

MONTREAL INSTITUTE FOR GENOCIDE AND HUMAN RIGHTS STUDIES AT CONCORDIA

Activity Report 2020-21





“Thank you, very much, MIGS donors – for your trust, your confidence, and your belief in the difference our university makes in the lives of our students and in service to society. Your generosity supports our reputation as a top-ranked young university. In challenging times, it helps us more than ever to exemplify what it means to be an innovative, solutions-oriented institution.”

— Graham Carr, President, Concordia University

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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



The Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies (MIGS) made great progress over the past year as Canada's leading university-based think tank with a focus on human rights.

While the institute continued to focus on the prevention of conflict and the protection of civilians from mass violence, we expanded our work to engage in the prevention of incitement of hate in all its forms and to decipher how new digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence, have an impact on human rights.

The COVID-19 pandemic did initially disrupt our work, with several large public events having to be postponed until 2021. MIGS quickly adapted to the situation and embraced new digital platforms to continue its activities, organizing over 30 events and conducting more than 60 podcast interviews with scholars and thought leaders.

With the support of its donors, the institute has cemented its place at Concordia University as a leading international hub. MIGS brings together academics, students, government policymakers, journalists, UN officials and nongovernmental organizations' leaders to work on some of the world's most pressing human rights problems.

Over the past year, the staff and fellows have regularly appeared in both Canadian and international media, seeking to increase public awareness of conflicts and human rights crises. MIGS' growing reputation as a progressive voice on human rights has led to being called upon to join other organizations in global advocacy campaigns to mobilize the international community to protect civilians in such places as Syria and Myanmar.

MIGS also had the honour and pleasure of engaging many Concordia students, as well as those from other universities, as youth fellows to help advance our work while providing them with practical skills and connecting them to a network of practitioners and policymakers. These students conducted research and published articles on media sites and in publications such as OpenCanada.org, The Hill Times, and the Swiss Foreign Ministry's Politorbis magazine. Many of MIGS' Youth Fellows have gone on to leadership positions in government, NGOs and international organizations.

Thank you for your ongoing support in making this happen.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kyle Matthews".

Kyle Matthews

Executive Director

Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies



MONTREAL INSTITUTE FOR GENOCIDE AND HUMAN RIGHTS STUDIES AT CONCORDIA

The Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies (MIGS) is recognized nationally and internationally as Canada's leading ideas and leadership institute for the prevention of genocide, mass atrocity crimes and violent extremism. MIGS conducts in-depth research and proposes concrete policy recommendations to resolve conflicts before they degenerate into mass atrocity crimes.

MIGS has received attention for its role as an idea and leadership incubator working with policymakers, academics, leading research institutions and the media.

MISSION

- Develop major research programs focusing on the prevention and punishment of genocide and other mass atrocity crimes.
- Collect and disseminate research results to specialist professionals and to the wider public.
- Create and advocate for innovative public policies to prevent future mass atrocities.
- Educate students, academics, journalists, government officials, civil society groups, and the wider public on threats to the national interest arising from genocide and mass atrocity crimes.
- Provide professional training and build mass atrocity awareness and prevention capacity of international and national leaders in key fields.
- Offer consultation services to various entities.
- Develop and foster fruitful relationships and networks at the local, national and international levels by working in collaboration with leading organisations, institutions and research institutes.
- Train and offer internships to students and young professionals.

2020-21 HIGHLIGHTS

With the impact of the pandemic on human rights worldwide and growing authoritarianism and social disruptions, MIGS sought to create a space for experts to keep a global audience informed. The Institute organized more than 30 virtual events, launched new projects and joined global human rights advocacy campaigns.

Noteworthy highlights are:

- MIGS **became a partner** of the Department of Canadian Heritage's Digital Citizens Initiative and **launched three projects** focused on disinformation and online harms. These projects included "Mapping Online Hate in Canada", the "Canadian Coalition to Counter COVID Digital Disinformation" and the "Canadian Women Leaders' Digital Defence Initiative".
- The **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's** (OSCE) Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media **selected MIGS** to assist the international organization in understanding the human rights implications of artificial intelligence and COVID-19 disinformation.
- MIGS was **awarded funding** from the Canadian Department of National Defence and the U.S. Embassy to Canada **to organize this year's #RightsCity Conference**. The conference brings together leading Canadian and international experts to talk about a variety of issues at the intersection of technology and human rights.
- MIGS **expanded its network of partners** including the National Endowment for Democracy, DisinfoWatch, Disinfo Cloud, Defend Democracy, the Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region and Freedom House.
- MIGS **launched a series of online conversations** on the state of human rights in the age of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the course of 24 episodes, The Coronavirus Diaries examined COVID-19's impact on refugees, terrorism, disinformation campaigns and freedom worldwide.
- MIGS commemorated the late human rights champion and politician Paul Dewar during a **live event** featuring Thomas Mulcair, Alex Neve, Lt-Gen Roméo Dallaire and Hélène Laverdière.





INITIATIVES

GENOCIDE AND MASS ATROCITIES

MIGS remains focused on the prevention of mass atrocity crimes, most notably genocide, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and war crimes.

As part of this work, MIGS organized events that focused on the persecution of the Uyghurs in China. From the suppression of democracy in Hong Kong, to the genocide of the Uyghur in Xinjiang Province, the Chinese Communist Party is using its growing international power to commit grave human rights abuses at home and abroad. While the international community stands by, MIGS worked with its global partners to raise awareness about the threat the Chinese government poses to the rights of citizens worldwide.

In partnership with organizations such as the National Endowment for Democracy, the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights and Freedom House, MIGS organized a conference, China at a Crossroads: Standing up for Human Rights during the Pandemic, giving a voice to victims, leading experts and policymakers. Over 500 people registered for this conference. MIGS also hosted and participated in numerous online talks on the persecution of the Uyghurs.

In November, it partnered with Concordia's Department of Political Science to co-host Uyghurs Under Threat. A [recording of the event](#) has been viewed almost 1,000 times on YouTube. To reach the general public, the staff gave a large number of interviews and published op-eds in reputable news outlets about the genocide of the Uyghur and the growing digital authoritarianism displayed by China.

MIGS additionally looked at other worrying crises, such as the risk of mass atrocities in Ethiopia, the genocide of the Rohingya and recent coup in Myanmar, continued violence in Iraq and Syria, growing tensions between anglophone and francophone communities in Cameroon, and threats posed by the Iranian government to human rights activists as well as the Bahai's. The staff did not let the global attention on the pandemic prevent them from shining a light on these pressing issues and they brought together practitioners, academics, and activists virtually to help us in our mission.

SPOTLIGHT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND TECHNOLOGY

Over the past few years, MIGS has dramatically expanded its work on human rights and technology. This has been accomplished largely through its Digital Mass Atrocity Prevention Lab and its AI and Global Stability Initiative, with the aim of better understanding the intersection between social media, artificial intelligence, democracy, and human rights. With the speed of technological progress, MIGS understands the need to act and think proactively to prevent these tools from being used to commit human rights abuses.

In April 2021, MIGS hosted the second annual Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights Forum. Carried out in collaboration with the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Global Affairs Canada, the Quebec government, under the patronage of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, the forum brought together NGOs, tech companies, foundations and governments around the globe that understand the need to collaborate on the future of AI and human rights. Distinguished speakers included Irene Khan (UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression), Eileen Donahoe (Executive Director of the Global Digital Policy Incubator) and Marietje Schaake (International Policy Director at the Cyber Policy Center, Stanford).

MIGS was selected by the OSCE's Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media to help map out experts working on the impact of AI and COVID-19 disinformation. More than 14 experts were interviewed including Alice Stollmeyer of Defend Democracy, Fabio Chiusi of Algorithm Watch, and Lucina Di Meco of ShePersisted. These interviews are a part of the OSCE's project, Spotlight on the Impact of AI on Freedom of Expression, and will be used by the organization to find the most effective ways to safeguard freedom of expression and media pluralism when deploying AI.

COMBATING ONLINE HATE

As part of its mission, MIGS has continued to expose the rise of hateful rhetoric in public discourse off and online. The pandemic only worsened this trend as individuals attempted to scapegoat certain communities.

In collaboration with its long-time partner Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes, MIGS hosted a series of discussions titled "Decoding Hate Speech" with the aim of promoting a deeper understanding of online hate. High-profile speakers included David Greene (Electronic Frontier Foundation), MIGS Distinguished Fellow Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire, Katarzyna Gardapkhadze (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) and Meetali Jain (Avaaz).

Focusing on the situation in Canada, MIGS' "Mapping Online Hate", supported by Canadian Heritage's Digital Citizens Initiative, featured a Twitter data study with Nexalogy and interviews with practitioners about online hate in our country, with a focus on Quebec. Experts we spoke to included Adama Dieng (former UN Special Representative for the Prevention of Genocide), Chris Tuckwood (Founder of the Sentinel Project and HateBase) and Ghayda Hassan (professor of clinical psychology at the Université du Québec à Montréal). As the pandemic progressed, this initiative highlighted newer forms of online hate that sought to scapegoat immigrants, and Asian and Jewish communities in Canada.

In February 2021, MIGS launched the “Canadian Women Leaders’ Digital Defence Initiative” with the support of the Department of Canadian Heritage’s Digital Citizens Contribution Program. During four panel discussions with representatives from Western Canada, Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada, the staff discussed the consequences of cyber intimidation and hate speech against female politicians and journalists, concluding with a report of recommendations for the Canadian government and social media platforms as they work to address these issues.

The graphic features a light blue background with a white vertical bar on the left containing a hamburger menu icon. The title "CANADIAN WOMEN LEADERS' DIGITAL DEFENCE INITIATIVE" is displayed in bold, black, uppercase letters, preceded by three black dots. Below the title, five circular headshots of women are arranged horizontally. Each headshot is accompanied by the person's name in a sans-serif font: Mercedes Stephenson, Supriya Dwivedi, LANA CUTHBERTSON, Lisa Raitt, and Marielou McPhedran. To the right of the headshots, the event details "JOIN US ON FEBRUARY 25, 2021 AT 1 PM" are listed in a bold, black, uppercase font. Below this text is a large black dot. At the bottom right, the logos for Concordia University (Montreal Institute for Gender Studies), the Canadian flag, and the Department of Canadian Heritage (Patrimoine canadien) are displayed.

CANADIAN
WOMEN
LEADERS'
DIGITAL
DEFENCE
INITIATIVE

JOIN US ON
FEBRUARY 25,
2021
AT 1 PM

Mercedes
Stephenson

Supriya
Dwivedi

LANA
CUTHBERTSON

Lisa
Raitt

Marielou
McPhedran

Concordia
MONTREAL INSTITUTE FOR GENDER STUDIES

Canadian
Heritage
Patrimoine
canadien

DEFENDING DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

As the pandemic spread, MIGS launched a series of online conversations titled “The Coronavirus Diaries” with the aim of understanding the impact of COVID-19 on communities around the globe. It became clear that the pandemic accelerated the existing decline in human rights and democracy worldwide, including in stable democracies. The 24-episode long series features interviews with experts such as Kurdish-German psychologist Dr. Jan Ilhan Kizilhan, New York Times journalist Muyi Xiao, United Nations Refugee Agency representative in Yemen Jean-Nicolas Beuze and Paige Morrow at Article19.

As governments focused on dealing with the virus at home, MIGS joined several advocacy campaigns, urging governments to remain true to their human rights obligations and humanitarian commitments despite the pandemic.

TACKLING COVID-19 DISINFORMATION

The COVID-19 crisis is the first pandemic in which social media is being utilized on a massive scale to inform and connect with citizens. At the same time, the same technology created and amplified an infodemic that undermined the global response to the virus, jeopardized the public health discourse, created social tensions and increased mistrust in democratic institutions.

Thanks to its previous experience studying and raising awareness about online hate and disinformation, MIGS was awarded a grant from Canada Heritage's Digital Citizens Initiative to establish the "Canadian Coalition to Counter COVID Digital Disinformation." This bilingual initiative sought to explore how COVID-19 misinformation and disinformation was being shared and talked about in Canada. It stressed the importance of strengthening digital literacy skills among Canadians, and tried to expose the way disinformation campaigns reduce trust in democratic institutions.

This was accomplished by hosting digital town halls featuring speakers such as Dr. Joan Donovan (Shorenstein Center at Harvard University) and Dr. Heidi Tworek (UBC & CIGI), organizing interviews with experts for the podcast, running a social media analysis with the help of Nexalogy, producing materials to share on social media such as informational graphics and GIFs, and op-eds.

**ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
AND HUMAN RIGHTS
FORUM**

April 21

12:00 PM

**Misinformation and AI:
friends or foes?**

Joan Donovan
Research Director of the Shorenstein
Center on Media, Politics and Public
Policy

Camille François
Chief Innovation Officer, Graphika

Taylor Owen
Associate Professor in the Max Bell
School of Public Policy at McGill
University, Senior Fellow at the
Center for International
Governance Innovation

**Moderator
Fenwick McKelvey**
Professor, Concordia University

LEADERSHIP AND STAFF

- **Kyle Matthews**, Executive Director
- **Frank Chalk**, Co-founder and Director of Research
- **Marie Lamensch**, Project Coordinator/Communications
- **Lauren Salim**, Project Officer
- **Lieutenant-General the Honourable Roméo A. Dallaire**, O.C., C.M.M., G.O.Q, M.S.C., C.D., (Retired), Senator, Distinguished Senior Fellow

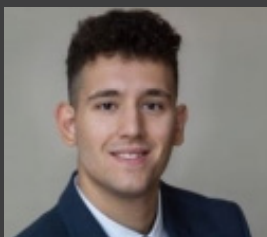
FELLOWS

- **Wale Adeboye**, West Africa focal representative, *Africa Working Group of the Global Action Against Mass Atrocities initiative*
- **Alyssa Blank**, policy analyst, *Digital Citizen Initiative* at Canadian Heritage
- **Dr. Joana Cook**, assistant professor, terrorism and political violence, Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs, Leiden University, and editor-in-chief, *International Centre for Counter Terrorism*
- **Zach Devereaux**, director public affairs, Datametrex AI Limited
- **Phil Gurski**, president and CEO, Borealis Threat and Risk Consulting
- **Dr. Mark Kersten**, senior consultant, Wayamo Foundation, and senior researcher, Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto
- **Naomi Kikoler**, deputy director, Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide, US Holocaust Memorial Museum
- **Fannie Lafontaine**, human rights lawyer, and professor, Faculty of Law, Université Laval
- **Joe Landry**, senior analyst and bureau coordinator, Peace and Stabilization Operations Program, Global Affairs Canada
- **Ewelina U. Ochab**, legal researcher and human rights advocate
- **Michael Petrou**, journalist, author and editor-in-chief, *OpenCanada*
- **Andrei Serbin Pont**, international analyst, CRIES
- **Diego Osorio**, international advisor and consultant



"I really enjoyed the exposure to various international human rights actors and organizations and gained a lot of knowledge in that field as well. Thanks to MIGS for a great professional internship experience."

– Emmanuelle Fahey, former fellow and Concordia graduate student, Political Science



“As a Youth Fellow at MIGS, I had the opportunity of working on various human rights issues. Namely, the use of digital technologies to facilitate state repression as well as the rise of disinformation during the Covid-19 pandemic. By contributing to event planning, op-ed writing, and research, interns have the chance to learn from experienced professionals emanating from intergovernmental organizations, think tanks, and government.

Despite their busy schedules, MIGS staff are always available to lend a helping hand and to guide their interns. Overall, working with MIGS is a great option for anyone interested in human rights, global security, and how both are influenced by emerging AI technologies.”

– George Tsagaroulis, former fellow and Concordia graduate student, Political Science

IN THE MEDIA

Disseminating knowledge and expertise is at the heart of the mission of the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies. MIGS continues to grow its presence in traditional media in Canada and abroad through interviews, op-eds and other publications. Over the past year, MIGS' staff has also given more than 30 radio and TV interviews, including Radio-Canada, CTV News, the CBC and Global News.

The institute's staff and fellows have been featured in news outlets such as Forbes, The Globe and Mail, The Montreal Gazette, La Presse, France24, Liberation, The New York Times, Vice, The Hill Times, OpenCanada, Le Journal de Montréal and iPolitics. Some features include:

- In newspapers and print media: 90 + op-eds and mentions/interviews
- “China must not shape the future of human rights at the UN.” Kyle Matthews and Margaret McCaig Johnston, April 22, 2020, *The Conversation*.
- “Parliamentarians and Atrocity Prevention.” Kyle Matthews and MIGS Student Fellow Daniel Twijuke, November 16, 2020, *Politorbis*.
- “Traitement des Ouïghours: Cibler l'économie chinoise.” Marie Lamensch, November 12, 2020, *La Presse*.
- “The Cost of an Internet Shutdown.” Marie Lamensch, March 9, 2021, *Centre for International Governance Innovation*.
- “Confronting China, together.” Kyle Matthews, March 17, 2021, *Open Canada*.
- “As the International Criminal Court Faces More Challenges, We Need It More Than Ever.” Ewelina Ochab, September 13, 2020, *Forbes*.
- “COVID-19: once again, Indigenous communities are failed by North American governments.” Emmanuelle Fahey, August 3, 2020, *The Hill Times*.

SOCIAL MEDIA

While MIGS is based at Concordia University, its activities and projects extend well beyond the university campus. The institute embraces social media as a strategic way to engage and foster debate on important human rights issues, as well as to promote its fellows, events, projects, advocacy efforts and media appearances. Scholars, students, UN officials, politicians, journalists, human rights practitioners and activists from across the world follow the MIGS social media accounts.

- **Facebook:** 1,834 Followers
- **Twitter:** 5,426 followers
 - Average 45 new followers per month over the past year
 - Average 160-250K Tweet impressions per month
 - Average profile visit increase over the past 3 months with an average of 3,500-4,000
- **LinkedIn:** 2,100+ connections
- **Podcast episodes:** 67 episodes
- With its more than 1,500 subscribers, MIGS' newsletter keeps its audience informed about all upcoming events, publication, media interventions, advocacy campaigns and activities

LOOKING AHEAD

MIGS plans to continue growing as a public-facing institution committed to being a platform at Concordia for human rights leadership. Thanks to the support of the late John F. Lemieux, BA 66, MIGS will launch a paid fellowship program for Concordia students and faculty to become more engaged in our work, and the current Distinguished Senior Fellow, Roméo Dallaire, will spend more time on campus as Concordia's first-ever Humanitarian in Residence.

MIGS' public events will continue online with this year's #RightsCity conference scheduled to take place June 15-17, 2021. Experts will gather to discuss issues such as digital authoritarianism, digital attacks on human rights advocates, the need for a digital Geneva convention and how social media can be used as a tool to investigate atrocity crimes.

MIGS has been awarded funding by the Department of Canadian Heritage to launch the Canadian Taskforce to Counter Online Anti-Semitism. The project will set up a task force of six eminent Canadians who will help guide the project, build a strong network of experts and give non-partisan advice on combating anti-Semitism online. A group of international experts will participate in a roundtable to discuss the trends of online anti-Semitism to better understand the Canadian context. The knowledge gathered will help shape policy labs held online, to discuss what can be done nationally to address online anti-Semitism and implement Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy.

MIGS also received funding from the U.S. Embassy to organize a virtual speaker series, "Countering digital authoritarianism initiative", which will focus on the nefarious deployment of new technologies and the consequences for democracy and global security. Left uncontested, the damaging abuse of technologies will further lead to a decline of human rights worldwide. As the illiberal use of technologies threatens to reshape the balance of power, our speaker series will examine the strategies used by authoritarian states and their impact on populations at home and abroad, and discuss the pressing need for alliances between Canada, the United States, and like-minded democratic countries.



PARTNERS

- Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights
- National Endowment for Democracy
- Canadian Commission for UNESCO
- Global Affairs Canada
- Canadian Heritage
- Department of National Defence
- Québec Ministère des Relations internationales et de la francophonie
- Freedom House
- The Netherlands Embassy to Canada
- U.S. Embassy to Canada
- The Institute for Economics and Peace
- Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes
- Office of the OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media
- Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region
- Canadian International Council
- DisinfoWatch
- Amnistie Internationale Canada francophone
- Canadian All Party Parliamentary Group for the Prevention of Genocide and Other Crimes Against Humanity
- Centre de prévention de la radicalisation menant à la violence
- Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect
- UN Executive Directorate for Counter Terrorism
- Office of the UN Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide
- Parliamentarians for Global Action
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
- Canada Human Rights Watch Film Festival
- Disinfo Cloud
- Agence Science-Pressé

CANADA'S NEXT-GEN UNIVERSITY

[Concordia](#) is a next-generation university, continually reimagining the future of higher education. Established in 1974, Concordia is located in vibrant and multicultural Montreal, North America's favourite student city. Its two campuses are situated in Tiohtià:ke/Montreal, on the traditional lands and waters of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation. Concordia is [top-ranked university in North America](#) [founded within the last 50 years](#) and among the most innovative in its approach to experiential learning and cross-functional research.

The university annually registers 51,000 diverse and engaged students in its [Faculty of Arts and Science](#), [John Molson School of Business](#), [Gina Cody School of Engineering and Computer Science](#) and [Faculty of Fine Arts](#) and in [Concordia Continuing Education](#). The university employs more than 6,600 faculty and staff and has over 220,000 alumni worldwide. The university annually secures nearly \$61.9 million in sponsored research income.

Concordia's [strategic directions](#) set out a vision for the future and exemplify a daring and transformative outlook to some of the most important issues of our time. The university strives to be forward-looking, agile and responsive while remaining deeply rooted in the community and globally networked.

About 75 per cent of Concordia's courses have fewer than 60 students. Its student body includes over 36,400 undergraduate students and 9,600 graduate students in over 200 grad programs, more than 10,000 international students from some 150 countries and 3,000-plus co-op students. Concordia maintains formal ties with 181 institutions in 39 countries.

Concordia is committed to decolonization and Indigenization and being sustainably responsible.

For more information, visit [concordia.ca](#).

THE CAMPAIGN FOR CONCORDIA: NEXT-GEN. NOW.

Concordia is leading its most ambitious fundraising effort ever ([concordia.ca/campaign](#)).

The campaign supports nine strategic directions that advance Concordia's role as Canada's next-generation university ([concordia.ca/directions](#)). With co-chairs Gina Cody, MEng 81, PhD 89, Andrew Molson and Lino Saputo Jr., BA 89, volunteer leaders across Canada, the United States and Asia are helping to drive this major initiative. The Campaign for Concordia will culminate in 2024-25, the year of Concordia's 50th anniversary.

Learn how Concordia's most ambitious campaign
to date will empower tomorrow's leaders:
concordia.ca/campaign.

Discover what Concordia achieved first in Montreal,
Quebec, Canada and the world:
concordia.ca/concordiafirsts.

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