

Peoples' Tribunals and International Law: Report of expert seminar held in Rome 27-28 September

On 27-28 September, the Australian Human Rights Centre, UNSW Law, in collaboration with the Lelio and Lisli Basso Foundation, held an expert seminar on Peoples' Tribunals and International Law in Rome. The best known peoples' tribunal is probably the one established by British philosopher Bertrand Russell in 1967 to examine the culpability of the United States and its allies in the war in Vietnam, which its president, Jean-Paul Sartre, saw as a successor to the Nuremberg Tribunal pending the establishment of a permanent international criminal court. Lelio Basso, an Italian Senator who participated in the second Bertrand Russell Tribunal on Latin America, established the international section of the Basso Foundation as a Permanent Peoples' Tribunal in 1979. Since then the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal has held over forty sessions on a range of issues, but this was the first time that activists from a range of peoples' tribunals and academics had come together to discuss peoples' tribunals and international law.

Academics and civil society activists from 10 countries participated in two days of discussion and debate in Spanish and English. There were also two speeches in Italian, from Salvatore Senese, a former Senator and magistrate and the current President of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal, and Franco Ippolito, a magistrate and current Vice-President of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal. Speakers analysed their experiences participating in the World Tribunal on Iraq in Istanbul, 2005; the Tokyo Women's Tribunal on the Japanese military 'comfort' system held in 2000; the Asia-Pacific Regional Hearing on gender-related violence in conflict held in Phnom Penh in 2012; the sessions of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal on Colombia (2009) and the ongoing hearings on Mexico; the Latin American Water Tribunal; Permanent Peoples' Tribunal hearings on European Transnational Corporations in Latin America (2006, 2008, 2010); and the session on agrochemical corporations held in Bangalore, India in 2011.

Themes addressed included the relationship between international criminal law and peoples' tribunals; indigenous peoples and legal pluralism; business, trade and human rights; the politics of listening; and the role of 'popular international law' in addressing the exclusion suffered by refugees, undocumented migrants and asylum seekers. The next step is to produce an edited collection based on the papers presented at the seminar.

UNSW doctoral student Gabriela Cuadrado Quesada and LLM student Alba Boer Cueva assisted greatly with organising the seminar and translations. Thanks also to Dianne MacDonald and Michael Caddy for maintaining our seminar website. We are indebted to our colleagues Gianni Tognoni and Simona Fraudatorio at the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal in Rome for around a year of preparation, including providing the venue, the Basso Foundation in the historic centre of Rome. We gratefully acknowledge funding provided by the Australian Research Council (DP 110101594).