

UNDERGRADUATE LAWS PROGRAMME BLOG

## Video transcript: Social media movements and human rights

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Hello so I'm Urfan Khaliq and I'm the module leader for International protection of human rights and this is a short audio blog for students following the International protection of human rights program.

I thought I'd talk to you briefly about something which has been in the news and which is really quite interesting from a human rights perspective as far as international law is concerned and that's the sort of so-called #metoo movement. Now as you probably know the #metoo movement started when a number of actresses came forward in Hollywood and they were accusing a very well-known film producer Harvey Weinstein of various forms of unacceptable behaviour such as sexual harassment and sexual assaults and so forth. But what was very interesting about the #metoo movement was it led to an outpouring of sentiment and emotion as well as anger by a very large number of women, not only just privileged women in the West, and these were very wealthy very well-known actresses who were coming forward, but it led to a sort of movement throughout the world where women started to talk about harassment, the sexual discrimination they faced, the harassment they faced, the assaults they have faced, indeed the assaults and harassment they faced over millennia and they were talking about how it still impacted upon women in contemporary society.

And it became a movement and has become a movement which is global in its reach. We can see the power of it in that it has led to certain individuals and also certain societies beginning to think about the sort of incidents of discrimination and harassment and the meaning of women which are common place but taken in many senses for granted. I mean we can see for example the idea and one doesn't have to think hard of this, if you are watching into an IPL cricket match or if you watch American football you'll see women very scantily dressed as cheerleaders. We don't ever see men in those sorts of situations. And it just highlights the sort of the normalization of the demeaning of women.

We can also see for example how the metoo movement led to a breaking of taboos in certain societies, societies in which women have never really come forward and sort of sexual assaults and harassment have been seen as stigmas of shame for the victim, the women. Some of these taboos were being broken. Pakistan was a very interesting case actually. Now there's the "justice for Zainab" movement which the sort of metoo movement evolved into in Pakistan and sort of women coming forward saying we want police to take action, we want politicians to be held accountable and also sort of very well-known women coming forward and saying we were sexually assaulted as children and we... the only shame in fact was that we stayed silent and we have no shame or we thought should feel no shame, rather the shame belongs to those who perpetrated these crimes against us.

So the metoo movement has been very interesting because it sort of tackles lots of issues of harassment assault but fundamentally it's about gender discrimination and discrimination against women endemic in societies. And of course we have the women's convention which tries to tackle

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those sorts of matters, need various provisions deal with cultural practices which sort of discriminate against women and those cultural practice can take a variety of different forms.

What's also very interesting about the metoo movement is that in some senses it's a social movement and social movements can be very important in the law evolving and developing. It's not on par so far with matters such as those which led to women receiving the vote. But one can also see this in the sort of the "black lives matter" movement which has sprung up in the United States in the recent past and how that "black lives" movement... the "black lives matter" movement also led some sort of change in introspection in the United Kingdom. The metoo movement for women of course is global. Women are half of the population in all parts of the world and it has led to a rising of awareness, now what sort of change this leads to over the longer term is much harder to predict. It will be difficult to discern but the raising of awareness in itself is an important factor and it can lead to the better protection and rights and they can lead to legislative initiatives to protect women or other groups who are vulnerable in these sorts of circumstances.

So it's certainly a movement which is well worth keeping an eye out for and it also highlights very nicely the sort of the fluidity and the living nature of human rights and how things evolve and how actions and reactions in one part of the world may have profound changes over time in another part of the world.

I hope you found that interesting.