

## Call for papers

### Conference on Denialism and Human Rights

**29 and 30 January 2015, Maastricht, the Netherlands**

*After having rejected the scientific wisdom about AIDS, former South African president Thabo Mbeki and his government were directly responsible for many avoidable deaths according to research by Harvard University. (The Guardian, 2008)*

*Dutch Cardinal Ad Simonis claimed that church leaders were not aware of child sex abuse. Speaking on the TV he said - in German - "wir haben es nicht gewusst" and added "I know that is a very dangerous remark and heavily loaded, but it's true." (RNW, 2010)*

*A discussion paper on Rwanda, prepared by an official in the Office of the Secretary of Defense stated: "Be Careful. Legal at State was worried about this yesterday—Genocide finding could commit [the U.S. government] to actually "do something."" (Power, 2001)*

The cases above illustrate that the safeguarding of human rights remains problematic, despite the proliferation of human rights instruments and the many actions taken by a variety of actors, such as governmental and non-governmental organizations, (individual) states and the international community over the past decades. Human rights violations do still occur and injustice remains rampant. Central to this problem appears to be that social, economic, cultural and political structures in societies provide for denialist defense mechanisms. Such deeply embedded denialism causes and/or facilitates human rights violations, because the true nature of the problems involved remains fully or partly unacknowledged and as a result appropriate action remains absent. In order to safeguard the effectuation of human rights it is thus pertinent to acknowledge and address this problem of denialism and develop strategies to move beyond it.

We challenge all scholars, practitioners, and students from various disciplines and fields to unearth and address denialism in the context of their own particular area of research. We especially invite them to consider and deal with the following issues:

- Firstly, a clear conception and definition of denialism should be developed. What does denialism exactly entail? On what social, economic, cultural and political structures and mechanisms in societies does it operate and how? What ideologies and prejudices are involved?
- Secondly, denialism operating in practice should be investigated and its relation to and particular relevance for human rights issues should be clarified. In which concrete cases do we see denialism 'at work'? What are the implications in terms of human rights? How is the effectuation of these rights blocked or obstructed? Is denialism only destructive or can it also be constructive? Can human rights discourse itself be in denial?
- Thirdly, how should we deal with denialism and move to a situation of human rights consistent behavior and change? Is it always possible to move from denial to compliance? What are suitable strategies or policies? Is legislation required? Which factors obstruct human rights change in denialist situations?

The conference format will be a mixture of small panels with plenary keynote sessions. The Maastricht Centre for Human Rights welcomes papers and suggestions for panels related to the questions raised above and the conference theme more generally. To this end, scholars, practitioners/field workers, and students from various academic disciplines (such as law, psychology, political science, international relations, criminology, anthropology, sociology, etc.) and other relevant practice based fields are encouraged to apply. A selection of papers will be published in an edited book. The deadline for submissions of papers and panel descriptions (max. 300 words) is **1 August 2014** via [humanrights@maastrichtuniversity.nl](mailto:humanrights@maastrichtuniversity.nl). Notification of acceptances will be sent by e-mail by 15 September 2014.

More information about the programme, the key note speakers, the conference fee and the details on the submission of papers will follow in due course on [the website of the Maastricht Centre](#), on our [blog](#) as well as our [Facebook page](#)!