

Islamic Sharia law, which favours men in all areas.' For example, 'during a stoning, while men are only buried up to their pelvis, women are buried up to their necks before fifty stones are thrown at them, drastically reducing their chances of survival.'

I'm fighting so that this doesn't happen to other families, so that Iran recognises the death penalty as a violent act against humanity

Shole Pakravan

After this analysis, Shole Pakravan returned to her tragic personal journey, which led her to oppose the Ayatollahs' regime. Indeed, 'in 2007, her daughter was raped and, while defending herself with a knife, killed her attacker.' Unfortunately, 'it was discovered that the man in question was a member of the Revolutionary Guards', so 'the regime supported his family and demanded Al-Qisäs, i.e., retaliation in kind.' 'After seven years of fighting', she continued, 'my daughter was executed.' After that, 'I didn't want to live anymore' but fortunately, 'a woman who had lost her son came to see me and helped me heal.' 'Thanks to her', said Reyhaneh Jabbari's mother, 'we met other be-



Watch the full debate on YouTube

MODERATOR:

Nicolas Perron, Director of Programmes, Ensemble contre la Peine de Mort (Ensemble against the Death Penalty)

SPEAKERS:

Taimoor Aliassi, Executive Director and Representative to the United Nations of the Kurdistan Human Rights Association - Geneva (KMMK-G)

Shole Pakravan, Iranian activist, mother of Reyhaneh Jabbari, sentenced to death and executed for the murder of her alleged rapist

reaved mothers and I told myself that my daughter wouldn't have wanted me to go under, so I picked myself up and found a reason to live.' Agreeing with the theme of the discussion, she stated that 'the death penalty is no normal punishment because it punishes the family of the condemned person forever.' In addition, 'before being executed, prisoners are in isolation, and the family is in the dark; personally I was becoming paranoid, I saw my daughter everywhere in the street.' Today, 'I'm fighting so that this doesn't happen to other families, so that Iran recognises the death penalty as a violent act against humanity.'

Pointing to the title of the documentary – *Seven Winters in Tehran* (2023) – which tells the story of Shole Pakravan's fight to free her daughter, the moderator invited the Iranian to describe the workings of Al-Qisäs. The law, which has been in force since the arrival of the mullahs in 1991, gives families the right to 'demand reparation through blood, i.e., the death penalty.' 'Sometimes it's possible to make a deal with the family by paying them', she continued, 'but in my case, they were rich and demanded this revenge.' This law of retaliation 'is just a law of hatred and blood', asserted Shole Pakravan. She insisted that 'this tool is used to repress', adding that she 'has hope in the new generation fighting for its abolition, mobilising in the streets and on social networks.' The Iranian activist ended this discussion by saying that 'the situation is becoming radicalised; the regime is determined to repress the youth but the youth are determined to change the regime.'

YOUTH SEQUENCE

AT THE HEART OF THE CONFLICT: THOSE COMMITTED TO PEACE IN AFRICA

29 September, 10:30 a.m. - 12 p.m., Gold Room



Drissa Traoré, Binta Sidibe-Gascon, Ousmane Ndiaye, Niagalé Bagayoko and François Hericher

Defending human rights, without distinction

'How do you perceive the role of clichés in conflicts?' asked Ousmane Ndiaye to kick off the discussions. Niagalé Bagayoko noted that the force of communitarianism is one of the main levers manipulated by those involved in conflicts in Africa. She cited the example of the Rwandan genocide, which claimed almost a million lives in 1994. The massacre was made possible by the Hutu community's use of media tools, such as Radio télévision Libre des Mille Collines, to call for the murder of the Tutsis.

How can such a tragedy be explained? 'In Africa, there are very homogeneous communities, which can be explained by the existence of highly compartmentalised dynamics, based on a caste logic. Lifestyles and occupations, such as farming and herding, have been perpetuated over the centuries, leading to a number of painful confrontations', explained Binta

Sidibe-Gascon. These dynamics are now being revived. The Fulani, who are mainly herders, are now targeted on the basis of the blue colour of their clothing, their physical features or their behaviour. 'In a Sahelian region that is plagued by armed groups and terrorist organisations, there is a facial prejudice that identifies the Fulani as terrorists, which in turn leads to a call to get rid of them. The community's civilians, targeted by the various armed groups and armies of the Sahelian countries, are paying a heavy price', warned the vice-president of the Kisal Observatory ('protection' in Fulani). The organisation works to protect civilians suffering this type of discrimination in the Sahel, whatever their community.

In these conflicts, the role of NGOs in defending human rights is vital, as they take the place of weakened states by providing

Moderator:

Ousmane Ndiaye, Africa Editor-in-Chief and former Sahel correspondent at TV5 Monde

Speakers:

Binta Sidibe-Gascon, Vice-President of the Kisal Observatory

Niagalé Bagayoko, President of the African Security Sector Network

Drissa Traoré, Head of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) in the Sahel

François Hericher, Director of Security and Safety at the NGO, Acted

assistance to the people. 'We intervene in areas that are sometimes difficult to access, providing emergency responses: we distribute food aid and blankets, and we build wells. We provide basic education and vocational training. We also work on mediation and conciliation, to reduce tensions between communities', explains François Hericher.

Having set the scene, Ousmane Ndiaye asked the speakers to explain the reasons for their humanitarian commitment. Binta Sidibe-Gascon, who was born in a Sahelian village in Burkina Faso and lives in France, wanted to speak on behalf of people working in the field. Drissa Traoré believes that a human rights defender is committed to helping others at all costs, without counting their working hours, and sometimes risking their own life, because the risk of being imprisoned, taken hostage or even killed is very real.

As an academic, Niagalé Bagayoko has taken a theoretical approach to these conflicts, focusing on peace studies*. These approaches take a different view of human security from the traditional one, where security is often synonymous with the use of military



Watch
the full
debate on
YouTube

means. But this latter vision provides only partial solutions to conflicts. 'We need a much broader approach, one that focuses on people and not just states. It was while making this remark that I met peace activists. That's when I realised that I could contribute to advancing these causes by sharing knowledge and disseminating detailed information', said the researcher.

My involvement is bound by a refusal to stand idly by

François Hericher

François Hericher discovered the world of humanitarian aid while working as a civil engineer in Chad, before joining Acted to rebuild houses that had been demolished in the Central African Republic following the conflict that broke out between Selekas and anti-Balakas in 2013. This assignment eventually led him to take on a mediation role to help the various communities to coexist once again. 'My involvement is bound by a refusal to stand idly by,' he confided.

Humanitarian action is highly complex because it has to take account of the many players on the ground. 'We can't do our work without the agreement of governments', warned Drissa Traoré. 'That's why we lobby national and international decision-makers, such as the African Union, to

Peace studies* = Peace studies is a sociological discipline that aims to provide an intellectual framework for finding non-violent solutions to national or global conflicts.

try and influence practices. But our action sometimes gives rise to misunderstandings and even tensions, because governments may choose to defend themselves when we expose abuses committed by the defence and security forces.'

Humanitarian workers are sometimes taken to task when we try to negotiate access to certain areas

François Hericher

Binta Sidibe-Gascon noted that the recent coups d'état in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have led to a narrowing of civic space. 'Our colleagues are being pressured and intimidated into self-censorship, sometimes to the point of kidnapping', she warned. 'Humanitarian workers are sometimes taken to task when we try to negotiate access to certain areas. Especially as, in recent years, we've been trying to get as close as possible to conflict zones', added François Berricher. This can lead to arrests and even detentions, even though, in theory, international principles such as the Geneva Convention protect humanitarian operators.

'The principles of international humanitarian law must be taught to all military personnel in order to spare civilians and non-combatants, whether they are pris-



Drissa Traoré

© Eric Bismacki - Région Normandie

ners of war, doctors or humanitarian workers', urged Drissa Traoré. Nevertheless, conflicts in the Sahel involve not only regular armies but also other armed groups. NGOs are, consequently, forced to cooperate with the various factions, which makes their task all the more complicated.

For Binta Sidibe-Gascon, we need to stop trying to resolve conflicts at all costs by 'going all military', whether through the intervention of foreign armies, mercenary groups or the distribution of arms to civilians, which only serves to inflame the situation. This is why the Citizens' Coalition for the Sahel, which brings together various civil society organisations in the region, is trying to develop a strategy based on four pillars: protecting civilians, tackling the root causes of conflicts, allowing humanitarian access to the various areas of operation and fighting impunity for abuses committed, which only drive more civilians into the arms of armed groups. 'It really is time to listen to the distress of these different communities and take action', concludes Binta Sidibe-Gascon.