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Decolonizing Human Rights: Sovereignty. Disruption. Tactics.

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Going Against the Grain

University of Dayton Human Rights Center
Social Practice of Human Rights Conference, Oct. 1-4, 2019

Decolonizing Human Rights: Sovereignty. Disruption. Tactics.

Presented by:

A. Kayum Ahmed, *Open Society Foundations*

Session: Reimagining and Decolonizing Human Rights

Abstract:

Despite its emancipatory potential, human rights remains locked in a form of epistemic coloniality that defers to Euro-American knowledge and reinforces anthropocentric exceptionalism. In order to employ human rights as a source of emancipation, human rights must itself be emancipated—it must be decolonized. Drawing on the notion of “decoloniality” as a framework that advances radical possibilities by delinking from structural racism, patriarchy and class embedded in capitalism and Western modernity, a typology of human rights as *sovereignty*, *disruption*, and *tactics* is developed as a way of understanding human rights from the position of the colonized.

Presenter information:

A. Kayum Ahmed is Division Director at the Open Society Foundations (OSF) in New York where he leads the Public Health Program’s global portfolio on access to medicines and innovation. He also teaches a class on socio-economic rights at Columbia Law School.

Before joining OSF, Kayum served as Chief Executive Officer of the South African Human Rights Commission from 2010 to 2015. During this period, he led a team of 178 colleagues to monitor, protect and promote human rights in South Africa, and oversaw the management of nearly 45,000 human rights cases.

He holds a Ph.D. in education from Columbia University as well as various degrees in law from the universities of Oxford (M.S.t), Cape Town (LL.B.), and Leiden (LL.M.). In addition, he has degrees in anthropology (M.A.) and theology (B.A. Hons).