



Human Rights and Technology
Fall 2023
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Welcome to a study group exploration of human rights and technology. We will meet **Thursdays from 2:30-4:00** on *September 14, October 12, October 26, November 9 and December 7*. In addition, I will be available for office hours on the Fridays after our sessions (9/15, 10/13, 10/27, 11/10, and 12/8).

Study Group Description:

The Human Rights and Technology study group will explore the emerging and complex intersection between human rights and advancements in technology. We will reckon with, and critically analyze, the racial justice, gender equity and human rights implications of technology. Will AI further entrench hierarchies of racial, gender and economic privilege, or can we forge AI for justice that upends those hierarchies? Can tech be leveraged to accurately document and support the prosecution of human rights abuses and crimes against humanity? What does it mean to innovate from a rights-based framework that centers underrepresented communities? Are our smartphones human rights tools that advance the work of human rights lawyers to bear witness; or do existing and new technologies continue the oppressive tactics of state surveillance and harassment against human rights defenders and emerging justice movements?

Our study group will be an opportunity to explore these questions, with guests at the frontlines of these very questions, from the tech, academic, and human rights sectors.

Course Objectives:

1. Understand the fundamental concepts and tensions at the intersection of human rights and technology.
2. Analyze the implications of technological advancements on human rights.

3. Evaluate the weaponization of technology on human rights defenders and underrepresented communities.
4. Examine the transformational use of technology to document human rights abuses and innovate from a rights-based framework.
5. Interact with representatives from the tech sector, human rights organizations and civil society seeking to address human rights in the digital age.
6. Identify potential solutions and strategies in culture, international law, and product design to address the challenges posed by technology's impact on human rights.

Study Session 1

September 14

Introduction to Human Rights and Technology

Our first gathering will be an opportunity to learn about each other and discuss the hope and vision of our study group. We will cover the following points:

- Scaffolding the intersection of rights and tech
- The power of tech to bear witness, from Mamie Till to Darnella Frazier

Study Session 2

October 12

Freedom of Expression, Hate Speech and Content Moderation in the Digital Era

We will discuss the challenges of social media platforms to adhere to a commitment to freedom of expression and, at the same time, address the spread of online hate and harassment. Our conversation will double click on the specific experiences of online hate and harassment endured by the queer communities in the Middle East and North Africa, with queer activists and scholars, [Afsaneh Rigot](#) and [Azza Nubi](#). Critical points for discussion will include:

- Censorship, content moderation, and the role of online platforms
- Definitions of hate speech and balancing freedom of expression with countering hate speech and disinformation
- Case in point: weaponization of tech against queer communities in MENA
- Discussion of on and off platform attacks against queer communities
- Designing from the margins to protect vulnerable communities

Study Session 3

October 26

Tech and Human Rights Documentation

While tech can be used to surveil and entrap vulnerable communities and human rights activists, there are also real opportunities for tech to document human rights abuses and crimes against

humanity, including for International Criminal Court prosecutions. In addition to tech advancements, there are also new legal frameworks that can be leveraged through the Digital Services Act. Our guest [Raquel Vazquez Llorente](#) from the human rights organization [Witness](#) will broach the themes of:

- Legal framework of the Digital Services Act and preservation of content for human rights prosecution
- Role of tech companies in the preservation of content for prosecution of human rights violations
- Additional tech challenges to human rights documentation

Study Session 4

November 9

Gen AI Challenges, Risks and Opportunities to Human Rights Defenders and Movements

Gen AI is moving at a rapid pace, and despite efforts from the White House to the UN to propose different regulatory controls and ethical guardrails to mediate the use of gen AI, there is widespread belief that the technology cannot be truly harnessed. There are also unprecedented racial justice and gender equity implications regarding gen AI—will the need to consider those implications be subordinated to the drive for innovation and competition?

Guest speakers will help us think through these conversations, with overall points on:

- Ethical implications and risks of AI on human rights
- Bias, discrimination, and accountability in AI systems
- The right to explanation and algorithmic transparency
- AI for justice?

Study Session 5

December 7

What does a Career in Human Rights and Tech Look Like?

There is a profound imperative for human rights practitioners to be in the tech sector, and for technologists to be in the human rights space. At present, that intersection is a pioneering one, and there are many from both sectors who are making the way. This last session will be an opportunity to interact and learn from those pioneers—what is their lived experience and journey, what might they advise to students with a similar interest, what are the important learnings?

Topics and themes covered will be:

- Holding tech accountable to human rights frameworks from the NGO praxis
- At the intersection of tech and human rights, in academia and scholarship
- Supporting tech's commitment to human rights via philanthropy
- Establishing adherence to human rights frameworks within the tech sector

Course Leadership

Malika Saada Saar is YouTube's Global Head of Human Rights and formerly Google's Senior Counsel on Civil and Human Rights. Before joining Google, Malika was founder and Executive Director of the Human Rights Project for Girls (Rights4Girls), a human rights organization focused on gender-based violence against young women and girls in the U.S. She also served as Special Counsel on Human Rights at The Raben Group. As a human rights lawyer and advocate, Malika led the effort to shut down Craigslist sex ads that served as the leading site for the trafficking of children for sex, ended the federal practice of shackling pregnant mothers behind bars in U.S. prisons, and successfully advocated for millions in federal funding for treatment services for at-risk families.

Newsweek and the Daily Beast have named Malika as one of "150 Women Who Shake the World." The Obama White House selected Ms. Saada Saar to serve on the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS. She has also been honored by Brown University's highest alumni award, the Roger Williams award, and by Georgetown Law Center's esteemed Robert F. Drinan Award for Public Service.

Ms. Saada Saar holds a B.A. from Brown University, M.A. in Education from Stanford University, and a J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center.