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NGO in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social
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Democratic Values and Minority Rights in the Global South

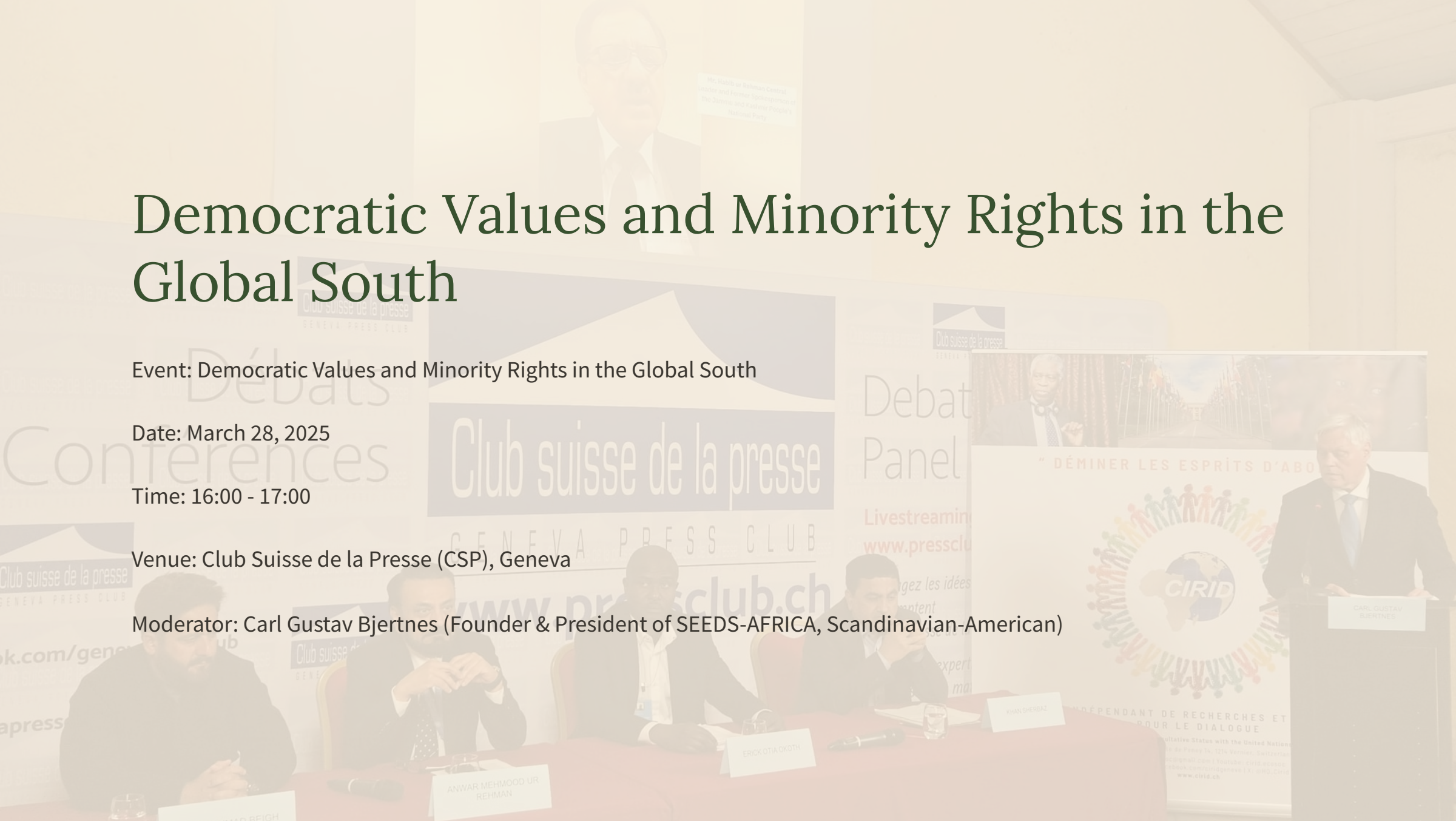
Event: Democratic Values and Minority Rights in the Global South

Date: March 28, 2025

Time: 16:00 - 17:00

Venue: Club Suisse de la Presse (CSP), Geneva

Moderator: Carl Gustav Bjertnes (Founder & President of SEEDS-AFRICA, Scandinavian-American)



Welcome Address from Geneva Press Club

Geneva Press Club Representative: Isabelle Falconnier, Directrice executive

Good afternoon to those joining us online, and welcome to the Geneva Press Club.

We are pleased this afternoon to host the CIRID – Independent Center for Research and Initiative for Dialogue, the CEDAC, and their partners for this side event organized on the occasion of the 58th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

The theme of today's discussion is: "Democratic Values and Minority Rights in the Global South."

The term Global South has regained prominence in political discourse, especially in the context of growing geopolitical tensions. But beyond these dynamics, the Global South is also experiencing profound political transformations. The principles of democracy and human rights remain at the core of political debates and evolving governance models.

This panel will examine the evolution of democratic definitions and practices in the Global South — and what they mean for the protection of minority rights.

Moderator's Opening Words

Carl Gustav Bjertnes, Founder and President of SEEDS-AFRICA, Scandinavian-American

Distinguished guests, esteemed panelists, members of the audience, ladies and gentlemen —

It is a great honor for me to be here with you today, and for CEDAC and CIRID to present this timely and important discussion: the Global South and democratic rights.

In today's world, democracy is more than just a system of governance. It is a commitment to inclusion, representation, and justice for all.

During this session, we will explore the challenges and perspectives that shape democratic practice in the Global South, with insights from experts and human rights defenders working in different regions.

Each of our panelists brings a unique perspective on democracy, the rights of minorities, and the paths toward inclusive and participatory governance. Their experiences highlight both the diverse challenges that communities face, and the potential solutions that can lead to peace and justice.



Eric Niragira's Intervention -Founder and President of CEDAC, Former Chairperson of Burundi Global Diaspora, Bujumbura

Your excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates to the 58th session of the Human Rights Council,

To talk about "Democratic Values and Minority Rights in the Global South: Challenges and Perspectives", should take me more than the time allocated to this event but let me do my best to give a short and yet concise contribution that will emphasize on recommendations for what should be done.

My presentation focuses on my experience during Burundi's Civil War Era, 1993-2008 and the Conflict Post-Conflict Period, 2008-2017, which defined the democratic values of the people of Burundi.

I was born and grew-up in Burundi, a country which was affected by conflicts from its independence in 1962 until now in 2025 with the current war occurring on our borders in the Democratic Republic of Congo.



Wars in Burundi were always ethnic bloodbaths since the assassination of the last King of Burundi, his Majesty Ntare V, violently killed on the 29th of April 1972, thus becoming the first victim of the 1972 Genocide Against the Hutus of Burundi.

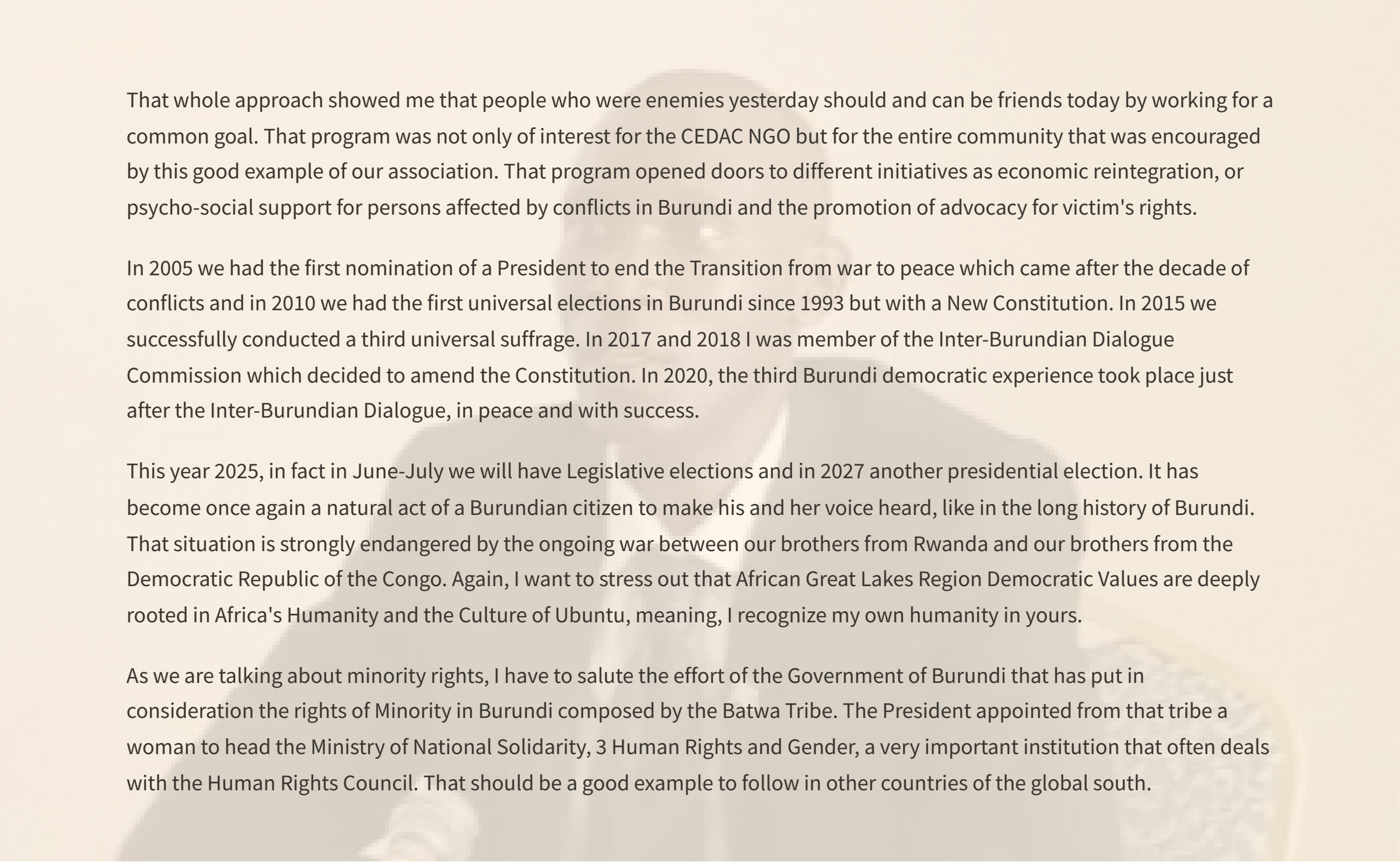
In Burundi 1965, all elected Hutus in the National Assembly were shot to death. But killings of Bahutus of Burundi continued in 1967, 1972 with the genocide that killed 10% of the population in three months, the Ntega-Marangara Massacres of Summer 1988 when Napalm was used to kill a lot and the 1993-2008 Civil War that was opened with the assassination of the first universal election of the President of Burundi, the Late president Melchior Ndadaye, honoured in Burundi as the Heroe of Democracy.

In April 1996 at Intercontinental Hotel Geneva, a Geneva-based NGO led by the former Burundian diplomat Deo Hakizimana organised the very first Inter-Burundian Dialogue with the support of Switzerland. The project eventually led to the creation of multiple institutions under the auspices of the Organisation of the African Unity and the United Nations.

As a victim of the Burundi Civil War, I am convinced that former actors should play a role in the peace-building and development of Burundi processes, the main reason behind the launching of the Center for Development and Development of Former Combattants, CEDAC, established in Burundi since 2005.

With friends, we created an organisation that would unify and encourage former combatants from both sides to work together with members of community organisers and follow that good example of peace agreement signed in August 2000 and work together for the development of Burundi.

As the leader of CEDAC, I was very surprised to see how former combatants who were enemies yesterday composed by Hutu and Tutsi accepted to work together in this initiative of CEDAC in Voluntary Disarmament and development. Different campaigns were realised in the 17 provinces of Burundi, and we collected may thousands of small arms and light weapons in coordination with the Government.



That whole approach showed me that people who were enemies yesterday should and can be friends today by working for a common goal. That program was not only of interest for the CEDAC NGO but for the entire community that was encouraged by this good example of our association. That program opened doors to different initiatives as economic reintegration, or psycho-social support for persons affected by conflicts in Burundi and the promotion of advocacy for victim's rights.

In 2005 we had the first nomination of a President to end the Transition from war to peace which came after the decade of conflicts and in 2010 we had the first universal elections in Burundi since 1993 but with a New Constitution. In 2015 we successfully conducted a third universal suffrage. In 2017 and 2018 I was member of the Inter-Burundian Dialogue Commission which decided to amend the Constitution. In 2020, the third Burundi democratic experience took place just after the Inter-Burundian Dialogue, in peace and with success.

This year 2025, in fact in June-July we will have Legislative elections and in 2027 another presidential election. It has become once again a natural act of a Burundian citizen to make his and her voice heard, like in the long history of Burundi. That situation is strongly endangered by the ongoing war between our brothers from Rwanda and our brothers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Again, I want to stress out that African Great Lakes Region Democratic Values are deeply rooted in Africa's Humanity and the Culture of Ubuntu, meaning, I recognize my own humanity in yours.

As we are talking about minority rights, I have to salute the effort of the Government of Burundi that has put in consideration the rights of Minority in Burundi composed by the Batwa Tribe. The President appointed from that tribe a woman to head the Ministry of National Solidarity, 3 Human Rights and Gender, a very important institution that often deals with the Human Rights Council. That should be a good example to follow in other countries of the global south.

Eric Niragira's Intervention - Conclusion

As I was affected by conflict in Burundi and created an organisation that has helped somehow in Burundi's peace building with the contribution of friends of our humanity and friends of Burundi, I believe that our experience in Burundi may inspire the leaders on how to create a sustainable peace in the Great Lakes Region and especially about what is happening in DRC.

Therefore and as a concluding remark, I strongly support the plan presented by His Excellency Evariste Ndayishimiye, the President of Burundi. The Five Points Plan for Peace in the DRC reflects some of the good example on where Burundi came from and where we are now and where we are going. It also calls to Former Head of State of Kenya, his Excellency President Uhuru Kenyatta to continue its efforts as a Special Envoy for the African great Lakes.

CEDAC will continue to give its contributions in peace and development and I strongly believe that if money used in war should be affected in development, the world would be better.

Your excellencies, distinguished delegates, I thank you for your time and consideration





Mehmood Ur Rehman Anwar's Intervention -Public Relations Officer for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Switzerland and serves as the Public Relations Representative for the International Association of Ahmadi Architects and Engineers (IAAAE) in Europe

Anwar is a dedicated political scientist with a background in public relations and external affairs. He pursued his studies in political science at the University of Basel. In his professional journey, Anwar has served as a public relations officer for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Switzerland, contributing to the community's outreach and engagement efforts. He has also held the position of External Affairs representative for the International Association of Ahmadi Architects and Engineers (IAAAE), an NGO focused on humanitarian aid and development in Africa, emphasizing clean water, renewable energy, and sustainable infrastructure. Beyond these roles, Anwar is recognized as a motivational speaker, human rights activist, and politician, consistently advocating for social justice and community development.

Honorable Chair, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. I am honoured to speak with you today about the challenges and perspectives regarding democratic values and minority rights in the Global South. This region, often defined by its economic struggles—poverty, debt, food insecurity, and the devastating effects of climate change—has also become a focal point for political transformation.

While the Global South is facing structural challenges, it is also undergoing significant political change. This is a time when we must ask: How do nations in the Global South define and protect democratic values? How can we ensure the rights of minorities are upheld? And how do these issues fit into the changing regional and global landscape?

Challenges to Democratic Values

First, let us discuss the diverse forms of democracy in the Global South. Many countries in this region have embraced democratic systems, but these systems take many forms. Some nations have constitutional democracies with free elections, while others are transitioning from authoritarian regimes or are experiencing political instability. In some cases, democratic values are still evolving, and the process can be fragile.

The challenge lies in geopolitical pressures that threaten the integrity of these democracies. As global power shifts, countries in the Global South often face external influences and interference, which can undermine their democratic institutions. Rising authoritarianism, foreign intervention, and economic dependencies all threaten the sovereignty and democratic processes of these nations.

Moreover, economic challenges also impact the functioning of democracy. When poverty, inequality, and a lack of basic services dominate people's lives, democratic engagement often takes a back seat. In some cases, political decisions are influenced by economic elites and multinational corporations, further eroding the will of the people and weakening democratic legitimacy.

We must ensure that the voices of the Global South are heard and respected in global decision-making, particularly when it comes to human rights.

Mechanisms like the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) provide valuable opportunities for dialogue and accountability.

However, they must be adapted to recognize the unique challenges faced by countries in the Global South, ensuring that their concerns are not overlooked.

Conclusion: A Call for Inclusive Dialogue

As the Global South continues to evolve politically and economically, it is essential that democratic values and the protection of minority rights remain at the centre of our discussions. It is vital that we create an inclusive dialogue, where voices from the Global South are actively heard, understood, and respected.

We cannot expect countries in the Global South to simply replicate Western models of democracy. The future of democracy must be shaped by the unique political systems, historical contexts, and cultural realities of each country in this region.

Mehmood Ur Rehman Anwar's Call to Action

In closing, I urge the international community to support countries in the Global South in strengthening their democratic institutions and safeguarding the rights of all citizens—particularly minorities. This requires a partnership rooted in mutual respect, a commitment to justice, and a recognition of shared responsibility.

Let us work together to ensure that democracy is not just an ideal, but a living reality for all.

Thank you.





Habib ur Rehman's Intervention -Central Leader and Former Spokesperson of the Jammu and Kashmir People's National Party

Biography

Habib Ur Rehman is a significant figure in the political and human rights landscape of Pakistani Occupied Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). His role as the former spokesperson for the Jammu Kashmir Peoples National Party (JKPNP) highlights his deep commitment to advocating for the rights and political aspirations of the region's people.

As a long-standing human rights defender, Rehman has been at the forefront of addressing the challenges faced by the people living under Pakistani administration in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. His commitment to a democratic struggle reflects his dedication to freedom, social justice, and the reunification of the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

As a writer and intellectual, Rehman has contributed to raising awareness about the complex issues surrounding the Jammu and Kashmir conflict. His writings and public engagements serve as important mediums to convey his political views, struggles, and aspirations for a peaceful and just resolution for the people of the region. Through his dual roles as a political leader and thought leader, Rehman continues to advocate for the rights and freedom of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

Democratic Values and Minority Rights in the Global South: Challenges and Perspectives

The issue of democratic values and minority rights in Pakistani-administered Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) is closely linked to the south Asian political, historical, and cultural dynamics. AJK, part of the broader Jammu and Kashmir dispute, faces unique challenges in governance and human rights, shaped by Pakistan's control, military-backed religious extremism, historical conflicts, and governance struggles. This analysis delves into the obstacles to democracy and the protection of rights in AJK, considering various stakeholders' perspectives.

1. Historical and Political Context of AJK

The Jammu Kashmir Conflict: The political landscape of AJK is deeply influenced by the larger Jammu and Kashmir conflict between India and Pakistan. Although Pakistan administers AJK, it claims the entire region, disregarding the aspirations of its people. AJK has limited autonomy under Pakistani rule, with significant control from Islamabad.

Governance Structure: AJK has a Legislative Assembly and a Prime Minister, but its autonomy is curtailed by Pakistan's Ministry of Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan Affairs, limiting its legislative and executive powers. This constrained self-rule prevents AJK from making decisions aligned with the population's needs.

Role of the Military: Pakistan's military exerts substantial influence over AJK, shaping its political, economic, and social spheres. This dominance stifles democratic values by restricting freedoms of expression and assembly, with the Pakistan military playing a central role in policymaking.

2. Challenges to Democratic Values in AJK

Limited Political Freedoms: Fundamental democratic principles, such as freedom of expression, assembly, and the press, are often compromised in AJK. Political dissenters face repression, including harassment, intimidation, and arrest, limiting open debate and the responsiveness of the political system.

Centralized Control: Political power is concentrated in Pakistan, leaving AJK residents with limited influence over decisions that directly affect their lives. Local representatives have little real power, weakening democratic governance.

Electoral Integrity: While elections are held, their fairness is questioned due to military and political elite influence over outcomes, undermining democratic legitimacy.

3. Economic Exclusion

The people of AJK, particularly women and vulnerable groups, experience economic marginalization, facing barriers to employment and social services. This economic exclusion contributes to broader inequalities, driving many, especially the youth, to migrate abroad in search of better opportunities.

4. Human Rights Violations

Lack of Accountability: Human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, and torture, are widespread in AJK, particularly against political activists, journalists, and civil society groups. The military's influence and lack of independent judicial oversight prevent accountability for these violations.

Freedom of the Press: Journalists in AJK face threats, harassment, and censorship, particularly when investigating government or military activities. This suppresses civil society's ability to hold authorities accountable, stifling democratic discourse.

State Surveillance: The AJK region experiences extensive surveillance of political dissidents, activists, and critics, further curbing civil liberties and democratic rights.

5. Social and Cultural Challenges

Cultural Homogenization: Concerns arise over the erosion of AJK's local cultures and indigenous languages due to Pakistan's dominant cultural narratives. This undermines the region's cultural diversity and prevents marginalized communities from preserving their heritage.

Education and Empowerment: While literacy has improved, AJK's education system is often shaped by Pakistani priorities, limiting local empowerment and undermining the development of an informed electorate. Educational content that overlooks AJK's unique cultural and political context marginalizes local identities.

Youth and Political Engagement: AJK's youth feel disconnected from the political system. The absence of inclusive political spaces for youth participation diminishes their political engagement and leaves their concerns unmet.

6. The Role of Pakistan's Government

Influence of Islamabad's Policies: Pakistan's government significantly influences AJK's policies, from foreign relations to security matters. This centralization weakens AJK's ability to uphold democratic values, as local needs and aspirations are often ignored.

Lack of Empowerment: AJK's political system limits local representatives' authority, with political parties that oppose accession to Pakistan barred from participating in elections. This stifles the development of democratic institutions and ensures that governance serves Pakistan's colonial interests rather than the needs of AJK's residents.

7. International Influence and the Kashmir Dispute

International Focus: While the Kashmir conflict receives global attention, the voices of AJK's residents often go unheard. The international community focuses more on the geopolitical conflict between India and Pakistan, sidelining the human rights and democratic needs of AJK's people.

Human Rights Advocacy: International human rights organizations have called for greater protection of political freedoms and an end to military abuses in AJK. However, international pressure has yet to bring about meaningful reforms on the ground.

8. Perspectives for Change

Strengthening Local Governance: Increasing AJK's autonomy could empower local governments to make decisions on education, healthcare, and economic policies, improving responsiveness to citizens' needs and fostering political accountability, unless Pakistan's occupation is ended.

Promoting Inclusivity: Efforts must be made to ensure equal political participation and access to resources, creating a more inclusive society where discrimination is eradicated, and democracy can flourish.

Civil Society and Human Rights: Strengthening civil society and human rights advocacy is crucial for holding the government accountable. International support from organizations like the UN and Amnesty International can amplify the voices of marginalized groups and push for greater protection of human rights.





Habib ur Rehman's Intervention - Conclusion

The challenges of upholding democratic values and human rights in Pakistani-administered Azad Jammu Kashmir are deeply intertwined with South Asian political history, the ongoing Kashmir conflict, and Pakistan's governance. To promote democracy, protect rights, and ensure equality for all, the region must overcome barriers like military influence, political repression, and religious extremism. A more democratic and inclusive future for AJK depends on local empowerment, cultural preservation, and greater international attention to human rights abuses. Only through legal reforms, political dialogue, and civil society support can AJK hope to realize the ideals of democracy and human rights for all its citizens.



Erick Otia Okoth's Intervention - President, ADYNE Swiss Chapter (African Diaspora Youth Network Europe), Ambassador for Peace, and Artist/Musician

Erick Otia Okoth (Amuka Sasa), President of ADYNE Swiss Chapter, is dedicated to promoting human rights, youth empowerment, and cultural dialogue within the African diaspora. Through engagement with the ADYNE Swiss Chapter and initiatives such as Bit for Peace, efforts focus on supporting youth leadership, strengthening diaspora engagement, and advancing global peace-building initiatives.

His artistic platform serves as a powerful medium to amplify the voices of marginalized communities, using music as a catalyst for social change. As an Ambassador for Peace, his mission is to foster unity, advocate for equal opportunities, and bridge cultural divides, creating inclusive spaces for dialogue and collaboration.

Every day, they say the youth are the leaders of tomorrow...

Yet today, we are silenced.

Billions are spent on weapons, not welfare—

Technology advancing, but humanity retreating.

They call it progress... but we see more poverty.

Distinguished guests, fellow panelists, it's an honor to speak on behalf of the many unheard voices of the Global South.

Democracy, if it does not deliver dignity, inclusion, and opportunity, becomes a broken promise. We must go beyond political rights—to economic empowerment, to social access, to meaningful participation.

Integration should foster belonging, not control. But many are still locked out—by language, by discrimination, by systems that were not built with us in mind.

Migrants and refugees wait years for recognition. Undocumented workers contribute silently but remain invisible—vulnerable to exploitation, even in developed nations.

Culture, and especially music, is how we fight back.

Our art is our resistance.

Our rhythm is our resilience.

But even then, many artists from the Global South struggle for recognition and access to platforms.

My vision is clear:

A borderless Global South—where diasporas are not disconnected but empowered to uplift their homelands.

Where indigenous communities are no longer marginalized.

Where governance is truly global, not dictated by historical hierarchies.

ERICK OTIA OKOTH

Erick Otia Okoth's Call to Action

Let us empower, not just include.

Let us dismantle dependency and redefine dignity.

Let us unite—through cooperation, through culture, and through courage.

Closing

With Rhythm I wanna talk to you, Mr. Government...

"Ime kuwa chorus sasa—hii anthem!

Every day dem a killer, killer, killer dem,

But we are the builders, the dreamers, the changemakers!"

"The Global South has always had a voice. Now, it's time for the world to listen"





Jawad Ahmad Beigh's Intervention - Human Rights Defender from Jammu and Kashmir India

Ladies, Gentlemen and members of this august gathering. I feel greatly honored and privileged to have been invited to speak about rights of minority communities.

I am going to make my speech a little bit different as I would be speaking about the plight of ethnic and sectarian minorities of Pakistan Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoGB) and Pakistan Occupied Gilgit Baltistan (PoGB). PoGB and PoJK are both parts of India's Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh which are under illegal occupation of Pakistan since 1947. While on the face of it, both PoJK and PoGB are Muslim just like most of mainland Pakistan, but digging down deeper, it becomes clear that parts of former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir comprises of ethnic and sectarian Muslim minorities, who are at receiving end of discrimination at the hands of predominantly Punjabi Muslim dominated Pakistani government and Army.

The region of PoJK comprises of ethnic Muslim minority community of Pahari Muslims who speak Potohari Pahari language closer to Dogri language spoken in Jammu region.

The region of PoGB comprises both ethnic and sectarian Muslim minority communities. These include ethnic minority communities like Baltis, Shinas, Wakhis, Burushaskis etc. Furthermore, the region of PoGB also comprises of large communities of Muslim minority sects like Shias, Ismailis and Noorbakshias.

The ethnic and sectarian Muslim minority communities of PoJK and PoGB have long been oppressed by the mainland Pakistani ruling elite. I will be speaking about how the last one year has been for the people of PoJK and PoGB.

First, I will speak about Pakistan Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK).

In early November 2024, Sultan Mehmood Chaudhry, so called President of Pakistan Occupied Jammu and Kashmir or PoJK Kashmir" issued Peaceful Assembly and Public Order Ordinance, 2024, which in effect severely curtailed right of freedom of gathering of people PoJK.

Presidential Ordinance was widely criticised by the civil society of PoJK, who protested against it under the umbrella of Jammu and Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee or JKJAAC, conglomerate of different social, political, religious bodies of PoJK.

Thousands of people across PoJK led by JKJAAC protested by blocking major entry points to the region through its capital, Muzaffarabad. The Civilian protest was brutally crushed by the puppet regime of Chaudhary Anwarul Haq, so-called Prime Minister of PoJK.

On December 4, 2024, weeks after massive civilian protests, local puppet regime of PoJK was forced to bow down to anger of Kashmiris from PoJK, when after huge four day wheel jam strike and shutdown of markets and civic activities, puppet government of PoJK embarrassingly announced withdrawal of presidential ordinance.

The entire fiasco showed the true face of Pakistan that whitewashes its brutal oppression of the people of PoJK and in reality leaves no opportunity to curb their civilian liberties.

Withdrawal of Presidential Ordinance by Pakistan was unprecedented development as it was for the first time that Pakistan was brought to its knees by the people of PoJK.

I will now talk about Pakistan Occupied Gilgit & Baltistan (PoGB).

Misuse of Rogue Anti-Terrorism Laws by the State of Pakistan in Pakistan Occupied Gilgit & Baltistan (PoGB)

Pakistan has been controlling parts of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, namely Pakistan occupied Gilgit & Baltistan or PoGB that has been under illegal occupation of Pakistan since 1947 with tight leash & brutal oppression.

In 1997, in order to control civilian dissent in PoGB, Pakistan through its local puppet government enacted a draconian Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997 (ATA) along with its infamous Schedule IV that Pakistan has been using to crush and suppress voices of civilian dissent in PoGB.

ATA was brought supposedly to deal with terrorism in the region of PoGB but it has ended up exacerbating the miseries of the innocent people of PoGB by usurping their basic civil and fundamental rights and freedom.

Under ATA, so far, many religious leaders, student activists, politicians, civil society members, and other human rights activists have been detained on charges of terrorism.

Many prominent leaders of PoGB have faced this draconian law so far. In 2012, Baba Jan, a prominent political activist from Hunza, was detained under ATA and kept incarcerated for nine years. Another political leader of PoGB, Haider Shah Rizvi, a leader of Balawaristan National Front, who was an ardent advocate of political and economic rights of the people of PoGB, remained in prison on several occasions under ATA.

More than 31 individuals from PoGB are on infamous Schedule IV of ATA, according to the report provided by Home and Prisons Department of PoGB including some incumbent and former members of the legislative assembly of PoGB including former Chief Minister of the PoGB, Mohammad Khalid Khursid Khan, who served as the Chief Minister of PoGB in 2020.

The world must take notice of what Pakistan is doing in PoGB and hold Pakistan responsible for oppressing the people of PoGB.





Khan Sherbaz's Intervention - Human Rights Defender from Azzad Jammu and Kashmir India

Excellencies, distinguished guests of the Geneva Press Club, and our host organization, CIRID,

Thank you very much and good evening. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today. I would like to draw your urgent attention to the systematic human rights violations taking place in Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu & Kashmir, both regions currently under Pakistani control, and both largely forgotten on the international stage.

One major concern is the misuse of anti-terrorism laws. Specifically, I am referring to the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997, also known as Schedule 4. This law was originally introduced to combat terrorism and religious extremism. However, today it is being used against political activists, lawyers, social media influencers, and even YouTubers — people who simply raise their voices for democratic rights.

Instead of fighting terrorism, this law is now used as a tool for political suppression. When someone speaks out, they are labeled as a threat, detained under this law, and disappear for periods of time. Often, they are denied access to passports, ID cards, and bank accounts. Even basic movement — such as traveling 10 to 20 kilometers — is monitored and questioned.

What's worse, some of these individuals suffer from serious health conditions — kidney issues, heart problems, or other chronic illnesses. Yet they are not allowed to seek medical treatment in larger cities, because local hospitals in Gilgit-Baltistan lack the necessary facilities. Instead, they are told to stay confined in their towns.

These are anti-people laws — introduced under the pretext of national security, but now used to intimidate and control civil society.

Our region is home to rich culture and a growing community of progressive thinkers — academics, lawyers, and activists — who continue to demand one fundamental right: an autonomous legislative assembly. We want to govern ourselves, to make decisions for our communities.

But even this so-called regional assembly is monitored and controlled directly from Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. Real autonomy does not exist. All local affairs are tightly managed by central authorities.

Even though the region lacks any true local authority, all decisions continue to be dictated from Islamabad.

As we reflect today on democratic values and minority rights in the Global South, the cases of Azad Jammu & Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan stand as stark examples of how democracy can be denied under the pretext of national security and strategic interests.

Khan Sherbaz's Call to Action

Therefore, I respectfully call upon the international community, the United Nations, and international human rights organizations to take urgent action:

- Condemn the misuse of anti-terrorism laws, which are being used to silence peaceful voices and criminalize dissent.
- Support the implementation of United Nations resolutions, which affirm the right of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan to have their own local constitution and autonomous assembly.
- Promote self-governance and democratic participation in the region.
- Support the economic and social development of Gilgit-Baltistan through investment in education, healthcare, infrastructure, and cultural preservation.

And most importantly, I emphasize that the people of Gilgit-Baltistan must be seen as stakeholders in their own future — not as subjects to be neglected, managed, or controlled from afar.

Thank you very much.



Moderator's Closing Remarks

Key Reflections

The moderator concluded the session by highlighting the recurring themes and challenges raised by the panelists:

- Youth as the marginalized yet essential agents of the future: Several speakers emphasized the exclusion of young people in decision-making and the harsh realities they face — from unemployment and migration to death at sea and in detention.
- Education as a cornerstone of democracy: Across all interventions, access to quality education was viewed as a fundamental pillar for building inclusive and participatory societies.
- The misuse of legal frameworks to repress dissent: Laws originally meant to ensure national security are being misapplied to target activists, lawyers, and minority voices.
- Equitable protection of minority rights: The panelists stressed that not all minority groups receive equal protection or recognition, raising the need for international standards that apply universally, not selectively.



The moderator then introduced a forward-looking dimension by proposing the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to support democratic governance and human rights monitoring:

The idea of an AI Ombudsman — a digital, autonomous system designed to monitor public institutions and identify violations of human rights — could serve as a transformative governance tool. Inspired by early-warning systems such as those developed by the Sentinel Project, this model would analyze data from public services, social media, and law enforcement. Importantly, it would allow individuals to provide information anonymously, safeguarding against retaliation and ensuring that underrepresented voices are heard.

The discussion closed with a reflection on regional comparisons — from Africa to Southeast Asia, the Balkans to the Gulf — underscoring the diversity of challenges and the importance of context-sensitive solutions.



Detailed General Conclusion

This roundtable offered a powerful and diverse range of testimonies, showing that while the Global South encompasses varied histories and realities, many of its people face common challenges: lack of political representation, social exclusion, economic inequality, and weakened democratic institutions.

What emerged clearly is that democratic values must be tied to real-life conditions: the right to speak freely, to be educated, to be protected, and to participate. The voices of youth, religious minorities, ethnic groups, and marginalized communities must be centered — not sidelined — in both national and international conversations.

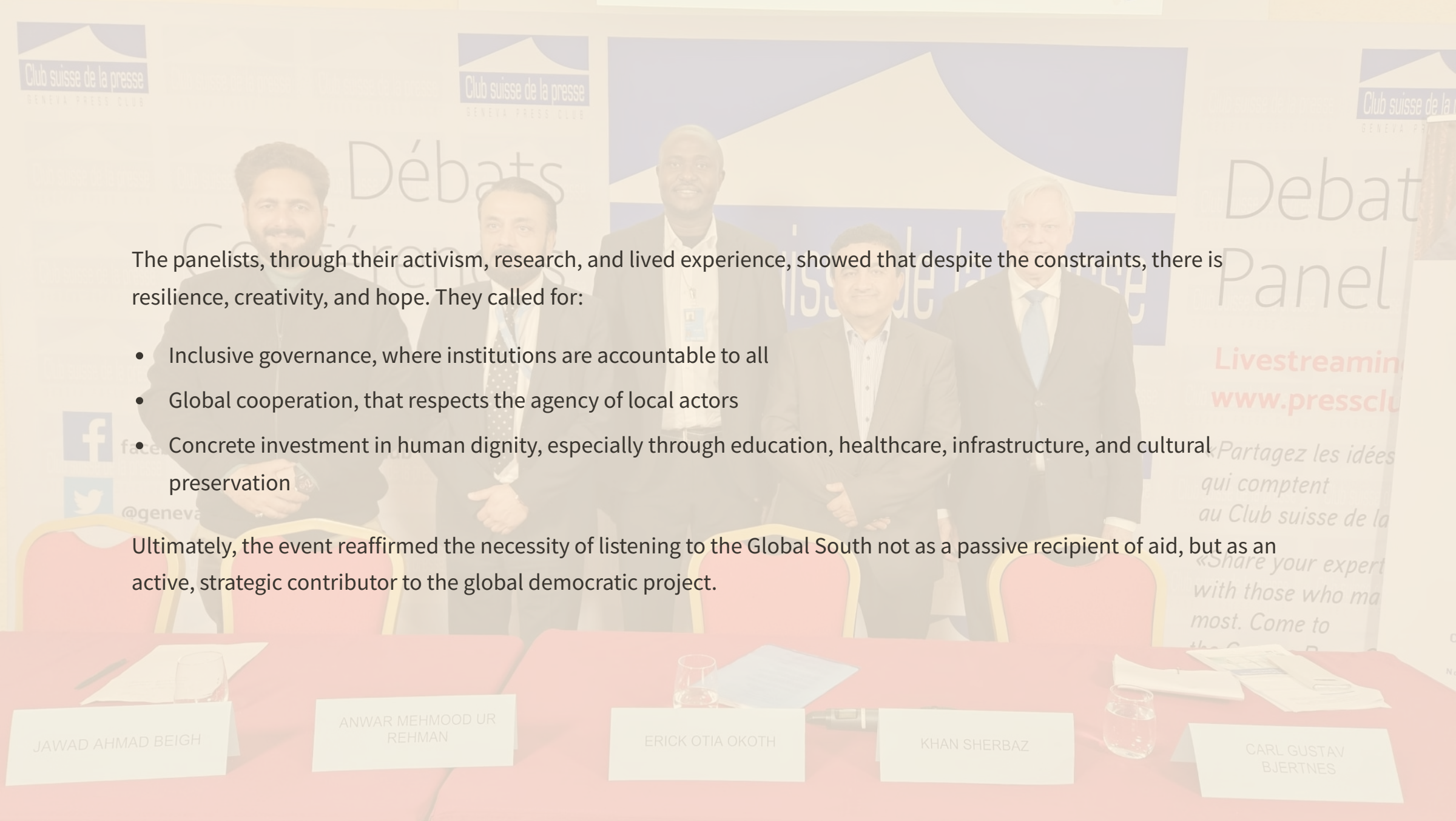
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ERICK OTIA OKOTH

KHAN SHERBAZ

CARL GUSTAV
BJERTNES



The panelists, through their activism, research, and lived experience, showed that despite the constraints, there is resilience, creativity, and hope. They called for:

- Inclusive governance, where institutions are accountable to all
- Global cooperation, that respects the agency of local actors
- Concrete investment in human dignity, especially through education, healthcare, infrastructure, and cultural preservation

Ultimately, the event reaffirmed the necessity of listening to the Global South not as a passive recipient of aid, but as an active, strategic contributor to the global democratic project.



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Debat
Panel

" DÉMINER LES ESPRITS D'ABORD "



CENTRE INDÉPENDANT DE RECHERCHES ET D'INITIATIVES
POUR LE DIALOGUE

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Weblinks

The Press Conference Full Video

The Swiss Press Club Geneva Chanel

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