

Conference participants' summary  
BHR Young Researchers Summit  
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### **Inaugural BHR Young Researchers' Summit an enriching experience**

Last month, the beautiful Swiss town of St Gallen provided the backdrop to the inaugural Business and Human Rights Young Researchers' Summit, hosted by the Institute for Business Ethics at University of St. Gallen, the Business and Human Rights Center at New York University's Stern School of Business, and the Business and Human Rights Journal.

The Summit participants, comprised of a dozen PhD and early post-doctoral researchers from multidisciplinary backgrounds, were guided by Dorothee Baumann-Pauly, Research Director of the Business and Human Rights Center at NYU and Professor Florian Wettstein of the University of St Gallen. The workshop format provided an opportunity for participants to share their research projects and to explore the major issues and challenges presented by the business and human rights field in a collegiate and scholarly way. The participants' geographical diversity - representing South America, North America, Asia, Africa, Europe and Australia - greatly enriched the discussion.

Workshop participants presented a broad body of work ranging from specific issues raised by particular industries, to broader questions of law and policy.

The longstanding issue of how to regulate global supply chains was discussed from a range of perspectives, including the role of multi-stakeholder initiatives, the limitations of social auditing, the interpretation and application of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the potential application of tort law to corporate human rights impacts.

Participants tackled broader questions of policy and practice through an analysis of the specific intersection between business and economic, social and cultural rights. In particular, researchers assessed the impact of the pharmaceutical industry on the right to health, as well as the potential for public-private partnerships to contribute to the greater realisation of economic, social and cultural rights.

Both the potential and the limits of the law were canvassed through an exploration of innovative approaches to legal liability. Presentations considered the role of criminal corporate accountability, the potential extension of customary international law, and the obligation of home States to regulate the extraterritorial conduct of multinationals.

Companies' own perception and application of their human rights policies, and the actual impact this has on the experience of workers was illustrated through an anthropological evaluation of the UK hospitality industry. This issue was further addressed from the corporate management perspective, with the Workshop's keynote speaker, Ron Popper, Vice President and Head of Corporate Responsibility at ABB providing practical insights into how corporations seek to meaningfully embed human rights within their own operations.

Despite this diversity of issues and contexts, a number of common themes emerged: the need to understand relationships of power and control in virtually all contexts; that engaging with the full range of potential stakeholders is a critical component of addressing business and human rights challenges; the desirability of balancing flexibility and clarity when attempting to regulate corporate conduct; understanding the power but also the limits of law as an advocacy tool; and recognising the role of broader ethical and policy frameworks in rebalancing power in the global economy. The deeply practical orientation of this field of scholarship was reinforced in each presentation.

The Summit was an invaluable opportunity for young researchers to critically appraise and reflect upon each other's work, to share ideas and innovations, to form connections with the growing international research community and to discuss its future elaboration. While the business and human rights field has no doubt grown in significance and impact in the past decade, it remains an emerging area of research and practice. Its ongoing development will require increased interdisciplinary attention as well as greater institutionalization; and it was the unanimous view of the participants that a workshop of this kind is a critical component in this regard.

We hope that this year's Young Researchers Summit is the first of many, and that it continues to provide a forum for young researchers to test ideas and seek solutions to contemporary scholarly and practical challenges.