

CONFERENCE ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN DIGNITY IN INDIGENOUS PHILOSOPHIES

September 12 and 13, 2011 at The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, Oslo

Some years ago, the International Union of Academies (IUA) launched a research project on the concept of “human dignity”, starting with a number of workshops and conferences. IUA charged a small group (M. Düwell, J. Braarvig, R. Brownsword and D. Mieth) with the task of editing a multi-disciplinary volume on human dignity called *Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity: Historical Traditions, Philosophical Interpretations, Legal Implementation and Contemporary Challenges*. The Handbook (c. 220,000 words, and with more than 50 contributors) will be published at Cambridge University Press (2012). The Handbook focus on human dignity as the foundational concept of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) where inherent dignity, together with the inalienable rights, of all members of the human family is recognised as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. Sixty years after the official announcement of the Declaration the concepts of human rights and human dignity are formally accepted globally, but the philosophical foundation and the interpretation of these concepts are still criticized as vague, arbitrary and Eurocentric. A variety of questions is therefore prompted in the Handbook—for example, how is the rights-oriented concept of the UDHR related to the diverse religious and cultural traditions that express views on human dignity; can similar concepts be found beyond Western tradition and history; which kinds of philosophical explorations of the concept are there and which theories are defensible; how does the idea of dignity as an inherent and inalienable aspect of humanity relate to the concept of dignity that is associated with social status, or merit, or the like; and what about the many legal, ethical, and philosophical contexts where references to human dignity are contested?

The International Union of Academies (IUA) has encouraged Secretary General Øivind Andersen and Delegate Professor Jens Braarvig of The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters to organise a conference about the concept of human

dignity in Oslo, Norway. Research Associate at the Mesoamerican Archive, Harvard University & Institute for Signifying Scriptures, Claremont Graduate University, Dr. Lars Kirkhusmo Pharo – who has a special interest in religions, philosophies and languages of the Americas – has been commissioned by Professor Øivind Andersen and Professor Jens Braarvig with this honourable task. Pharo has chosen to organise a conference about the concept human dignity in Indigenous philosophies of the Americas and Norway. As aforementioned, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 has been perceived as the fundamental reference for an interpretation and an understanding of the principles of universal human rights and human dignity. Indigenous people have, however, produced a comprehensive statement addressing the human rights of Indigenous peoples, which is the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007. The latter document emphasises the right of Indigenous peoples to live in dignity, the right to self-determination, to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures, religions, languages and traditions. By that right, Indigenous people can determine their political status and pursue their economic, social, linguistic, religious and cultural development. Based upon these documents, the topic of the conference is the concept of human dignity as understood in the philosophical systems of Indigenous people in the various postcolonial nation states. The conference is organised in collaboration with The Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights and the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters. Invited Indigenous speakers from various cultures of the American continent and the Sámi from Norway will present and discuss the concept of human dignity and related philosophical matters from the perspective of *their* history, intellectual traditions and present religious, judicial, linguistic and socio-political conditions. In order to organise and focus the topic, the following focal sub-themes related to the concept of human dignity according to Indigenous philosophies have been defined for the conference:

- Indigenous **ecological wisdom** and the question of global sustainability.
- Indigenous **languages** connected to traditional religions and cultures.
- Indigenous **self-determination** and **rights** in the postcolonial nation-state.

