

Opening remarks for AIV Wellenstein-lecture, November 1, 2022

“Universal Human Rights in a Changing Global Order” by Professor Gareth Evans

Prof. Bert Koenders, chair of the AIV:

Good afternoon excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It's a great pleasure to see you all today. On behalf of the Advisory Council on International Affairs I would like to warmly welcome you to this second AIV Wellenstein lecture.

The Wellenstein lecture is an annual public lecture named after Dr. Edmund Wellenstein, who, during his lifetime, was an honorary member of the AIV, and one could say one of the founders and catalysts of the European project.

Mom Wellenstein's life story has inspired us to devote this year's Lecture to the urgency of the defence of human rights at a moment these are violated everyday on our European continent, in a ferocious war, that has devastated the lives of tens of thousands of people on our continent with grave repercussions for social and economic rights across the globe.

WHEN “Mom” Wellenstein – if indeed we may call him so – was studying in Delft – he prioritized human rights almost “avant la lettre” in his early call for resistance , participating in student strikes when the Jewish Professors and students were kicked out of the University. In 1942 he was imprisoned in the Oranjehotel in Scheveningen and in 2012 an impressive manuscript was published telling his unique experiences in Kamp Amersfoort.

Edmund Wellenstein must have thought about this when he was helping to catalyse the European project into a community of fate and its further unity as the precondition for the effective defence of human rights.

What could be more actual when so much is at stake in our world today...and when solidarity within and between nations including within Europe form a precondition to stand up against the act of aggression.

Our international legal order, the UN Charter, the respect for international humanitarian law, this is “Was auf dem Spel steht” – as the Germans say-not only in Europe but globally in a more divided, polarized and unequal world.

The first Wellenstein lecture was delivered in February 2020; Today’s lecture was originally planned over a year ago, in the summer of 2021, but had to be postponed several times because of the pandemic. Yet, we managed “to stay the course”. And I’m delighted that our distinguished speaker today, who was also invited over a year ago, has been willing to “ride the waves with us” – and adjusted his plans time and again, so he could be with us for this
Special Event

Professor Gareth Evans, it’s a great honour and pleasure for us to finally welcome you here today!

Your presence here in the Hague, International City of UN Legal Institutions, combined with the title of your presentation -"Universal Human Rights in a Changing Global Order" could not be more timely and more appropriate. You have in your career looked at new opportunities and strategies for mankind rather than falling into the "defeatist" trap BUT YES:

Universal human rights ARE increasingly under pressure, and gross violations ARE an everyday occurrence, partially – but not only – as a result of changes in geopolitical competition and socio-economic, mediatic and cultural divisions. At the same time human rights HAVE become an issue of power politics ITSELF as rising authoritarianism can have dire foreign policy consequences as we see in Europe today, but also, Dr. Evans, in your part of the world. I think it is YOUR history as a long standing Statesman of Australia, serving among other public functions as Foreign Minister and Attorney General - which can help us understand these developments better.

Double standards, our incapacity sometimes to look in the mirror of some of the antiterror wars and our own domestic realities require us in what still is called the West – apologies to DownUnder – to invest much more in a serious global conversation, in a global strategy if you wish, to address this crucial and defining topic of the existing risk to universal human rights . "What do we have ACTUALLY HAVE left if it is not human rights?"

I mentioned it: We first started planning this lecture in the summer of 2021, the topic was already more urgent than ever, with seismic shifts taking place in the geopolitical order: China's continued and more authoritarian rise, Russia's increasingly aggressive and uncompromising role, raging conflicts and humanitarian tragedies in the Middle East and

Eastern – all topics about which the Advisory Council has published extensively, and which have profound implications for the worldwide protection and enjoyment of human rights.

However, I believe that nothing quite prepared us in a Europe on geopolitical holiday- for the aggression and tragedy we have witnessed in Europe since February 2022. When Russia decided to invade Ukraine, the resounding blow dealt to the international order created after the Second World War was gigantic, and the consequences irreversible.

Against this background, the AIV recently published an advisory report on human rights as core interest in the current geopolitical order. In this report, the AIV calls on the Dutch government to intelligently prioritize human rights in an unpredictable world. As far as foreign policy is concerned, this requires the Netherlands to take at the same time an effective as well explicit stance in a complex environment characterized by the realpolitik of everyday and tense international relations. A more integrated approach, new partnerships and the provision of an effective counterweight, based on an understanding of the cultural context in other countries, are key building blocks in this regard and we came with a set of very operational recommendations and hopefully a new strategic framework that goes beyond what we call in this country the Merchant-Referend Dichotomy.

Yet, there is no doubt that it will remain a Herculean task to continue to protect and promote the international human rights framework we have built as an international community over that last seventy years. And we will need all the intellectual and political capacity available to face this challenge and to be effective in the crude “Realpolitik” and democratic recession of everyday.

Fortunately, no one seems better placed to provide us with his lucid analysis and insights on how we can most effectively do this than our speaker today: the Honourable Professor Gareth Evans. So, we are absolutely thrilled that he is with us, all the way from Australia.

I'm sure that for many of you Mr. Evans does not need any introduction, but I'll briefly summarize his background and accomplishments.

Professor Evans has had a very long and distinctive career both in national and international politics for his country, Australia, as Senate Leader, Attorney General and Foreign Minister just to mention a few functions. He has always been writing and teaching at the same time and increasingly so – with a special focus on conflict resolution and the prevention of mass atrocities and he is one of the best experts in this field . Mr. Evans was the President of the International Crisis Group from 2000 to 2009 of which I have the honour to serve on the Board, and-Gareth- we will meet just this weekend in New York to discuss the State of the World, and we are honoured you are currently the President Emeritus of the Crisis Group. Professor Evans was co-chair of two important international commissions, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (2000-2001) and the Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (2008-2010). He is considered the “auctor intellectualis” – the main intellectual driving force – of the principle of the Responsibility to Protect, a topic about which he has also published widely. He is the author of fourteen books, amongst others *The Responsibility to Protect: Ending Mass Atrocity Crimes Once and for All* (2008), *Nuclear Weapons: The State of Play* (2015), and most recently *Good International Citizenship: The Case for Decency* (2022). Mr. Evans has been awarded

frequently, amongst others with the Four Freedoms Award of the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute. In 2017, Mr. Evans published his autobiographical work, under the title *Incorrigible Optimist: A Political Memoir*. I would say that optimism AT LEAST of the will is probably exactly what we need in considering the topic at hand today!

Professor Evans, we are looking forward to hearing from you, you now have the floor.

Please, give Mr. Evans a warm welcome!