds. It is about cultural diversity, tolerance, respect, mutual understanding, equality of opportunities and protecting marginalized and vulnerable people close to home, but also beyond national borders. This is what I have tried to do in my Master courses on Human Rights at the Faculty of Law and in Venice, in which students from different national and cultural backgrounds met and discussed issues such as the universality of human rights within different cultural, political, social and economic settings.

Internationally, the Maastricht UNESCO Chair has collaborated with partners in the Global South, such as Udayama University in Bali, the University of Fort Hare in East-London, South Africa, and also through my Visiting Professorship at the University of Cape Town. I want to thank Budi and Ayu for the wonderful teaching experiences when developing a problem-based learning human rights course for staff and students in Bali. Prof Rembe, also a UNESCO Chair holder, introduced me to Fort Hare University. We jointly organized a conference on Rights-Based Governance in South Africa. Perhaps I have learned most from the lively and rich academic climate at the University of Cape Town where Professor Leslie London introduced a human rights based approach in his courses at the School of Public Health and Family Medicine to which I was able to contribute.

In the Netherlands we are fortunate to have the Netherlands Network for Human Rights Research, of which Maastricht is an active member. It successfully brings together junior and senior researchers in The Netherlands in the field of human rights. In particular the training events for PhD-students are one of the strengths of this Network. Our Faculty has organized several training sessions on methods of human rights research for the Network. I

want to thank the members of the Steering Committee of the Network, led by Prof Yvonne Donders, for the fruitful and pleasant collaboration for so many years.

Locally, Maastricht University, together with the Municipality, Amnesty International and Mondiaal Maastricht, is a partner in the Shelter City Maastricht Project which offers a place of temporary rest and relief for human rights defenders whose lives are at risk in the countries where they live and work. I am happy that Sebastiaan van der Zwaan, the Director of Justice and Peace in The Hague and an alumnus from our Faculty, has taken the initiative to start the Shelter City Program and involve Maastricht as a Shelter City.

At the Faculty I have held several management positions over the years. As Head of the Department in the period 2009-2013 I have seen the Department steadily growing in size and cultural diversity. I must say honestly that I do not envy the current Head, Prof Ellen Vos, who almost has a full time job managing this still expanding group of people. Thank you Ellen for our good collaboration during all these years.

I have been a Chairperson of the Faculty's Science Committee and in that capacity, together with Patrick van Eijs as its unsurpassed secretary, led many rounds of recruiting new PhD-students for our Faculty. I want to thank the members of the Science Committee who, in consultation with the Vice-Dean for Research, have developed and professionalized together the policy and standards for training and evaluating PhD-researchers, but also more generally the evaluation of the quality of research output at our Faculty.

I am grateful for the support received from the Executive Board of our University, in particular from Prof Rianne Letschert. She was the person I did not have to convince of the importance of human rights teaching and research.

As for the Faculty I am thankful for the good and constructive collaboration with the Board, in particular Prof Jan Smits and Prof Monica Claes. They have always recognized human rights teaching and research as one of the key strengths of our Faculty's profile.

The Maastricht Centre for Human Rights is well-known internationally for its research in the area of social, economic and cultural rights. We have a critical mass of excellent young and more senior researchers who have all made important contributions to developing human rights law on these rights and of particular groups, such disabled people, women and



children. I am very grateful for the collaboration and friendship with Jennifer Sellin, Lisa Waddington, Ingrid Westendorp, Andrea Broderick, Gustavo Arosemena and Marieke Hopman. And of course the supervision of many PhD-students which is perhaps the part of my job that I have enjoyed most. This has all been facilitated by the excellent secretarial and administrative support by Chantal Kuypers and Elke Hundhausen who in a very professional way have put our Centre on the map. I also thank the members of the Board of the Centre for Human Rights for the sense of joint responsibility for activities of the Centre. It is time now to hand over to a generation of younger colleagues.

I also look back with gratitude to the work of former colleagues who paved the way for the Centre as it is today and have been a source of inspiration in many respects: Menno Kamminga, Fred Grünfeld and Ria Wolleswinkel, and especially Theo van Boven and Kees Flinterman. The Centre and I owe a lot to you!

Recently I have handed over the position of Director of the Centre for Human Rights to Roland Moerland and Andrea Broderick as new Co-Directors. I am confident that the two of you will be able to bring together members of the Centre with different backgrounds to work on common issues and projects of human rights.

Finally I am very happy that recently Andrea Broderick has been appointed as my successor at the UNESCO Chair. Dear Andrea, a long and winding road has come to an end. You have made a speedy career and worked very hard. I wish you success and wisdom, both in your professional and personal life. And may the human rights of future generations be a source of inspiration for you.

I will not leave completely from the Faculty. I will keep a position as Professor Emeritus, so you will see me around regularly. Perhaps I can volunteer for renovating the inner garden of the Faculty which I have enjoyed for so many years from my quiet office which, unfortunately, I have to give up.

I come to a conclusion, but not before thanking warmly my wife Lilian who has been a beacon of support and encouragement in my career and emphasized many times that work is certainly not the most important thing in life. I must say honestly that I did not always follow that good and wise advice. I hope that my new status as a pensionado will help in doing more and new things together that we both enjoy.

Ik heb gezegd.