

Human Rights Conversations Across Generations

Paul Hunt episode

Transcript of edited conversation

Originally Released August 2026

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 0:04

Hi, welcome to our podcast, Human Rights, Conversations Across Generations. I'm Meredith Lockwood, founder of Lockwood Creative, a purpose-driven creative agency. And I'm here with my dad.

BERT LOCKWOOD 0:16

And I'm Professor Bert Lockwood, the director of the Urban Morgan Institute for Human Rights at the University of Cincinnati College of Law.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 0:26

Together, we are your father-daughter co-hosts.

BERT LOCKWOOD 0:29

For over 50 years, I've had a front-row seat to the evolution of international human rights.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 0:35

And now, we're sharing that expertise with you by connecting to the powerful stories and insights of human rights voices from around the world.

BERT LOCKWOOD 0:43

We bridge the past and the present, making complex human rights issues more approachable and understandable.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 0:50

So, pull up a chair and join our table as we speak with Nobel Peace Prize recipients, political leaders and the world's leading human rights scholars and activists.

PAUL HUNT 1:03

My dad and I are thrilled to welcome our Paul Hunt, to the show.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:08

Professor Hunt at the University of Essex is a leading practitioner in international human rights. Over more than four decades, Paul's work has been global in Palestine, the Gambia, and New Zealand, where he served as the Chief Human Rights Commissioner. Okay. He served on the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and became the first UN Special Rapporteur on the right to the highest attainable standard of health. He later advised the World Health Organization on integrating human rights into global health policy. Paul has moved human rights beyond legal frameworks and declarations toward the more difficult task, namely, how rights are actually implemented in people's lives.

PAUL HUNT 2:04

We start this episode by connecting the dots on how Paul and my dad first came in touch. From there, we look at how Paul's thinking has evolved over four decades and his belief that human rights must become more people-centered, rooted in listening, and learning from communities.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 2:23

I really love to start off, um, connecting you and my dad. through your first engagement in 1992 with the human rights quarterly, you submitted an article on Gambia, which my dad published the following year. Could you both discuss how you came to get to know each other in the early nineties?

BERT LOCKWOOD 2:43

Paul, I'm terrible on these things my, my memory is not great, but I, I assume it we at Essex.

PAUL HUNT 2:51

But my recollection is, uh, but look, actually, first of all, can I just I really want to, uh, acknowledge the I forget how many 44, 45 years of, of editing the human rights quarterly. Um, and all the Penn Press books that you've been responsible for, including the first one Ian Guest's, which was really important and the, the most recent one on reparations. That's really important too. So, you know, the contribution, I don't want this to turn into a sort of mutual admiration society thing or anything like that, but it's important to acknowledge, the incredible contribution you've made, to, human rights, international human rights. And it's best I say that now, because, you know, maybe in an hour's time, I' have changed my mind, dep how the conversation goes, right?

and Meredith, thanks for, uh, keeping your dad in order. Uhm,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 3:42

I do my best.

PAUL HUNT 3:44

now I become familiar with the work of the Human Rights Quarterly, and then I was spending a year or two Banjul in the Gambia uh, I was working at the Africa Centre for Democracy and Rights and Human Rights Studies and I was struck by a whole lot of things, it was a wonderful, wonderful experience and I was deeply privileged to be working at the Africa Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies. and I, I was struck by one phenomenon which we saw every day which concerned children's rights and I decided, to write a piece, uh, about, uh, children's rights, and it was plain to me that the place that I should send it to would to Bert at the Human Rights Quarterly. but we didn't actually meet, I think, until, probably the, the , the, the noughties, I would imagine, uh, when I was at Essex and Burt, you were quite a frequent visitor, I don't know how often, but quite a frequent visitor to Colchester and, uh, I remember having, meeting you for the first time in, in Colchester when I've jumped forward an awful long

way but when I um, been appointed a chair at the Human Rights Centre at the University of, of Essex.

BERT LOCKWOOD 4:55

Kevin and Nigel were both there, right?

PAUL HUNT 4:59

They were. So I, I, I'd met them in the 1980s and 1990s, uh, Kevin, no, not Kevin, Nigel came out and visited my wife and myself in the Gambia when we were there. Um,

BERT LOCKWOOD 5:14

Wow.

PAUL HUNT 5:14

know, the three of us were in touch, uh, on this and that for some 10 years or so. and, and then, uh, I took a I was working at, in New Zealand at the University of Waikato in New Zealand as a senior lecturer. And then in 1999, I got a call from, Nigel saying there's this, uh, opportunity to apply for a chair at Essex. Um, he said, you know, I can't promise what the outcome will be, but would you like to apply? So I and I was appointed. So I began working at Essex in the year 2000. I mean, I knew Nigel well, and I was interested that he'd made the phone call because. No disrespect to Nigel. he's, a champion of human rights. And has made this enormous impact, on the international human rights law, but he was not a great champion of economic, social, cultural rights. It has to be said.

BERT_LOCKWOOD 6:08

Yes. Ha, ha,

PAUL HUNT 6:09

And

BERT_LOCKWOOD 6:10

ha, ha,

PAUL HUNT 6:10

I,

BERT_LOCKWOOD 6:10

ha.

PAUL HUNT 6:10

I knew that really the appointment, was generated by by Kevin, Kevin was a champion of economic, social, cultural rights. but it wasn't Kevin who made the call to me. It was Nigel who made the call to me. And, um, and then once I was appointment, I was able to take over one of the modules of Kevin's, which was on economic, social, cultural rights. And he felt very

inadequate about it. So he was very pleased to hand it to me, uh, because I'd done more work than he had on economic, social, cultural rights.

BERT LOCKWOOD 6:38

you've had such a fascinating, career in the different roles that played. but I have said

BERT_LOCKWOOD 6:45

previous

BERT LOCKWOOD 6:45

previous broadcasts

BERT_LOCKWOOD 6:46

broadcast, uh,

BERT LOCKWOOD 6:47

it's not atypical someone in the field is asked state what are, are our most effective mechanisms. for the enforcement of human rights, uh, for people to point to the special

PAUL HUNT 7:00

Yeah.

BERT LOCKWOOD 7:00

procedures. And the individual experts. And I've often thought it's sort of that these are what we identify particularly, uh, effective. Because typically these individuals are full-time law

PAUL HUNT 7:21

Hmm.

BERT LOCKWOOD 7:21

professors. And they do this on top of that work and they don't get paid for it. I mean, other than travel expenses. but one of the points that I have made is that I think is important in terms of, uh, uh, context of the development of the international human rights field is the relative lack of financial

PAUL HUNT 7:48

Yes.

BERT LOCKWOOD 7:48

resources. that are devoted

PAUL HUNT 7:50

Yeah.

BERT LOCKWOOD 7:51

to this

PAUL HUNT 7:52

Yeah.

BERT LOCKWOOD 7:52

field, that's sort of underscored by the fact that Special Rapporteurs are, uh, identified as being the, the most effective, uh, way of achieving some, uh, result,

PAUL HUNT 8:06

Sure. You're right.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 8:07

and dad, I Paul, you have a little bit of insight we had this conversation with Manfred Novak on a recent podcast. And we got feedback from our listeners broadcast that they did not know that United Nations special rapporteurs volunteer based, that they were not paid. Those are very, and esteemed titles with really prestigious work. And many wrote to us and commented to me specifically saying, I just always assumed they were paid and that was actually their full-time job. They didn't realize that that was not a fully paid

PAUL HUNT 8:45

Yeah, it is a real problem, the, uh, reso problem. And it's getting worse, actually, as the months, not years, as the months go by. It's getting worse for all sorts of reasons that we, that we know about. you know, the way I'm envisaging the human rights system is, my recent article just a few weeks ago in the Human Rights Quarterly. But very, very briefly, it's, I sort of see there is this state-centered human rights sphere where important work is being done by officials, by courts, uh, by parliaments, at least some parliaments and so forth and so on. So the, there is that sphere, the state human rights sphere. and then there's also what I call the people-centered human rights sphere, which is about social movements, communities, indigenous peoples. and then I see in the middle in what I call a relational space between the two are, people like the special rapporteurs and the treaty bodies and the national human rights, uh, institutions and the professionalized civil society Um, and they are in that middle space, the relational space, they've some degree of independence, which is a great, thing to have. So, um, m feeling is, and of course I might be proved wrong, but my feeling is that, that we have to keep doing the work in the state-centered human rights sphere. No question about that. We have to keep doing the work in the relational space of special rapporteurs, treaty academics, so forth and so on. But we have to give more attention to the other sphere. That is the people centered human rights sphere of social movements, communities peoples. think the special procedures of the UN, the rapporteurs and so on, I think they play a really important role. I think a time has come where their role must continue and there has to be some sort of shift, a sort of shift to that other sphere. And the literature, you know, the scholarship is talking these days about this awful phrase, the vernacularization of human rights and the localism of human rights and human rights from below. So there's lots of new scholarship about that. And I think

that sort of chimes with how to develop this other sphere. That is the people centered human rights sphere. But I'm not knocking the special rapporteurs and the treaty bodies and all the good work done by others. I'm not knocking it at all. I must continue. But one of the things that has struck me, Meredith, in response to your and your observations is I think there's been a lack of vocabulary around economic, social, cultural rights. What I mean is, you know, to use Cees Flinteman's term, economic, social, cultural rights are the poor relations in the human rights family. And he has worked to try to address that. And I and a thousand others have worked to try to address that. We've over the last 30 years or so, treaty bodies, special rapporteurs, academics, scholars, etc. They have tried to devise a vocabulary for economic, social, cultural rights, which wasn't there before. There was a vocabulary about civil and political rights for various historical reasons. But there wasn't much of a literature and there wasn't there wasn't a lot of vocabulary and conceptual understanding of economic, social, cultural rights. And I think the special rapporteurs and treaty bodies working on economic, social, cultural rights have played an important role to give vocabulary to economic, social, cultural rights. But now, having done that, you know, thousands of people have contributed to that. So now I think we're in a better position to turn to the people centred human rights sphere and to get real grunty, messy economic, social, cultural rights work, you know, in communities, in and in the regions. So, that's a long response to your point, but it, it sort chimed a bit when I listened to Ian Guest's, uh, conversation. and he comes from a very civil and political background, as it Um, but he was beginning to, beginning to, not recognise, he'd recognised it a long time, but he was beginning to talk about how, when it came to reparations, this has got to be done in community, and not necessarily through courts, but through families. And, uh, I thought that was interesting. That sort of chimed with the idea of a people-centred human rights sphere and how to, how to empower that sphere.

BERT LOCKWOOD 13:24

found ideas um, in terms going to the families that, see what they needed. And, uh, often being surprised that it wasn't the hand-out of money, that was important, um, to many of them. But, as I recall, uh, recognizing that wrongs had been done to them particularly important, psychologically, but to, to reinforce the fact they were not, um, responsible for what had happened to their, them and their families.

PAUL HUNT 14:00

Yes, I think it's really important that there is this, a deepening understanding of repair, a deepening understanding of reparation. And there's some fantastic work being done in transitional justice around that. I have to say, in Outaro, New Zealand, there's some really interesting work being done around reparations for the, the terrible treatment that Maori have, been subjected to in New Zealand. But, and Maori will speak for themselves. I do not speak for Maori. But when I listen to them and read about them and listen to my colleagues, Maori colleagues, you know, the idea of memorialization, the idea of an apology, an apology from the crown. You know, the Queen of England, when she was in position, uh, you know, she came to New Zealand and she went to the iwi to some of, not all, but some of the tribes. And she apologized. and that, I understand from my, my Maori friends and colleagues, you know, that was immensely important. It wasn't sufficient, the, the apology. There had to be a return

of some land. There had to be some financial compensation. There had to be various other things. But, but the apology and the memorialization, critically important. And we've learned that from transitional justice coming out of Latin America and South Africa and elsewhere.

BERT LOCKWOOD 15:20

what Paul, when you took as the chair of the, uh, Human Rights Commission in New Zealand, that you were, I may I'm mischaracterizing this, but somewhat surprised at how difficult, the issues were that you had to deal with. And specifically, it on the indigenous questions I think you came under if I'm mistaken.

PAUL HUNT 15:51

And it was the first time I'd held a public office like that. I was surprised by the abuse, death threats. It was just incredible, actually. And what I sought to do in that position as Chief Human Rights Commissioner wonderful, wonderful colleagues

I'm not sure it was entirely clear to me at the time, but I was really trying to find a way respecting classic Western liberal conceptions of human rights, such as autonomy and respect for civil and political rights, for instance. But to combine that. that view of the world with an entirely different view of the world, which is the, the, the indigenous peoples, the First Nations of Aotearoa New Zealand have a completely different vision of the world. you know, I very sort of touched and deeply, uh, impressed by, their vision. Which was intergenerational. It was environmental. It was collective as well as individual. So, what I tried to do, what we tried to do in effect was to sort of blend in a respectful, appropriate way, the classic Western liberal conceptions of human rights to combine that with the different insights And world views from First Nations. And that's what endeavored to do. and that has actually sort of inspired me having stepped down from five years in that position. That sort of inspired me in my current work. But yes, you know, there's one, one example of a difficulty that you intimated, uh, Bert, was I got an invitation from the Mongrel Mob in Aotearoa. And the Mongrel Mob has a very, uh, sort of negative, uh, associations. And, uh, I won't unpack it. it does have that. and, they approached me and said they were being subjected to racism by the police. The Mongrel Mob are largely indigenous peoples, not exclusively, but largely First Nations, large Maori. And so they said, you know, we want to talk with you about human rights. So, I went, of course, I went and sat with them, had, the better part of a day with them. there were, there were many of them over a hundred, talked with them, listened above all, listened, listened to them. Um, and, uh, the custom was to give a, what's called a koha to give a little gift on arriving. So there's a certain ceremony that you go through that I and my colleagues from the human rights commission went through this ceremony of giving a koha. and we had, we had taken great steps to ensure that this was a private meeting, but, but photographs were taken and they did get, it did get into the public domain. and, and some political parties were deeply offended by the fact that I'd given, or we had given, I should say, we from the New Zealand Human Rights Commission had given this, core this gift to our hosts. and, uh, and, uh, and it caused an immense, uh, uproar. There were questions in parliament and, the leader of the opposition said that I, I should be sacked and so forth and so on. It was a, it was a, it was a big, it was a big thing. um, but I'm sure it was the right thing to do, you know, you know, but when I did speak

with the Mongrel Mob, you know, I did talk about their rights not to be subjected to race discrimination. But I did also talk about the imperative of non-violence and, I talked about, the conception of human rights. Um, and, uh, in fact, I've got a sweatshirt on here, which you won't be able to see, but I, it's, it's got responsibilities, relationships, and written on it. And I made this sweatshirt before I went for that meeting with the Mongrel Mob, because, I wanted it to be loud and clear that yes, they had rights, but they also had responsibilities. And human rights is about building relationships. So, and you have to talk to each other with respect. And so that's what I was trying to signal. But yes, it's one example, Bert

BERT LOCKWOOD 20:14

right. Was the, the gift that you gave to sweat, the, uh, sweatshirts?

PAUL HUNT 20:19

No, it wasn't. It wasn't. I should have done.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 20:21

Get any comments? Did they get this

PAUL HUNT 20:23

Um,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 20:23

subliminal message?

PAUL HUNT 20:24

I think that they must have got it because I was just standing at a, you know, I was with them all day and I was walking around with rights responsibilities and relationships. and, when it, when it was photographed, which we weren't, we weren't planning. a friend, called me and said, Paul, I've just seen this picture of you and, it's got at the top, it's your sweatshirt and it says relationships. she said, what the hell are you doing? You're trying to promote relationships. Is this, is this Tinder? What are you trying

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 20:54

Yeah.

PAUL HUNT 20:54

to do here?

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 20:55

I was gonna say, it sounds like Hinge or Bumble.

BERT LOCKWOOD 20:58

Well, it's the, The new three R's, right?

PAUL HUNT 21:02

The three R's. but she couldn't see, the whole message. So she thought I was, you know, was promoting Tinder or something like that.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 21:09

Paul, that would have been groundbreaking

if I may also just give some context to our listeners about your time in New Zealand as the chief human rights commissioner. Um, it was also during a very dynamic period in New Zealand's history. while you were holding that an horrific attack happened at the Christ Church at the Linwood Islamic Center, where a self-proclaimed white nationalist murdered 51 people and injured 40. Um, it was also during the COVID-19 pandemic. There was rising online harm. There was also violence outside the parliament in New Zealand. people were having an inquiry into the right to decent housing. So I feel like it was quite a story time when you took on that position as well.

PAUL HUNT 21:52

There was a lot going on. it was just within a few weeks after my appointment that the massacres took place at Christ Church. that was, uh, profoundly important and shaking event for everyone in Aotearoa, New Zealand. And it gave rise to a lot of discussion about social cohesion. So that meant I had to sort of pivot away from some other things that were planned and, and give due attention to social cohesion in New Zealand. because there were signs of it beginning to fray. Um, Then we had COVID and the government, I thought I applauded the government. Uh, it was a sort of weird because, you know, there were these dreadful restrictions being placed on citizens in New Zealand, like no assembly, no travel and so forth. But I actually took the view that the government had got it right. So I thought it was reasoned. The data supported what was, what their decisions. So I was strongly in favour of the government, uh, in that first stage. Um, bu later, I think that they got it wrong. Uh, various policies were changed and, I, I anticipate what was going to happen. Actually, it's in black and white. Um, and I was very concerned that the social cohesion was going to be damaged by the second phase response of the government to COVID. Not the first phase. The first phase, I think it was terrific, but the second phase, I don't think was quite right. And I said so. And, and then a few months later, it did word, there was the protests in, uh, outside parliament. They occupied the grounds of parliament. And my advice was the same, as my reaction had been to, the Mongrel Mob. My advice was go and sit with them. Actually, if they're, as long as they're nonviolent, go and sit with them. And I advised the government, they didn't heed my advice, but I said, you know, go and sit with these protesters and explain. I wasn't suggesting the prime minister should go, but officials should go and have a discussion. And they didn't, but did. So I had a number of meetings with the leaders of the. the protesters, and some of them, you know, one can interpret this in any way you want, me being naive or whatever, but when people sat with me, they wanted to these are the protesters, they wanted, to be heard, and they felt they weren't being heard. And some of them literally wept with relief at being listened to. So I met them quite a bit, always in confidence, always strict rules of behavior. Uh, I would always begin by saying no antisemitism, no violence, no misogyny, no xenophobia,

because there was a lot of those things there out in, amongs the protesters. So I would give them a bit of a

I would say all that every time, uh, but then endeavor to listen to them. But it, it wasn't appreciated by the government, and it one of the, one of the difficult decisions that, I took.

BERT_LOCKWOOD 24:58
'm curious, Paul,

BERT LOCKWOOD 24:59
do you think one of the shortcomings of the, uh, human rights, movement, is that we haven't

BERT_LOCKWOOD 25:07
Talked about duties.

BERT LOCKWOOD 25:08
As opposed to rights?

PAUL HUNT 25:10
Yeah. Thanks for raising that, but, cause this is a really tricky one. you know, in my early days, I, went to, this is in the 1990s. I went to the Gambia worked, as I mentioned earlier, at the Africa Center for Democracy Human Rights Studies.

Now, why was I doing that? It was because I knew there was something really interesting going on, with the African charter on human and people's rights. There it is in the title. Human and people's rights, collective rights. So I thought that's kind of interesting.

And then you open up the African charter and the stuff about right to development, ri to a safe environment. This was written in 1981, right? And, and there in the charter, there's a holistic vision of human rights, civil, political rights, and economic, social, cultural rights on the same standing. And also there's a section on duties, duties of individuals, not just the state. Now I know that's controversial and difficult and it's open to abuse, but that's why, that's honestly why I wanted to work at the Africa Center for Democracy and Human Rights Studies. nd I was not a white saviour, but rather as a white learner. That's why I was there. Because I sort of knew in my gut there was something really important going on there. And I wanted to go and listen and learn. people treated me very nicely and... there were some wonderful people nicely. And there were some wonderful people there. Raymond Sock who kindly, graciously put up with me there and, and, and Hassan Jalo. And it was there that I met, Macau Matur before he had written some of his literature. to go back to your question, I've always hesitated to say it, uh, Bert, but, I have come to the view that of course we have to hold government to account, but actually individuals have responsibilities and duties as well. you can't, you can't be taken to court over a breach of them, right? That's a difference. That's a difference. You can't, they can't be empowered by judicial process. That's my view. But nonetheless, there are some compelling duties, that individuals have to each other. and then, you know, fast forward

25, 30 years, I find myself as chief human rights commissioner and I was hearing the same thing there for Tangata Fenua, for Maori, for the first nations in New Zealand, for them relationships are really important and duties are really important and not just for the present generation, but for the future generation and indeed for the past generation. And this to me, you Westerner though I am, you know, this really appeals to me. It resonates for me. I think it points to the way forward for the human rights movement.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 27:55

Paul, I heard you discuss your time in the Gambia as an extraordinary opportunity. You did a wonderful TED in 2020. 2014 with the University of Essex called Equality, The Road Less Traveled. And one thing you noted in your TED Talk is your time in Gambia changed your life and you explain upon that time that you realized you had been viewing human rights with one hand over one eye, and you were only looking at half of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And I really, really found that profound, how interspersive you were. And now, all these years later, you can reflect that you did not start that journey as a white savior, but truly as a white learner. And I think as an American here in the United States, when in 2020, we lost George Floyd at the hands of police brutality and murder, is a lot of my peers and myself have spent time learning about decolonization, anti-racism from incredible authors and academics from Nicole Hannah-Jones to Ibram X. Kendi, going and reading Bell Hooks, James Baldwin. And I was wondering if you could share a little bit more about experience you got from the community and conversations you had in the Gambia.

PAUL HUNT 29:21

It was really Meredith. It was it was listening and, and watching and keeping one's eyes open. Had a lot of, of course civil and political rights were being esteemed in the Gambia. Of course they were. And indeed only 10 years later, they were terribly violated in the Gambia by various dictatorships that came in later. So, so, so what heard and saw was a commitment to civil and political rights for sure, but also issues around economic, social, cultural rights by which I mean, the right to economic right is, is really a fancy term for the right to work. The right to work. The right to work with proper, uh, cond and fair, uh, payment and social rights, the rights to a functioning health system and a functioning, uh, education system and a secure source of food and other social rights. And then cultural rights, which we're more familiar with. so what I witnessed and heard and, uh, in, in, in the Gambia was that one needed, as it said in the African charter on human and people's rights. It said a holistic approach, civil, political, economic, social, cultural rights, the right to development, the right to safe environment, uh, equity, uh, and of course, major rights such as the right to self-determination. So frankly, it was very easy, Meredith. It was really easy. It was just walking around with my eyes open and listening and reading the African charter. And listening to what the African commission on human and people's rights, which was situated just down the road, what the African commission on human and people's rights, what they were saying.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 31:11

Paul, I feel like that must've been a very similar mindset of listening, engaging, during your time in the West bank in Gaza, which was before the Gambia, you had been practicing civil and

criminal law in England. and then you were able to join a Quaker program and spent two years alongside Palestinian human rights organizations, one year in the West bank and one year in Gaza. Um, and now as we know in 2026, what's happening in Palestine every day through the genocide, um, it's in the news, it's in the media, there are cries for help. But back then you lived alongside communities whose daily lives were shaped by occupation, uncertainty, questions of dignity and Could you take us back to that time in those years?

PAUL HUNT 32:04

For me, sort of selfishly and personally, it was a human rights, breakthrough for me. I learnt so much. I hadn't, I didn't have much of a human rights background before then, but they're supported by colleagues, uh, Palestinian and non-Palestinian, I learnt about what was happening in the, occupied Palestinian territories. And I was given some Um, uh, one task was to go and sit in a military court, in Gaza, which was then right in the centre of Gaza. It was Israeli military court and people were administratively detained, without judicial process, but they did have to appear before a court every six months. So one of my jobs was to sit in the military court and see, in particular, one in particular activist to see him appear after six months and to check out how he Um, and then out of that, I wrote a little booklet, uh, published by my Palestinian colleagues, on the administrative court system. Uh, and I critiqued it through the lens of the international covenant on civil and political rights. so I was, uh, I was cutting my Meredith. I was learning the trade of human rights, but it wasn't just civil and political rights. It was also some economic, social, cultural rights. For instance, something that would happen routinely was demolition of houses as punishment for some families where a member of the the Israeli authorities found that person to breaking their laws, the Israeli laws, and sometimes their houses were demolished. The family's house was demolished and this was a collective punishment. So this is unlawful. So there was that going on as So I was learning honestly, I was so lucky. I was working with Al Haqq in the West they're now, I think, prescribed, I believe. But I was working with them in Ramallah. And then to my astonishment, after a year, they said, Paul, we want you to go to Gaza. We don't have an office in Gaza. We'd like you to go and meet people in Gaza and meet the lawyers and see what's, you know, if there's scope for a centre, a Palestinian centre for human rights of some sort in Gaza. So, you know, which was a bit incredible. So they packed me off. I don't know if they were just trying to get rid of me. I don't really know. But they packed me off to Gaza and I lived in, worked in Gaza for a year. Again, it was, you know, sitting with lawyers, talking with lawyers and there was there an embryonic Gaza Centre for Human Rights, it was called. And so I aligned myself with them and I just worked with them. it was really good. that Gaza Centre for Human Rights, I think, that eventually folded, I think. And I think it was replaced by or sort. I'm not sure if replaced is the right word, but there was a Palestinian Centre for Human Rights. And that was founded by Raji Sarani and colleagues. Raji Sarani activist that I was charged with going to see when he was in administrative detention and brought up to an Israeli military court. So he was released eventually and founded this Palestinian Centre for Human Rights and has done, for decades, has done incredible for Palestinian human rights. So this isn't false modesty. I'm not sure how much I contributed, but I learnt a hell of a lot. And I've continued, of course, to be engaged as best I can with issues in Palestine. After the Oslo Accords, that was 1993, part one, there was a conference, the Human Rights Conference in Gaza, which was incredible. So in

1994, there's a conference, I was invited to the conference. And it was wonderful to see a sort of beginning of blossoming of human rights in Gaza. But that was before gained control and then things became very, very different. Actually, can I tell one little short story? I think, I don't think I've ever told it elsewhere, but at that conference in 1994 in Gaza, to my astonishment, John Humphreys turned up. So he was one of the authors of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And I suspect, Bert, that you knew John, but I'd never met him.

BERT LOCKWOOD 36:35

a friend, yeah.

PAUL HUNT 36:37

Okay, well, he came, aged, I don't know, 89, 90. He had someone with him to help him get around. and he, he spoke I was asked to talk about economic social cultural rights, which in Gaza, which is what I did. And then afterwards, this is the bit I've never told anybody, but I think it's okay. Uh, afterwards he came up to me and he said, you know, thank you for your talk. He said, you know, I really wanted economic social cultural rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Um, in those days, he said, I was a bit of a socialist. That's what he said.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 37:11

You heard, you heard it here.

PAUL HUNT 37:12

Uh,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 37:12

Wow.

PAUL HUNT 37:14

so there, there we are. It was incredible. He was there in Gaza in 1994. He died the next year. Actually, he died in 1995.

BERT LOCKWOOD 37:23

yeah, I, I thought of two days ago because one of the most, memorable lunches that I ever had was a picnic lunch Etna,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 37:34

In Sicily.

BERT LOCKWOOD 37:36

So we, we had a picnic lunch with, uh, Bill Butler and, uh, John Humphreys But, I'm sorry. I, I

PAUL HUNT 37:43

Nope.

BERT LOCKWOOD 37:43

interrupted you, Paul.

PAUL HUNT 37:45

no problem. But the comment of his about, you know, his whisper to me I was a socialist in those days. I think what he, what I took from that was that, the values that underpinned his thinking around the universal declaration of human rights were not solely Western liberal values. he was respectful of those, of course, but he had a wider vision. and that's the vision I think we're still chasing actually, that wider vision. but I'm more hopeful now about that wider vision. I'm more hopeful about that now than I was ten years ago, actually.

BERT LOCKWOOD 38:20

Wel, you know, use a comment, from him when I have to discuss customary international law. and I was the chair in

BERT_LOCKWOOD 38:30

74

BERT LOCKWOOD 38:32

I, I worked for uh, for two years for World Peace Through Law Institute, which put together these major meetings every other year where they'd get about 5,000 lawyers from 100 countries. Uh, uh, I was in charge of the one that was going to be in Washington, D. C. And, he was the chair of the Human Rights Committee, And so, one of the things that they do in the last session is that the... ..various chairs submit resolutions to be adopted by the whole group. A he submitted one that said the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was customary international law. And so, I called him. he says, "John, you 1975, I can agree that some of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is customary international law, there's no way that all of it is." And his response was, you know that, Bert, and I know that, but if enough of us say that it is, it will become so." Because what are the sources that they look to are experts in human rights?

PAUL HUNT 39:48

Oh, that's, that, oh, that's good. That's interesting. That's very interesting.

BERT LOCKWOOD 39:53

Um, I, I, I refer to it as the, the Tinkerbell principle of, uh, uh, customary international law. If enough of us clap uh, Tinkerbell will come to

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 40:03

Which, Dad, you know, I, I think goes into the topic the era of implementation, which I know, Paul, you drew from Kofi Annan's phrase. Um, and, you wrote an article in 2017 for the Human Rights Quarterly, "Configuring the United Nations Human Rights System in the Era of

Implantation." Paul, for our listeners, who may be hearing the phrase, the era of implementation for the first time, could you explain what it means?

PAUL HUNT 40:27

Sure. thanks, Meredith. So I was very struck by a speech given by Kofi Annan in, it was either 2005 or 2006, I don't remember now, but it was around then just as the, the commission on human rights melted away and it was replaced by the UN human rights council. And he made a speech. And in that speech, he said, we are now moving from the quote, "Era of declaration to the quote, era of implementation." And I thought this was rather, I thought this was rather neat and I picked it up for that article in the Human Rights Quarterly, some 10 years later in 2017. And the point he was making was that we've spent a lot of time, uh, trying to, articulate human rights, declare the human rights, lots of important conventions and treaties and declarations and so forth and so on. And then he was saying, okay, that's cool. But now we have to have an era of implementation, um, of actually putting this stuff into practice. So that's where I get the phrase, the era of implementation from, i the title of that article, uh, I refer mainland and the archipelago. So very briefly, what I was alluding to there very, very subtle was the, Gulag archipelago. So, you know, there was the Solzhenitsyn book about the Gulag archipelago. So stole that idea and I used this phrase in the article, uh, how we need a mainland for human rights and also an archipelago. And what I meant that in, in the United Nations, there was this mainland associated with human rights. For instance, the UN Human Rights Council, the treaty bodies, the special rapporteurs, the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, all really important. I wasn't knocking them at all. That's the mainland of the human rights in the United Nations. And then I said, what we need is an archipelago within the United Nations, the wider United Nations, we need human rights to be in the Food and Agricultural Organization, which it is to a slight degree. We human rights to be in UNESCO, which it is to a slight degree. We need human rights to be in, the World Health Organization, which it is to a slight degree. I could go on. My point was that, yes, there was this mainland of human rights, uh, but we needed an archipelago of human rights scattered throughout the United Nations. And if we were serious about the era of declaration being followed by the era of implementation, we needed this archipelago in the United Nations. That alone wouldn't be enough. We need a whole lot of other stuff for implementation as well. You know, we need the localism, the vernacularization, the human rights from below, which I mentioned earlier. We need all that as well. But I was just confining myself to what was happening in the United Nations. And I thought, I like this phrase, era of declaration, moving to the era of implementation, and that had, I was trying to convey that that that plea for an era of implementation means that human rights have to go beyond the mainland within the UN and go to other bits of the United Nations. That's what was, in my mind.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 43:45

And for our listeners, Paul, you are on the University of Essex podcast, rights cast, hosted by Dr. Andrew Fagan. think you both had such a dynamic conversation around exact topic. So for our listeners in our show notes, I'm going to include the link in case they'd like to listen to that, because it was really, really interesting to listen to you and Andrew discuss. through that, I want to make sure to shine a light on your time from 2002 to 2008. You were the first United

Nations special rapporteur on the right to health. throughout our conversation I feel like we've been able to have different building blocks through from the basic right to health, basic right to education, basic right to housing. And I was wondering for this discussion, if you could take us to the experience you had with Sweden, examining Sweden's international assistance in Uganda, because if I'm correct, you were able to go to but then upon that trip, you asked again, if you could go back to Sweden, but this time to look through the lens of their assistance with Uganda.

PAUL HUNT 44:59

Yes, you, Meredith. So So, what I was trying to do as the first UN special rapporteur on the right to the highest attainable standard of health, I was trying to do a lot of deepen a conceptual understanding of the right to But also, I wanted to sort of break some boundaries really. I wanted to demonstrate that there could be a mission from a UN Special Rapporteur in relation to a pharmaceutical company. And indeed, I did a report on a pharmaceutical company. I did a report on the World Trade Organization. I didn't just look at countries. bu the point that you raise to speak to that, yes, I went to I went in Sweden, looking at the right to health in Sweden. I surprised them by saying, well, I want to go to Lapland, please. And they said, why do you want to go there? I said, well, I need to sit with and be with the indigenous peoples, the Sami people in Sweden. So we went up and there were various other things that I won't go into that were going on in Sweden around migrants and the right to health. I won't go into that just now. But I went, having had this mission to Sweden, and having done this I knocked on their door and said, look, could you invite me to look at at international assistance and cooperation that you're doing in Uganda. I knew they were doing quite well, so I was deliberately choosing quite a favourable case, and this is an example trying to extend the vocabulary talking about economic social culture rights. Because in economic social culture rights under the relevant covenant it says that there has to be international assistance and cooperation. Well what does that mean? Frankly we didn't really So, so by going to Sweden a second time I was really asking them to see what they were doing in Uganda to discharge their responsibility of this international assistance and cooperation. that's what was going on there. It was an, it was an example of what I and many, many other people were trying to do was to build this vocabulary about how to deal with economic social and cultural rights. And in particular how to deal with international assistance and cooperation. And that also led to me going to the World Bank and the IMF and doing a report on them, because, you know, Sweden and others have some influence and uh on the World Bank and the IMF. So I wanted to know how were they taking into account their obligation of international assistance cooperation in in their, and cooperation in their, as they sit in the world bank and the IMF. And my argument was that when their people would go into the offices or the boards of the world bank and the IMF, they can't leave behind their international obligations. You know, it's, they don't take off their coat and hang it up in the cloakroom. They carry, these Swedish officials carry into the world bank and into the IMF, Sweden's international responsibilities to provide international assistance and cooperation. So that's what I was trying to do. I was trying to just give more attention to and credibility to, I hope, this idea of international assistance and cooperation. Meredith, I have to end with problem that because I, I wrote this report I submitted to the United Nations in which I said, in my view, there is a legal obligation to provide international

assistance and cooperation. That's what it means in article two of the international covenant on economic, social, cultural rights. It gives rise to a binding legal obligation to provide international assistance to cooperation. And that's what I said in my report. But the Swedes who had invited me to, to, to Sweden and then to undertake this extra report in Uganda. and they cooperated with that completely. They were not willing to accept it was a binding legal obligation. you know, the ambassador said to me before I presented my report, he said to me, if you're going to say that tomorrow, I'm going to have to disagree with you. And of course I didn't resile. I, I expressed my view and he expressed his view that no doubt had come from Stockholm, that there wasn't a, a binding international legal obligation to which I said, ambassador, on what basis are you providing international assistance and cooperation? If it's not legal obligation, then it's charity. And we are living in the 21st century. Those days of giving charity to, to developing countries, those days are gone. It can't be charity. It's got to be on some other basis that you're providing international assistance and cooperation. And he said, it's a response that he said, the people of Sweden are pleased to provide international assistance and cooperation, but out of a sense of political solidarity, not as a matter of legal obligation. And it's funny, isn't it, Meredith, because all high income countries take that position and all middle income and low income countries take my position. Isn't that strange?

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 50:01

The math does add up there. Paul, that goes into your most recent Human Rights Quarterly article, Empowering Human Rights for Revolutionary Change. And as I was listening to you, I agreed with every single word you I am a huge believer that human rights needs to be people-centered. movement where I get a little skeptical, hate to admit pessimistic, is the governments and institutions and corporations have so much power in finances right now. when I think about corporations and Elon Musk became a trillionaire, I think that status is gone. I think he lost a couple billion. But we have so many billionaires, and many of them are greedy and destructive. I struggle how we move the era of implementation even further when we're up against billionaire status these days.

PAUL HUNT 50:57

you know, I wish I had a neat answer, Meredith, but of course I don't. But I really recognize the, problem. perhaps I could try and respond very inadequately in a, in a roundabout way. what I'm looking at now in my work is the future of human rights. and I take the view that, today's prevailing conception of human rights is shaped by Western liberalism. and that means, a focus on individuals. Uh, it uh, individual ownership of, of private property. the Western liberal approach tends to privilege civil and political rights, n economic, social, cultural rights, so forth and so on. I'm not knocking. Um, I think there are some really important principles in, in Western liberalism, but it is limited. and moreover, international human rights law is a subset of public international law. And we know that public international law was shaped by and emerged through Western imperialism of the last 500 years. So what I see is there's this incredible mix, incredible cocktail of international human rights law, Western liberalism, public international law, Western imperialism. And it's really complicated and extremely important. Now, I personally take some support from, and I'm inspired by the TWAIL scholars. So TWAIL standing for third world approaches to international law. There are now some wonderful

scholars, brilliant scholars who are now analyzing this mix that I've just mentioned. it's really powerful scholarship, but I find it, and it's very sobering, but I find it very exciting. And I think those scholars, um, most of them, uh, they don't wish to discard human rights. They wish to critique human rights. They wish to refresh human rights and revisit human rights and decolonize human rights. And I think that's the way forward for human rights. And it includes economic, social, cultural rights which brings me to your point, uh, Meredith, because I think that if TWAIL scholars are right, and I think they are, that we've got some work to do to hold on to human rights, but to refresh and revisit and re-imagine human rights as well. We've got not jeopardizing the achievements we've made in the last 50, 60 years, we've got to, revisit human rights. We've got to identify human rights and, and, uh, that's what I'm hearing from the scholarship. and what are the components of revisiting human rights? I think that one component for revisiting human rights to contribute towards a decolonial approach is this holistic vision, civil, political rights, economic, social, cultural rights together, holistic vision. But now to your point, Meredith, thank you for your patience. Another feature of a decolonized human rights has to be the corporations. Look, wonderful work has been done around human rights and corporations, uh, by John Ruggie and, many other terrific, uh, scholars and practitioners, but the current, uh, approach of human rights to corporations, uh, I don't think it's going to change the paradigm. it's not going to slow down Elon Musk. So, want, to answer your point, I think that in this re-imagining human rights, without letting go of achievements we've made this revisiting, and reimagining human rights has to include a whole lot of things. One of them is the holistic view of human rights, civil, political, economic, social, cultural rights. Another is to give much more attention to the leviathans, the corporate leviathans. and, a I'm sorry, but the UN guiding principles is a step forward, then that's not enough. We, we've got to do something else. An, and, you know, I think there are other things we have to do around decolonizing human rights. It's this holistic approach, somehow wrestling with the corporations in an effective, meaningful way. Also, there's the, uh, idea of intergenerationality. There's also the idea the environment, uh, giving that higher priority. I could go on, but that the, the point, the one that worries me most is actually the point that you raise. It's the leviathans, what I call the leviathans, these immensely corporate leviathans. And, I think that decolonization of human rights, has to address that those leviathans and how we're to do it. I don't know, but if we work together, global South and global North, if we work together, global majority and global minority, if we work together, I think that human rights can provide, a, a powerful, deep, challenge to the corporate, leviathan. I think that's the way to go.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 56:19

Thank you, Paul. And one of my favorite stories. I was listening from your Ted talk with university of Essex, you shared a story of your son, Rob and being the daughter of a human rights professor, lawyer. You shared this really great story that when Rob was six years old, you overheard his friend say to him old, what does your dad do? Cause you had been traveling a lot and I had the same childhood with my dad always traveling. I remember one time I came home from school and I was looking for my dad and I said, mom, where's dad? And she was like, oh, he's in Moscow. I was like, oh, okay. when you overheard Rob's answer, he said, oh, he just travels a lot. then you were talking more with Rob and he was trying to explain like what human rights is. And I thought that was such a really interesting conversation because you

explained it a bit to Rob and his friend. And Rob said, but you keep traveling. So you're not fixing it. Like it's not working. Whatever, whatever you're doing is not working. So what, what do you do? And it's funny because for you and my dad, you're both still traveling for international human rights work and movements. so I think like an ender to this amazing conversation and we're so grateful for your time and friendship, Paul, is for both you and my dad, 40 years on now, reflect on that conversation you had with Rob at six. What is giving you hope for human rights? Like what is, is working?

PAUL HUNT 57:42

I'm, I'm more hopeful now. Maybe I intimated this earlier, but I'm more hopeful now than I was 10 years ago, partly because of that TWAIL scholarship, actually, partly because of that scholarship from the global South, where they're embracing, not all of them, of course, but they're embracing human rights, saying, keep it. But we've really got to make changes to it. And I think the global South can do that. Yeah. but it's, it'll be with, it'll be with some of us from the global north and some will oppose from the global north. So I think there's a shift which I think is, going to lend more support to human rights, because of the growing interest in the global, global south. And despite all the terrible things that are happening, y know, there are green shoots, particularly in the global south, there are green shoots, uh, of human rights activism, um, and so I take some comfort from that. And you know, one of the things that has conviction that has driven me is that the universal declaration is designed to try and address authoritarianism. So there must be free speech, there must be fair trials and all the rest of it. But also the universal declaration of human rights addresses the causes of authoritarianism. That's where the economic, social, cultura rights are crucially important because the causes of authoritarianism are poverty, uh, inequality, a sense of being mistreated, uh, a sense of unfairness. And I think that that's, that's one reason why I attach a lot of importance to economic, social, cultural rights, because it addresses the causes of authoritarianism. We've failed to address adequately the causes of authoritarianism. And some people have drifted away in our, in the last years, they've drifted away to authoritarian leaders, whether it's Trump or whether it's Farage or whoever. So we haven't got that right. We need to give more attention to the causes of authoritarianism, a well as authoritarianism itself. And I do see green shoots, uh, particularly in the global south. And keeps me going.

BERT LOCKWOOD 59:52

I would add I that Trump is going to be making a significant contribution to human rights. Because, I think he has exposed, what a vision without human rights looks like. And I think the reaction, To him, um, and that vision uh, significant. And I think it's particularly, represented young people's vision.

PAUL HUNT 1:00:20

Yeah.

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:00:21

uh, I have some optimism post-Trump um, we'll, we'll see a resurgence human rights.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:00:28

and Paul, when when, uh, Trump won the last election, this comes as no surprise since I have a human rights podcast with my dad, that my dad and my mom are my sounding boards. And when Trump won and I was distraught, I really did not see that coming. I called him and dad, you made a comment to me that really just kind of you know pissed me off at the moment because I was like I don't want to hear that and it was that with Trump winning it actually would do human rights would do better in that way and I don't think that's completely true and dad you can kind of maybe more explain what you meant by that but like in that moment I was just so enraged and I was so upset and then but the sad part is it is true like we've had to kind of hit rock bottom to see what a mess we've made of this and how evil Trump is and you know right now Paul in America we're facing that our amazing Haitian neighbors and Syrian neighbors are going to be deported back they're going to lose their but by 2028 it will get better

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:01:30

Meredith it's it's usually what I say to my students who um you know are indicating they're going to move to Canada I suggest to them that actually Trump is very good to them in terms of job opportunities that probably the worst time we had uh for human jobs was when Jimmy Carter was president uh because the foundations and stuff didn't need to fund human rights NGOs and stuff because the government was going to take care of it uh so it a pragmatic point I was making to our

PAUL HUNT 1:02:07

right

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:02:07

And Paul, what I would say for you and Rob, because I've had a year and a half getting to do these conversations with my dad, is perhaps chat with Rob and the recollection of his six-year-old being so insightful and kind of calling out human rights work and, you know, how far you've come. But reflecting on when he was six to where you guys are now. And, I'm sure as a daughter to Burt Lockwood, I'm sure your son Rob is so proud of you.

PAUL HUNT 1:02:34

We're terribly lucky with our children.

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:02:37

Thank you, Paul. This has been wonderful. I very much appreciate your, uh, contributions to the, literature of human rights, as well as the, uh, enforcement. you've had a remarkable, uh, career. And, I want to thank you very much for your friendship and contributions.

PAUL HUNT 1:02:56

It's a uh, pleasure to join both of you. Thank you very much, Bert. Thank you, Meredith. I really appreciate

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:03:02

Thank you so much, Paul. You've been so down for the entire time.

BERT_LOCKWOOD 1:03:07

You can learn more about Paul's work and explore the articles, talks, and resources discussed throughout our conversation through the links in our show notes.

PAUL HUNT 1:03:16

If you enjoyed this episode, please subscribe, rate, and Human Rights Conversations Across Generations on Spotify and Apple Podcast. Thank you so much for listening, and we'll see you next time.