



Human rights committee UHasselT

Self-assessment collaborations on Human Rights

As part of the work of the Human Rights Commission at UHasselT, the Commission would like you to complete a self-assessment to gain a deeper insight into (current or planned) cooperation.

Date:

Investigator name (responsible ZAP member):

Research group:

(Intended) Partner:

- **Assessment of (intended) cooperation**
 - How did the collaboration come about?
 - What activities have already been carried out together in the past?
 - What activities are planned?
 - In which locations will activities be carried out?
 - What is the (potential) impact for the researchers involved at the partner institution?
 - Should the collaboration be discontinued, will this have an impact on your own research?

- **VLIR Human rights test**
 - Please indicate the answers to the questions on the VLIR flashing light diagram and provide it together with this self-assessment document to mensenrechten@uhasselt.be.

Resource for completing the assessment

Examples of problematic partners:

- university partners who systematically discriminate against certain individuals on the basis of their gender, ethnicity, political opinion, nationality, religion, etc., for example by denying them access to the university;
- university partners who regularly sack staff because of their criticism of government policies;
- university partners whose security personnel confront demonstrating students with excessive violence (which may or may not result in death);
- non-university partners who systematically refuse to grant their staff fair remuneration, by local standards, for work delivered (within or outside the proposed cooperation);
- partners who are state actors, such as army, police, prisons, who have been shown to be currently committing or have committed in the past serious human rights violations (e.g. cracking down on demonstrations with excessive force, imprisoning minorities in 're-education camps', torturing terror suspects, expelling and massacring minority groups);
- university or non-university partners who actively contribute to serious human rights violations committed by a national government; these partners support the government in, for example:
 - the operation of detention centres in which refugees are held in inhuman conditions and/or for unlimited periods of time;
 - the unlawful destruction of homes as part of infrastructure projects or to oppress a section of the population;
 - the drastic reduction of healthcare in already deprived parts of a country;
 - Setting up torture programmes for terrorism suspects;
 - organising death squads in a 'war on drugs';
 - mandatory sterilisation of certain groups of people (e.g. people with disabilities or Roma);
 - testing experimental drugs on an impoverished part of the population.

Cooperation with the above partners should definitely be the subject of critical reflection and evaluation as they violate human rights in severe and/or systematic ways. This applies regardless of the activities that would be carried out in cooperation with the partner. In other words, even if the foreseen activities are in no way related to the human rights violations in question, the partnership is problematic.

Examples of problematic cooperation activities:

- activities involving child, forced or slave labour by the partner(s);
- activities that constitute unlawful discrimination, e.g. an exchange agreement or a 'joint PhD' agreement that are not open to certain categories of people on the basis of their gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, etc., without giving well-founded objective reasons (e.g. 'positive discrimination');
- activities with harmful side effects, e.g. the damage or destruction of indigenous peoples' lands and/or cultural property.

The above activities are problematic as they involve human rights violations (at least prima facie) and thus should trigger a flashing light. Regardless of the partner with whom cooperation is envisaged (even if it has an otherwise spotless human rights record), the university should consciously ask itself whether it can somehow make a positive contribution to solving the issues in question (e.g. by developing net alternatives to child labour in a project). At a minimum, the university should make a best effort to avoid cooperation being misused for political communication purposes or to legitimise wrong policies.

Examples of non-problematic situations (partners or activities):

- a Flemish university or staff member of a Flemish university is considering entering into an agreement with a partner from a country in which human rights are seriously violated (e.g. political activists are systematically imprisoned, large parts of the population die of malnutrition, minorities are systematically discriminated against, terrorist suspects are tortured, etc.); however, the proposed partner is not involved in these human rights violations in any sense, nor do the activities of the proposed cooperation involve human rights violations; in this case, one cannot conclude to a problem situation, as the human rights test does not assess the overall human rights situation in a country;
- a proposed non-university partner may occasionally fail to pay his/her employees' salaries on time due to a temporary shortage of funds, not caused by systematic misuse of funds;
- a proposed university partner refuses one-time access to his/her premises to an academic/a because of his/her controversial political opinion, without that opinion being punishable.