

Annual Human Rights Lecture - Law Society of Ireland - "Human Rights - an Ombudsman Perspective"

Speech - **City** Dublin - **Country** Ireland - **Date** 05/06/2015

Annual Human Rights Lecture - Law Society of Ireland "Human Rights - an Ombudsman Perspective" 5 June 2015 - Dublin Emily O'Reilly

(Introductory Remarks - thanks etc.)

In late 2003, shortly after my appointment as national Ombudsman, I was invited to give a keynote lecture on human rights at the world meeting of the International Ombudsman Institute in Canada.

As a then neophyte in the legal and human rights world – although not in its practical realities through my former life as a journalist – I did struggle somewhat with the drafting, but with the not inconsiderable input of my then director general, I managed neatly to line up my first and second generation rights, mused thoughtfully about third generation rights, tiptoed through the ECHR, the CRC, the CRPD, the CAT, and the ICERD, and sat down, rather relieved, at the end.

After that came the questions and at that point I was on my own. The first few I batted off easily enough and then I was asked how as an Ombudsman, I engaged human rights in my work.

At that point in my life I was also knee deep in small children and so in a flash of multi tasking thought processing, I said that an Ombudsman deals with human rights as a parent deals with feeding vegetables to their two year olds; they cut them up into funny shapes, they smother them in ketchup, and they do not on any account call them vegetables.

So neither I concluded should an Ombudsman let on to a Government that the stuff it deals with really is the stuff of human rights.

As an Ombudsman, I therefore dealt with poor or mal administration. When someone was wrongly denied a local authority house, this was not a breach of their human rights, but rather a procedural error, when an elderly person was abused through neglect in a nursing home, this was a failure to develop adequate protocols around nursing care, when a person with a disability failed to secure a grant to build a downstairs bathroom, this was a failure to add up the



sums properly.

I instinctively knew that Governments, not always and not everywhere, but in a vague generalised way, are uncomfortable about human rights particularly when the granting of them costs money or get in the way of their preferred legislative agenda. We have seen this played out here in recent years, largely in the face of public indifference, as the state's two main agencies for the protection and promotion of human rights were systematically downgraded.

The first Chief Commissioner of the now merged Irish Human Rights Commission and Equality Authority, Emily Logan, has rather acidly observed that the so called merger should more properly be called a start up given the way both bodies, as individual entities, had been asset stripped over the last number of years, thereby significantly reducing their capacity to do what they were set up to do – essentially to hold the state to account on its human rights record.

Ms Logan has referred to "legacy issues that meant the equality and human rights architecture in this country was so undermined as to effectively remove it from both political and public debate". Unfortunately for that Emily, she's stuck with a name for her Commission that does rather give the human rights game away.

And those of you who are keeping an eye on the hot button human rights debate currently in the UK will be aware that over there, the carrots and the broccoli have been well and truly unmasked as the new all Tory Government tucks into its campaign promise to stop the Strasbourg court from sticking its nose into British affairs..

The British Human Rights Act and British participation in the European Convention on Human Rights are both under scrutiny.

British judges, lawyers, politicians, and media have lined up on both sides of the ECHR debate over the degree to which the Strasbourg court puts limits on British sovereignty, on its Parliament's right to enact its own laws or on Judges to make their own Strasbourg free rulings. Having read some of the commentary on it would appear that the answer is 'well it does and it doesn't'...

But the debate over Strasbourg – and certainly in the context of the recent election – is in some sense a proxy for the wider British debate on EU membership, and it is therefore essentially political rather than legal.

But even if you cast it in a political framework and say it's actually about British sovereignty and not about human rights, it is remarkable nonetheless that the two words 'human rights' should generate such high degrees of suspicion, hostility, cynicism, even apathy, particularly when we live in a Europe essentially created from the ashes of one of the greatest human rights abuses in modern history and which expanded – through the European Union - to encompass countries whose peoples lived through their own more up to date periods of appalling human rights denial.



The human rights world is derided as an industry, bent on mission creep, finding within the ECHR and other instruments, according to its critics, the type of social and economic rights so far removed from the rights denied in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union as to be unrecognisable as human rights at all. I have heard even human rights practitioners clash, for example, over whether the right to water is a human right or not. And add to that the EU wide struggle to find a way to deal humanely with the migrants fleeing their own particular horrors in the middle east and Africa and one can see how the HR brand has its issues.

So I struggle, and everyone who thinks about what is in plain sight of all of us, must also struggle, to understand the contradictions in the playing out of our human rights systems and sympathies.

Why do we choose to see some events, some people, some categories of people as worthy of inclusion in our human rights framework and others barely or not at all. Why do our eyes well up at the sight of child's body floating dead under a blue sky inches from a member state shore even as we settle back, indifferently, and let our Governments haggle over the numbers of the still living we may grant asylum to.

In our own country, still basking in the glow of our league topping performance on the gay marriage front, we continue to dance around another human rights elephant in our nation's room – Direct Provision.

At the last count, Ireland's DP system had been criticised internationally by two Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioners, plus the UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, plus the UN Independent Expert on the Question of Human Rights and Extreme Poverty, plus the Europe Commission against Racism and Intolerance, plus the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Rights, plus the UN Human Rights Committee.

A recent HIQA report showed that in one twelve month period, over 14% of children in direct provision centres were the subject of child protection referrals compared with just over 1.5% in the general population, although given the open camp type conditions in which many families in Direct Provision live, it is possible that abuse is easier to spot in that environment than it would be in a private home.

I also acknowledge the deep seriousness and the humanity with which Minister Aodhain O'Riordan is attempting to deal with this matter and note the recent report from the Oireachtas Oversight and Petitions Committee which has made it its business to visit the centres and talk to the asylum seekers. We shall await the eventual outcome.

As European Ombudsman, I deal with the political sensitivities of the migrant issue through investigations into the EU's border agency Frontex and its role both in the on-going migrant issues in the Mediterranean area and in organising return flights on behalf of member states, that is bringing back to a third country those people who have failed the asylum test in Europe.



Again I try to present my arguments as dryly as possible. I suggest for example that Frontex should have a complaints mechanism for the observance of appropriate governance standards, yet I know, that for some people even that can appear as the addition of another so called pull factor for migrants and be politically divisive.

So how do we pick and choose those whom we wish to embrace as worthy of human rights protection or inclusion?

The recent marriage referendum provided near laboratory conditions for examining our contrariness when it comes to settling on who is human rights worthy. Ursula Halligan, compared herself to a Japanese soldier emerging from the jungle after thirty years when she described what it was like, at the age of 53, publicly to acknowledge that she is gay and find herself not met with hostility but rather a torrent of affirmative tweets, two marriage proposals, and some very impressive floral displays.

Yet for many others, in both camps, the transition of Ireland in a relatively short period of time from a homosexual punishing state to a state, where hours after the referendum was passed, the head of Tourism Ireland was already planning to monetise the result through branding us as a gay wedding destination of choice, was equally mind-blowing.

So how did that happen? A number of factors were at play, not least a collective shame around the way in which generations of homosexual men and women were treated. Another was the erosion over the last two decades of the view or indeed lived reality of marriage either as a union for life or the only valid way for a family unit to organise itself and to be supported by the state.

We now have a broad cultural acceptance of cohabitation, single parenting, divorce and separation as norms, alongside blended families and other kinds of family arrangements. So despite the understandable hype around its value during the referendum campaign, marriage has become just one option among many as a means to organise a family life, and therefore the move to include one more kind of family relationship into the mix no longer seemed like the stretch it might have even a few years ago.

But the second factor was the really critical one, and that was the very deliberate decision to turn the referendum not into a dry debate on law and ethics or even, curiously, marriage, but rather into a debate – or national conversation as the organisers liked to put it - into whether gay people are seen as fully equal citizens or not. And to do that, those who drove and supported the campaign had to turn those who were previously 'other' into those who are now, fully, 'us'. Or as the Taoiseach so memorably put it on a bus full of Marriage Equality campaigners, go out and show them you're normal.

On the day of the vote, I drove by a middle aged man, standing at the causeway near Clontarf holding a sign that said, simply, 'Vote for Me'. The genius of the campaign was to turn that gaze directly on to the eyes of the electorate and challenge it NOT to see it as a mirror image of itself and therefore deserving of everything that it had.



And that was why, in a very planned and focused way, we had story after story of human beings who described their personal experience of being gay, who moved out of the shadows of myth, of mystery and of curiosity and presented themselves as just themselves.

From 2004-2013, Atlantic Philanthropies supported four gay rights organisations in Ireland , in order to , according to its published report on its Irish activities in this area, “improve human rights, visibility, and access to services for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

“Marriage Equality”, according to this report “ focused on a visibility campaign, where videos on the web and posters on the street dramatically raised the visibility of LGB people and their families.

“ They trained family members and other allies to become spokespeople for the LGBT community. They organised these spokespeople on a massive scale using personal stories to educate the public, members of the legal community, and politicians that civil partnership was not equivalent to civil marriage. Marriage Equality also held a conference about the experiences of young people growing up in Ireland with gay parents to highlight the fact that the rights of children in LGBT families weren’t protected by the civil partnership legislation. This mobilisation led to 73% public support for marriage equality in 2012, an increase from 56% in 2008”.

And it was those stories that moved the undecided , even, those, I would suggest who did want to continue to reserve some sort of separate space for heterosexual marriage but who could not, in the end, deny that gaze. In the end the campaign made it impossible for many people to separate out those two things. The Church’s plea to the electorate not to turn its back on the tradition of millennia, of marriage based on sexual complementarity, could not withstand the direct personal pleading of those, who had chosen marriage equality as a marker of full acceptance.

The failure to accept the gaze of the other is what triggers, as we know, the neglect of, indifference towards, or abuse of, the other. That is the story of the holocaust and in this year of commemoration of the liberation of the Nazi camps, Europe can reflect on that and link the legacy to the human rights challenges it faces today.

Some weeks ago I visited the Auschwitz Birkenau concentration and extermination camp in Poland and it is clear that the purpose of this museum and memorial site is to attempt to drive that message home.

As you move through the camp, and particularly the Birkenau part that was purpose built on Himmler’s order because the former Polish barracks in Auschwitz lacked efficiency, you are shown where the people arrived at that infamous train stop, where they were separated into those who would live and those who would die within the hour, where those who would live were stripped of their clothes, shaved, disinfected, given their striped pyjamas and sent to the huts.

And at the end of all this, you enter into a part of the museum that contains a set of



photographs, found in boxes after the camp was liberated and which contain the family photographs of nine of the families who were deported to the camp.

There are pictures of weddings and family events and holidays and portraits, the banal standard fare of normal, generally middle class life, the women in the fashion of prosperous thirties Europe, the children smiling, clearly loved and almost certainly gassed to death within an hour of their arrival.

We are shown those photographs, explains the guide, because so many of our fixed images of the camp are of shaven headed near skeletal men and women, indistinguishable virtually one from the other, barely recognisable as human beings. Here, in these photographs, their humanity is returned, their gaze alights on us, we see them as we see ourselves and in many ways, those photographs, as they are intended to be, are the most moving and the most shocking part of that visit.

Peter Chivinski, the director of the Museum has written a meditation on Auschwitz and on its contemporary meaning, making the case, as many have done before him, that it was Auschwitz above all that spurred the eventual creation of the European Union.

Chivinsky writes; "In the Shoah Europe lost herself. Understanding this puts Shoah into the right context of European history. For in the Shoah Europe lost everything. First of all her sense of pride. Indeed, the quite unjustified sense of innocence, despite all the previous conflicts, wars and tragedies. In the Shoah Europe lost her right to believe in what until then she had most strongly represented: the strength of religious morality, enlightened humanism, the values of written constitutions and democracy as well as the dogmas of Positivism. ..

"No wonder then that in the first years after the war there were sometimes attempts to find a new face of Europe, one that had a greater sense of solidarity, mutual aid and community. This is what had been lacking the most. In this sense Auschwitz is one of the basic foundations of the post-War European community...

But, he adds,

"In fifty years time," he says, "people like us will leave museums devoted to what happened in Darfur or North Korea with tears in their eyes and cursing us for our silence, because, he adds, despite remembrance and at least partial awareness, without responsibility we continue to have a great, collective problem. People will continue to die virtually in our own arms."

What Civinsky is saying is hardly novel. We know that genocide did not stop when the Arbeit Macht Frei gate was opened and the world observed the horror hidden again in plain sight in camps that bordered towns and villages comprised of people just like us.

But when we are faced with the simplicity of the message of Auschwitz perhaps therein lies the problem. Maybe it's just too simple. We see it starkly but what we don't see from this distance are all the messy moral and political compromises, phoney rationalisations, and false



assumptions that led to the holocaust and which continue to deliver dead bodies on to European shores and which contribute to the web of conflict in the Middle East and in Africa from where those bodies come. Because it is precisely in the messy, complex and myriad interstices of events that the dust that blinds us to actual horror is cocooned.

“In the garden of beasts” - the title a reference to the Tiergarten in Berlin, is a book that chronicles the life of American Ambassador William Dodd in Berlin from 1933 to 1937 where he had an intimate ringside seat upon which to witness the road from the Aryan paragraph inserted in the dry, German Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil service all the way to the gates of holocaust hell.

While Dodd is credited with eventually attempting to alert the US administration to what was happening in plain view, the book chronicles the way in which he and others initially attempted to rationalise and minimise the way in which the Nazis were ramping up the level of Jewish persecution. When Roosevelt questioned the move to deprive Jewish people of their citizenship., Dodd responded, “Give men a chance to try their schemes.”

And this is precisely the point. The history of any cataclysmic event or genocidal horror is littered with references to the way in which the politics of the day and the ethical compromises arising from those politics, were precisely what led to the particular event and horror.

Peter Sutherland, interviewed recently about his concerns in relation to the EU’s response to the migrant deaths in the Mediterranean recalled the voyage of the MS St Louis in 1939, carrying 900 Jewish people fleeing Nazi persecution and which was turned away by Cuba, the United States and Canada, eventually forced to return to Europe where, while many of the passengers were taken in by the UK, France, Belgium and the Netherlands, upwards of 200 would eventually perish in the holocaust.

A mixture of anti Semitism, migration concerns, political dealing, and bureaucratic diktats had conspired essentially, to condemn at least some of those aboard to almost certain death.

Another such political compromise was made very shortly after the extermination camps were liberated and when attempts were made to ensure that the German population was made fully aware of what had taken place. A recent documentary tells the story of how a British official working in the then UK Ministry of Information, Sidney Bernstein was commissioned to make a documentary based on the footage recorded by US and British soldiers as they entered the camps in 1945. Alfred Hitchcock was partly involved in its production while Richard Crossman of Crossman Diaries fame, did the narration.

By the time the documentary ‘Night will Fall’ was ready for release, however the political climate had changed; the British Government was dealing with the Palestine issue, and, it was said, did not wish to invoke any more sympathy for Jewish people, while the opening bars of what would become the cold war cooled the desire to punish Germany too harshly as the Soviet Union became the new enemy. It would be seventy years before the unseen documentary was taken off the shelf.



The documentary, which I have watched, shows footage from the camps that is at times almost unwatchable. Nothing is spared. We see hundreds if not thousands of naked corpses thrown and shoveled into mass graves, the numbers too large, the threat of disease too great, to afford any semblance of dignified, individual burial. We also see the locals, the people who lived within a short distance of certain camps, paraded through the camps by the allied soldiers, forced, young and old to observe what was happening beside them as they went about their untroubled daily lives.

The title *Night will Fall* comes from a line in the script "Unless the world learns the lesson these pictures teach, night will fall."

But in 2015, supersaturated as we now are, with images of horror not just from that holocaust but from atrocities played out 24/7 on all our various screens and devices, is that ever or even enough really to engage us in a way that motivates us to action and not just to idle, fleeting tears?

In the past three years almost 200,000 Syrians, for example, have been killed. Some have been gassed. Some have been tortured. Many have been tossed into mass graves. Yes, the matrix of inter regional, international, inter tribal and inter religious issues in this and other contemporary conflicts is complex, not amenable to any quick fix but time will pass and a future generation will nonetheless be asking the questions we now ask of Auschwitz.

In 50 years time, as the next generation perhaps visits a memorial in Lampedusa and a guide takes them through the individual and collective horrors that migrants experienced, they too will gasp and wonder about the silent ones. And if they dig a bit deeper into the interstices of this period of history they may learn about the British and other elections in member states where migration was a 'sensitive' topic, or about how Greece was so broke that it couldn't always cope with the flood of migrants that came its way, or how fear of ISIS played a role, or how member states argued among themselves about quota numbers or even the idea of a quota at all. The messy banality of political and moral choice and compromise cues certain outcomes, not just the murderous intent of evil people.

And while Chivinsly talks rightly about Darfur and North Korea and 'other' faraway places, the human rights situation even in relatively, prosperous, Europe armed as we are with Treaties and Conventions to cover all manner of human rights abuses, is far from settled.

Nils Mužnieks, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, commented recently:

" 2014 was a bad year for human rights in Europe. Thousands of people died who should not have died, primarily in the Mediterranean Sea and in eastern Ukraine. They should not have died in a Europe that prides itself on being a space where the rule of law and democracy prevails. They should not have died on the doorstep to some of the wealthiest societies on the planet. They should not have died on a continent that claims to have drawn lessons from its own bloody and violent history - a history that includes many Europeans seeking and finding refuge



elsewhere on the planet ."

Mužnieks also describes the "grave deterioration of the human rights situation in Azerbaijan" where the authorities, in reprisal, have been prosecuting and detaining those reporting human rights abuses to the outside world, including to the Council of Europe.

The on-going denial of fundamental human rights to Roma people is an issue across many European countries with Muznieks dealing with issues that include anti-Roma hate speech and crime; with Roma children's access to inclusive, non-segregated education; with forced evictions and housing segregation; with statelessness; with the situation of abandoned and homeless children and children placed in institutions, among whom Roma children are often over-represented.

The European Commission is also concerned about discrimination against Roma in the Czech Republic where Roma children are 27 times more likely to be placed in schools for children with intellectual disabilities than are non-Roma children. In Slovakia recently, the Public Defender of Rights (an ombudsman equivalent) ran into difficulties with the Parliament because of her outspoken criticism of decisions adversely affecting Roma children. The Parliament initially rejected her Annual Report because of her critical comments.

Commissioner Mužnieks commented some time ago that, within the EU, human rights more often than not is more an issue "for export" than for domestic consumption; that is, we are happy to engage on human rights deficiencies elsewhere but reluctant to look at the situation in our own member states.

As European Ombudsman, my engagement with the human rights of member states citizens on one level is limited, as most of the social problems around housing, social protection, health and so on are dealt with at national level. The complaints I do deal with have to be directly against an EU institution and that necessarily limits the number of those who approach my office. Therefore in order to be most effective I have targeted my resources on issues of systemic maladministration and in lending my analysis to issues of significant public concern.

But as in Ireland, while the stuff I deal with is the dry stuff of public administration, the language of openness, transparency and accountability also masks the essential human rights component of the work that I and my colleagues do.

Some weeks ago, at a conference I made some remarks about the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean. One member of the audience spoke of how impossible it would be for Europe to cope with the flood of people fleeing persecution and poverty and that we should be mindful of our own interests and not go the way, as he put it, of Ancient Rome.

I said that any response has to be on a number of fronts and not just humanitarian and not just knee jerk. How we organise our foreign policy, our trade policy, and our overseas development policy is also critical to how our human rights obligations play out in that those policies do determine at least to some degree the economic and security interests of people both inside



and outside the borders of Europe.

The work of human rights cannot be confined to court judgments or Ombudsman recommendations or the work of mandated human rights bodies. Global poverty, wealth inequality, environmental degradation, climate change, all of those issues are influenced by political choices, by financial and market regulatory regimes, by all manner of decisions made in the developed world that have consequences both there and in the developing world.. And in attempting to hold those decisions up to the light of scrutiny, as I do in my work, I am essentially performing a human rights function.

Over the last 18 months, reports have been written about the often brutal conditions of migrants kept in detention centres in Greece. We tut tut at the standards and demand they be higher. But Greece is broke, and even though it receives EU money to help with this particular issue, the impact of austerity inevitably trickles down to the treatment of migrants who reach its shores, not to mention the treatment of its own citizens. And that is where transparency and accountability comes in, the exposure to public scrutiny of how decisions made at Commission level and ECB level (although not at IMF level) end up directly impacting on the human rights of migrants and of the most impoverished and marginalised of EU citizens.

Earlier this year, I published an investigation into the transparency of the negotiations around TTIP, the Trans Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership deal currently being negotiated between the EU and the USA, which, if and when finalised, will represent, depending on who is describing it, either a major economic boost for EU and US citizens, or a socially, financially, and environmentally damaging power grab by transnational corporations seeking a weak regulatory regime across two continents.

Like any trade agreement, there will of course be winners and losers and that is none of my business. What is my business is to make sure that to the fullest extent possible, the people whose lives this is going to affect are aware of what is being negotiated in their name and at a point when they still have a chance to influence it, if they wish and if they can.

Just as people's basic human rights - in this country as in Greece and Spain and elsewhere – were directly affected by political decisions made in their own countries but also within the institutions of the EU – so too will be the human rights of millions globally, potentially be impacted on – for good or for bad – by this agreement and that is why, in demanding greater transparency again I am executing an essential human rights function.

Last week, following reports that an ECB board member had prematurely revealed details of a particular bond buying plan, I asked ECB President Mario Draghi to give me a detailed account of what had happened. I have no evidence whatsoever that anything sinister happened and the bank has said that a technical error in relation to the uploading of the speech, was at fault.

Nonetheless, the fact that such sensitive, market moving, information could be released at a private meeting of billionaire hedge fund managers and other investors, does require a reassurance at least in relation to the measures in place at the ECB to avoid the perception of



privileged access by a highly economically influential grouping. Earlier this week President Draghi said that the ECB would now review its policy in relation to its attendance at such events and I await his full response to my query.

Other investigations concern the appointment of experts to advise the Commission on proposed laws, the so called revolving doors phenomenon whereby senior EU officials move into the private sector often into areas linked to files they have been dealing with in the Commission, plus numerous individual complaints around ethics and transparency.

The common denominator of these complaints and investigations is influence, how is legislation shaped, who influences, what does that influence amount to and when the fallout from that influence is felt, what are the implications in relation to the rights of those affected by what comes next.

As part of that, I have just begun an investigation into the transparency of law-making within the EU, and specifically into negotiations called Trilogues, an informal procedure, un referenced in any EU Treaty, whereby the Parliament, the Council, and the Commission take legislative positions and through a series of non public meetings, hammer out a deal on what eventually comes forward for a final vote. Trilogues have been described as a trade off between efficiency and accountability and my interest is in seeing the precise parameters of that trade off if that is what in fact Trilogues have actually become.

To conclude, let me say this. The business of human rights should not be allowed to become ghettoised, left to designated institutions the power and capacity of which can in any event often be determined by Government whim. Every individual capable of influencing policy is capable of protecting and promoting human rights. Over the last eight years, many Irish people lost their homes, their jobs, their health, their livelihoods, their children if they emigrated, and sometimes those closest to them when they took their own lives in despair caused by financial pressure. Those who, globally and domestically, caused that to happen did not do so with intent, they did it because they essentially failed to observe the public interest in the actions that they took or else failed to ensure that the public interest was correctly taken account of when decisions were made.

During this week we have had a discussion in relation to the public interest, what it is, and who protects it. Ombudsmen do their piece and can be successful, but in many cases it will ultimately be the courts, the rulings of individual judges or group of judges, that acts as a backstop against abuse of all kinds. That is a responsibility of no little significance. Ordinary people are often powerless, their voices drowned out by those with power, money, and access and they with little capacity to secure the public interest on their own. That is the obligation and duty of an independent judiciary and it is to the credit of that independence that Irish people still have immense confidence in the Irish judiciary's capacity to ensure, when no one else can, that the public interest is both recognised, named, and secured.

We like to say that transparency is there to promote good governance and accountability – once again the dry terminology of administration - but the reality is that it's there to prevent corruption



and as the FIFA saga continues to unfold , we see yet again the truth of that.

Global corruption comes with an actual cost and that cost is frequently borne by the poorest people on our planet. The World Economic Forum put an annual figure of two point six trillion US dollars on the cost of global corruption while the World Bank estimates that over one trillion US dollars is paid out in bribes every year.

Good FOI regimes allied to a legal system and a judiciary that recognises and defends the public interest ultimately support the human rights of millions of people rendered otherwise powerless by secrecy, by their lack of financial clout, and by their exclusion from the real power centres of Governments, of corporations, and of powerful institutions.

Recent events should cause us all to reflect on this , and to strengthen our resolve as Ombudsmen, judges, and lawyers to continue to recognise and accept our role in protecting the public interest, in truly becoming frontline human rights defenders.