>> MICHAEL BARR; Good afternoon everybody. Thank you for braving the icy paths and snowy streets to join us this afternoon. It's really a great pleasure to see, on Michael Barr, on the Joan and Sanford Weill Dean of the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy here at the University of Michigan.

I'm delighted to welcome you all to our 18th Josh Rosenthal Education Fund lecture, which this year features Michael Breen president and CEO of Human Rights First. Before introducing Mike, I'd like to share the history of this lecture series. The Josh Rosenthal Education Fund was established in memory of Josh Rosenthal, a 1979 University of Michigan graduate, who died in the World Trade Center attacks on September 11th, 2001. After Josh’s death, His mother, Mary, Rosenthal a long-time faculty member in sociology at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. Sought a way to make some positive meaning of what had happened on that day, she and others work to establish the Josh Rosenthal Education Fund, which enabled the Ford School to bring leading public policy figures to an Ann Arbor each fall to share their insights, foster dialogue, and create a greater sense of understanding around the causes and consequences of 911 and other pressing global issues, including International Human Rights.

Harriet Berg, Josh as aunt is in the audience, today on sitting in the back waving to us.

Thank you very much, Harriet and your family for your generosity and for allowing us to address the significant global issues of human rights advocacy.

In the mark would have been Josh as 40th-year anniversary of his graduation from the University of Michigan.

[ APPLAUSE ]

Let me turn now to today, speaker of Mike Breen. Mike recently took over the helm of Human Rights First about a year ago. Human Rights First as many of you know, is a non-profit, non-partisan international human rights organization with offices in New York, Washington DC, Houston, and LA, Human Rights First serves is an independent advocacy organization active around the globe.

Previously Mike, an Army veteran, served as President CEO of the Truman National Security Project, a nationwide membership organization of leaders inspired to serve in the aftermath of 9-11.After leaving the military he served in the White House in the Office of General Counsel and in law school, he co-founded the International Refugee assistance project, a program providing legal advocacy for refugees and displaced people.

We're delighted to have him here today as a Rosenthal speaker and to hear his lecture “human rights on the brink”.

Before I turn the podium over to Mike, let me just say a word on format. We have some time towards the end for questions from the audience.

Two students Sarah Wagner, an MPP candidate, and Mary K. Hazel, an MSW candidate from the public policy seminar the role of courts in international human rights with Hardie our policy maker - Towsley policymaker in residence teaching this semester and coincidentally Vice President for Legal Affairs of human rights. First, we'll sift through your question cards and pose them to our speaker during the question time.

And so now, please join me in welcoming our speaker Mike bringing to the podium.

[ APPLAUSE ]

>> MICHAEL BREEN: Thank you very much to Dean Barr and thank you so much to you into the family for making this possible. 911 was for all of us and certainly for me a day that touched my life profoundly and ways that I think we'll probably talk about tonight.

So it's especially meaningful to have the opportunity to speak about these human rights issues in this context.

From a small town in New Hampshire - Portsmouth, New Hampshire, is where my parents live, and where I was living at the time of 9/11, I was a senior in college and even in that small town, turned out one of the flight crew that flew out of Logan on that day, lived in Portsmouth and commuted to Logan airport.

So even this small, tiny New Hampshire town, we lost people that day and it transformed my life - sent me a war in two different conflicts and really changed the entire trajectory of my life.

It's a genuine pleasure to be here in Ann Arbor, especially to be indoors here in Ann Arbor.

I'd be with all of you and I look forward to a robust conversation, but before we get there, I've been asked to bore you with some remarks. I'll do my best to make them as interesting as I can.

The subject today is the modern human rights movement.

What it's been is what it is and some thoughts about what it needs to become what it needs to become if it's to remain relevant let alone essential. So I'm here to make a case for change first. This question of why do I care what's brought me to human rights? It's an interesting question, I think if we went around the room and ask everyone here to define human rights, and there's some extraordinarily educated, qualified people in this room, I have no doubt.

I suspect, we would probably get as many answers as there are people sitting here with us.

It's a concept that's become difficult to define and it's a concept, I think that in many cases is starting to lose. Or is it risk of losing its relevance to us but what is it? Our rights as human beings should be fundamental to us it should be organic understanding human rights should be like understanding or on treating a... For me, my experience with human rights with understanding what it means to me is tied up with 911 in my experience as an Army officer.

So, if you will, due I'll tell you a brief story.

203 in 2004. I was about 23 years old, I found myself as a second lieutenant with the first of the six cent for tree problem company in Baghdad, a rock, a war that I had written as an undergraduate, the previous year was deeply misguided as a response to 911 and where I was now all of a sudden charge with fighting a lot of things during my time there, but once it experiences I had, I watched the beginning of an insurgency in a rock and a lot of the form that took, was carbonic people were building car bombs and driving them into infrastructure projects and on other things that I was responsible for, so I would work to rebuild a school or a hospital or revitalize a piece of infrastructure with local race contractors and an insurgent would try to blow up what we had just built.

So a lot of my fellow soldiers I got into the business of trying to hunt down bomb makers and I remember the first one of these rats, but there were dozens of them. I'm an Eagle Scout small town, New Hampshire, my dad is a retired law enforcement officer. I remember hearing things about the rights of the accused, and due process when I was about three years old, my dad used to tell his better, all that 10 guilty man go free and convict.

I want a in-person. It was like a mantra that I grew up with, so I internalize the... Susan is constant for deeply.

And I remember going through the door on our first raid I got there in the morning and having a pretty good idea that the person I was going to detain was somebody who took money to kill strangers, by building bombs.

But of course, you go through the door.

And what do you find... You find a family terrified in the middle of the night is a mentor their home, and I remember talking to them sitting them down, and I don't know if my words meant anything to them, but I remember saying... We are different from the soldiers that might have been here six months ago under the previous regime. We're not gonna shoot your dad in the front yard.

We're Americans, this is the flag that I'm wearing. We don't torture people.

And I must have said that dozens of times to different families, every single one of those people ended up at a prison, called out a great so many months later, still in a rock, I walked down into the basement of a rocky police station during the battles, and the job and "fluste insurgencies. Now, in full swing, I'm there to inspect the conditions of the prisoners there's a big holding cell in a basement full of men behind bars one big cell and they see me coming down the stairs, and they panic because of the uniform on were they are basically begging the Iraqi police. Don't let that guy take me.

And that's how I found out about what had happened about great.

Some of you remember this vividly, for some of you, the photograph of the man with the jumper cables in the hood on the box, it turns out all those people I told their families were Americans. We don't do that sort of thing. Well, they all been subjected to unspeakable conditions, many cases towards your business.

And I thought to myself, "How did we become this? And that's the kind of experience. How did the flag out of the uniform become this?

And that's how I got interested in human rights in a rigorous way. That's how I left the military, went to Law school became involved in refugee issues eventually made my way to this organization, an organization by the way, whose name I didn't know at the time, but whose work I saw an organization that had rallied the most senior former military leaders in the nation to stand against torture a campaign that many of you probably remember that was Human Rights First. That's how I came to know them, so that's why I care that's why I'm here.

And that's why I care very deeply about the future of the human rights movement that I'd like to talk with you about a little bit today. Some of what I have to say is critical, some of what I have to say is potentially provocative, but it comes from a place of deep both hope and deep personal stake in the future of these values and the future of this movement and what I think is an absolutely critical time for all of us.

So first a little history very familiar to some of you.

The modern human rights movement grew out of the ashes of World War II, and the Holocaust. Its founding document, the Universal Declaration drew on ancient principles and traditions as it articulated the Roosevelt's vision of a peaceful post-war world built on respect for human rights and human dignity.

So this was both a simple and a radical idea, the notion? Every human being possesses certain legal rights, legal rights by virtue of her humanity that every government was obligated to respect those rights that this was more than a matter of philosophy. This was a matter of law, beginning with the Universal Declaration in 1948, the Geneva Convention in 1949, the United States spearheaded the formation of a global system of Human Rights, a network of laws agreements tools and institutions that was meant to make rights of reality in the lives of people all over the world and this system bolstered if not always heated by the United States and its allies helped spur the growth of democracy and respect for human rights worldwide activists and movements regularly invoked universal ideals and use the human rights system in their own political battles in their own countries. Activists, likewise relied on the United States for support, and looked to it for inspiration. And I think we should be careful not to romanticize this I'll speak more about America's human rights record a little later, but in the decades after World War II and especially after the early 1970s, the United States showed itself to be for the most part, a highly functional and progressing pluralistic democracy that welcomed a large number of newcomers greatly reduced economic inequality and allowed a large measure of political freedom, freedom that gave social justice movements, an opening to mobilize and fight for their rights the degree of freedom, the upward trajectory hard-fought as it was, made it reasonable for the human rights movement to Champion, American leadership, and it was for it to leverage it.

American leadership on behalf of human rights activists, in other countries.

At the same time, the human rights system was a vital political instrument for the United States as decolonization occurred at great speed and great scale around the willing the United States could differentiate itself from the Soviet Union, by hosting the banner of human rights.

This is not to say that it was mere branding. The United States put real money and effort into building the human rights system.

The point is that in the context of the Cold War, it was clear that championing human rights was both the right thing and the smart thing to do and ethical, as well as a strategic imperative throughout the Cold War, of the United States most of the time could do well by doing good.

So listen to Valhalla, the first opposition movements or so-called dissident movements, which emerged in the Soviet block at that time had one thing in common, they all cited the hill since documents, as well as other papers binding governments to respect human rights and liberties to these movements. The Helsinki cords were an inspiration, a shield, a chance to resist coercion and to make it difficult for the forces of coercion to retaliate an inspiration and a shield.

The Helsinki accords was non-binding its stated purpose was actually to ease tension between the east and the west, but combined with other factors, including the courage of activists and the power of the United States, it helped change the world that was 1989, democracy and capitalism also referred to as liberal internationalism had prevailed.

But as we all know, now the end of the Cold War, did not usher in a period of great progress on human rights and democracy, at least not the way we imagined.

So what happened?

That is a long conversation and it's an important one.

I think for today, it's enough to point out that several common assumptions turned out to be faulty.

There's a common thread to these assumptions and to many more that we wanna talk about right now, many forces and tools that we once believed would inevitably favor the advancement of human rights, turned out to be double-edged swords it was widely believed, for example, that economic growth would lead to Democrat on democratization and a call for more rights. The reality, unfortunately, is that some autocrat have succeeded in linking their rule to economic gains in security, trying to, for example, has succeeded in part through massive indoctrination in convincing its population and economic progress is made possible only by rejecting the messiness of democracy and embracing party rule.

We've also learned that even in countries with secure political and legal rights, the majority of the voting public will not always vote to defend the humanity around them.

The rejection of refugees. by the European Union in the United States, is... But one reminder that, possessing rights does not automatically extend them to others, unfortunately, given the persistent problems we see in our headlines today in the United States and other Western democracies, it's getting more difficult to make the case that liberal internationalism and other human rights respecting forms of governance or manifestly superior to other systems.

So all around the world, authoritarian are actively exploiting the failures and struggles of democratic countries. This is nothing new and the corruption of elites to gain and consolidate power, there's a related assumption that was common at the end of the Cold War that the global financial system would be a tool against authoritarian much as it was in the mid-20th century.

The reality is that authoritarian it in some ways it has been, but the authoritarian have used it to enable corruption and maintain power. I'm talking about so-called Dark finance, without which, by the way, there's probably no such thing as President Donald Trump but I'm also talking about a lot of activity that happens right out in the open.

Here's a fourth assumption it's been revealed as wrong or questionable that the diffusion of technology would favor democratize and activists.

The reality is that sometimes it does, but also that the centralization of communications technology the development of exquisite cyber means to target activists and the dispersion of surveillance capitalism for monitoring WI-swales, of a population has helped tire and suppress activists and the reality is also that violent extremists have often leveraged the same technology more effectively.

Then the activists have...

I could go on, but here's a fifth and final assumption that it pains me to say is no longer support. Able three decades later, unfortunately the United States will remain an example that other countries necessarily, wish to follow and emulate.

This was an assumption of the post-Cold War the United States began the century. Cast your mind back to the year 2000, the United States began the century has a respected and unrivaled military economic, political, and in many ways moral power, one that provided valuable public goods to the world and maintained a relatively benign global order.

The country was... If not, the interview of the world, then it certainly was its dominant player, and it was eminently credible across nearly every field of human endeavor military strength economic might financial competence, political system, the maintenance of international institutions, but consider America's record in the eyes of the world since the turn of this century.

And in many ways, I'm describing my lid experiences in adult American who graduated from undergraduate in 2002 illegal torture and black sites in the wake of 9-11, the 2003 invasion of a rock and the long also wore the followed the 2008 financial crisis, and subsequent recession, the 2016 election, and the continuing awful-ness of our politics across nearly every field of human endeavor American superiority has been humbled and our basic competence in major areas of geopolitics, and statecraft, and then called into question.

And unfortunately that's just a reality we contend with. Now, as for you S-world leadership, it's already taken some major hits before January of 2017, a torture. The wars in Yemen and Syria the United States had either committed or allowed some pretty horrific human rights abuses in the decades before the current administration, and today, we have arguably the first administration since the Second World War, to stand an open opposition to human rights, I don't need to recite the litany of transgressions.

Suffice to say, this administration has overseen a collapse of American credibility on human rights and in addition to tremendous concrete human harm, this has created a problem for activists, and for movements who might otherwise rely on American influence to advance claims to universal human rights.

So it's no wonder that the many protest movements rising up around the world are increasingly using localized rhetoric and organizing principles unlike the Arab Spring movements of 2011 and 12, The Umbrella Movement other movements today's protesters are largely turning away from universal human rights language.

In part, this is because a mid-worldwide stagnation widespread anger or over-copter and up governance, the focus of many protests is economic.

For example, the event that spurred the yellow vest protest in France was an increase in fuel taxes in Chile, the current enormous protest began as a response to a subway fare hike in the Lebanon. It was a tax on. What's that messages?

But it's also clear, the Human Rights, the concept, the system, the universal language, and it's great as traditional champion the NID states holds less promised for activists, we're coming up with strategies for their movements today than it did 10 years ago, all the large protest movements around the world they're taking place in at least 20 countries right now there a sign of hope, but they're also a sign of acute distress.Authoritarianism is ascended in many places as dictators, quasi-dictators would be fascist movements from Brazil to Hungary, to China exploit and insight anger against racial minorities migrants global its and international institutions, the growth of technology, has aided them in many cases giving them new powers to spy on and otherwise, control citizens. It's also facilitated the mass dissemination of disinformation undermining a very concept truth and threatening not only individual rights such as the right to privacy, but also individual autonomy and agency with things like the sophisticated manipulation of individual perception and choice by machine learning algorithms and AI other techniques.

So the future is very uncertain, and it's coming fast if you want a glimpse of it, of what it might be in if we fail.

Consider Western China... No nationalist authoritarianism meets a new Charles Dick in style capitalism, using ever progressing technology to expand its power. And to suppress descent we're an algorithm predicting that you will have low social compliance in the future.

You can't get a bank loan or go to college, or to a or can get... You walked up, indefinitely in a re-education camp, forced into slave labor, making consumer goods forced her announce your native language in your religion.

Then there's a minor matter of climate change, which threatens to exacerbate inequality and make refugee crisis perpetual which would in turn empower the darkest forces in our societies.

We're seeing a foreshadowing as this thing play out, in our own country. Over the last three years, I've been talking in terms of concepts and generalities, but behind those concepts are human beings people who live or die, people who suffer or thrive depending on whether our government and other governments respect their fundamental in rights as the ten mentioned before coming a Human Rights First, I co-founded an organization when I should have been in class in law school that helped refugee families and spend a lot of time on the ground in places like Lebanon. Dr.In the... Is a never-ending struggle for human rights. It's gone by many names. And that struggle has many victories in moments of transcendent courage.

The canon should inspire us to do our own duty, in our own time to our neighbors to our communities as well as to the global movement for universal values and universal rights and I don't think to focus on fixing problems at home is to ignore human rights activists in other countries. In fact, I think one of the best things we can do for active overseas as to restore or create American credibility on human rights, as I hope it made clear by now the capacity of the US government and by extension, the human rights movement to forge progress in other countries depends in large measure so on American credibility.

And it would be great if the US government were a shiny example to the world, but it is essential that we demonstrate a baseline level of commitment to the cause that is indispensable, but let's face it, the US government is not going to regain credibility overnight. The human rights movement in the world cannot afford to wait for that human rights advocates, should look for ways to take matters into our own hands, let me put it this way, we should continue to press the government to protect human rights when possible, and we should fight to protect human rights despite our government when necessary.

That's a lot of work that we're focused on right now. Human Rights First and we're early in the process, of formulating that work, it's also part of our traditions.

Hardy, right now is leading many pieces of impact litigation, that are about taking matters into our own hands to fight for our clients.

We have a new Chief Technology Officer who's joined us from the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory, to help us develop new technology tools to fight for human rights work with human rights defenders, and expose abuse. We're still early in the process of formulating a lot of this new work and this new strategy, but what I do know is that we cannot sit around and wait for a better US, Government to material is... And even when it does materialize the human rights movement needs to be more proactive and more creative along with a group of other human rights advocates. I recently met with a group of leaders from Western China, ex-patriots, all of them, every one of them had a family member in many cases, many family members who were detained in these camps, they hadn't been able to speak to didn't even in many cases, now, if they were alive, it into one of the leading members of this community looked at us on the panel and said, "Look my colleagues and I have been in this fight, a great personal cost, and we are watching the destruction of our community.

I can't sleep.

And we haven't seen much of a response.

Where is the hope, what do you have to offer us, "What can you do to help us?

And what ensued was a conversation about one of my colleague spoke up imminent leader, and another human rights organization, one of the very best in the business, and she gave what I thought was a perfect encapsulation of the advocacy environment in Congress, and was the state department and other organs of the federal government.

It was not an optimistic outlook.

And then she talked about what we might be able to do next quarter to advocate for stronger action.

Nothing wrong with what she had to say, but I realized at that moment that couldn't be our answer ultimately that it's not enough to say. Well, we asked the government to help you and the government said No. So we'll ask him again tomorrow. And that's it, that's all we can do.

We've got to have better answers.

Part of that answer could be more defensive technology to enable a human rights activist, to work securely.

It could be the sharing of tactics which is the diffusion of knowledge for how to extinguish tear-gas canisters that appears to a spread from Hong Kong to chill it continuing to develop new tools and techniques to hold Human Rights abusers accountable that don't rely on US government action connecting human rights defenders in their allies in American civil society and around the world, to one another through responsive rapid securely design networks, relentlessly improving or advocacy techniques, mastering the art of persuasion in the digital age.

I don't have the answers yet but I'm committed to finding them.

So is our team, because we'll try again tomorrow. Just this out of an... It could be that as sin perhaps you. I hope any of you search for new pathways to progress. We discover we need a new language of human rights. Maybe even new rights themselves after all the Universal Declaration was written 20 years before new research started that would eventually evolve into the internet before globalization brought down borders, before the impact of climate change was felt on a daily basis, by millions of people. The changes I've outlined call for a new lexicon, perhaps protest movements around the world are already birthing one listening carefully to these movements traces of the universal and they're increasingly particular language goals is feral ground for new research and scholarship.

If anyone here is interested in that sort of thing, it could also be that we need a new broader interdisciplinary vision for Human Rights.

For example, as more people live more of their lives online, there's a need for a basic human rights framework that empowers and protects them in the digital space.

The very definition of human is, in some ways, expanding to include for example, social media proof Foss the inescapable wake of data we leave behind us with our every action in every day.

The definition of human rights seems to me needs to expand as well, digital human rights, the right to be forgotten for example, or to access the Internet or to be free from forced exposure to things like child pornography, or disinformation they're worthy of our deep consideration. These are important debates to engage in.

I'd like to leave you with a final set of thoughts and then I hope we can have a great conversation and that final set of thoughts is that the politics of the moment can be all consumed.

But if we lift our day is just a little bit if we consider what the influence of her new authoritarianism extremist at no nationalist, populism unsustainable and transparent in a quality and climate change together with rapidly advancing technology, if we think about what that change means for human rights, I think we begin to see that we're probably in the opening stages, of a new very different and probably existential struggle for human rights.

I think we begin to see that if we fail in that struggle much, of what we've inherited, and built ourselves maybe at risk, I think we begin to see that, we may be facing a battle for the meaningful definition of any rights at all, but on the brink of crisis, there's also opportunity for too long. We've allowed human rights conversations to be about harms, perpetrated far away against people for a few of us know we allowed human rights to be about what we relatively powerful and safe in America would be willing to do to help those who are not so lucky.

That obligation of course, remains.

The conversation, of course, continues but this moment finally I think, is begin to crystallize for many of our neighbors for many of us that human rights is about us, too, that the dignity agency and future potential every one of us is not guaranteed even into the rest of the century as technology as ethno-nationalist politics a light leap across borders as mass migration continues as climate change reminds us that the only real "warder is the atmosphere that everything else ultimately is permeable.

We've really got new choice but to finally recognize that all 11 billion plus of us are well and truly whether we like it or not in this thing together.

And I think there's growing awareness that the risks we face are universal, they're shared by all.

So let this be also a moment for the re-assertion of universal values and universal rights.

Some questions to answer, future of the human rights movement is not remotely written. But I would invite you all to help us write it take you a eateries in enantiomers.

So you guys Durante back to work it on here today. My name is Arana MPP student here at Ford, in my first year with interest in racial and gender equity, as well as human rights, broadly, very excited to hear you speak to "Tayloe started with a question from the audience. Is there a need for other countries to rely on the USA or follow us as an example, regarding human rights? Is it still relevant to view? So today, it's a great question, the question was, Is there a if I can paraphrase it, is there a need for other countries to follow the example of the United States when it comes to human rights? And is that relevant today? I think I would offer two thoughts on that.

If by example, what the question refers to is moral perfection or a complete lack of hypocrisy. Absolutely, right, but that's never been true.

If the question is Does us power and leadership and human rights in the world, matter? The answer is Yes, tremendously, and I think in a funny way matters more almost as the United States is going through, I think What can just be objectively to fine or viewed as a decline and its relative power compared to other sending powers in the world as the United States becomes less relatively powerful compared to rest or well then it wasn't the '90s when we were unbelievably Ivey. Powerful right then a renewed emphasis on institutions, norms and agreements that can lock in international order, based on human rights that I think that the need for that re-Doubles, we have to get much more interested in building those institutions and commuting to those institutions, so pulling back from international institutions, pulling back from a rights-based order is the exact opposite of what I think we should be doing.

Is it relevant for other countries to look at the American experience? Absolutely, of course just as it's relevant for us to look at the experience of other countries, as a person leading a non-profit in the United States that is about human rights.

Sure, we have expertise that we can share across many disciplines we're trying to acquire more expertise and experience, we wanna be generous with those things but it's also very likely that a successful NGO leader, in a place like hungry probably has more to teach me right now that I have to teach her.

Right, so that exchange matters a lot so I...

US power matters tremendously. They're about 350 million of us, they get the vote in American elections that election has an impact a life or death impact in many cases on 11 billion plus other people.

I don't think we should walk around wearing that responsibility lightly. By any stretch of the imagination.

It matters massively with this country does or doesn't. Do you don't believe me, ask a Syrian or asking or Rocky or ask someone from Yemen.

Thank you for being with us here today, Mr. brain. My name is Mary K. Hazel I am a second year Masters of Social Work student about to graduate in December, okay, and I study social effects of policy and both domestic and global context. So I really appreciate the things that you said about human rights, not just being a global issue but also a domestic issue. Another question for you on the USS role over the past two decades I have seen the US government be very selective in terms of critiquing human rights violations, across the world based on the US strategic political and economic relations with the violating country. Should we be realistic and accept this as reality? Is it practical to hold countries to the idealistic principles of human rights? Interesting hypocrisy is part of International Relations. I wish it were not it is. I would make a couple of quick points first. I think imperfect adherence to a set of principles and imperfect. The champion is much better than no champion at all.

It matters tremendously whether the United States is imperfectly advancing Human Rights, maybe not on daring them to reach all the time, or openly rejecting the system and that has huge implications.

The second point I would make quickly is that no as activists, as citizens, I don't think we should accept these things.

No, of course not.

I think speaking truth to power is my job. I think it's the job of all of us reporter for the right.

That's not to say that I am a naive individual believes that I live in a utopian world, in which we will always win that argument.

But one of the things I think it does really point out is that effective and this is a huge part of the tradition of Human Rights First and a huge part of what I admired about the organization on before I joined, it was it... We're a human rights organization that is comfortable with making pragmatic arguments successful advocacy is often the product of moral force and legal right combined with an argument and appeal to enlightened self-interest figuring out whether it's things aligned, and I think this underlines a larger point.

We didn't really get to, in lecture, except in the context of the Cold War, but I would continue to argue that it is absolutely, I dive in the United States is strategic geo-political interest to be a human rights champion. And I'm more than happy to get into that conversation and hope it the...

IT is in our self-interest to do that, without a question.

In fact, I'd say it's probably strategically critical that we do it.

And so I think making those arguments matters wealth disparity worldwide seems to play a role in many of the destructive trends that you've described with many supporting systems against their own interest. Should that be a major focus in the human rights movement?

This is a perennial one, right?

This is the argument about whether human rights should or should not encompass economic right, for lack of economic justice, let's call it.

I don't think there's ever gonna be an answer to this question. I would point out a couple of things though to the extent that the theories of advancing Human Rights, internationally were based on the idea that you could have for Petra economic growth everywhere and that would just keep happening.

That's not gonna happen for a bunch of reasons. So there's a faulty assumption there, and then I've already mentioned another faulty assumption which is that economic growth in the absence of Human Rights Advancement will produce human rights advancement. This is a major argument would apply into many, many countries including China right now we're running the experiment things to incredible achievement, unprecedented a human history has been lifting an unbelievable the more people out of life-crushing soul-destroying abject poverty in an unbelievable amount of time.

The theory was that that would produce essentially a middle class that would then call for rights to some extent that's happened to some extent, it hasn't, right?

So there's a shaky relationship, between economic justice and human rights, I think and it's worth looking into from a theoretical perspective, from a practical standpoint, it's very hard to put them a part right now.

Excuse me, the ease in allergic to the question, for Do me.

But as I mentioned earlier, if you look across these 20 plus countries where protest moments are happening almost every single one of them has a deeply economic rationale that's the... Even if there's a lot of politics at play too. And rites, searching for rights, the straw that breaks the camel's back over and over again is economic so it's hard to pull. He things, support.

Okay, another question this one specific to Human Rights First, what steps is your organization taking in regards to the human rights abuses taking place and detention facilities on our borders, and a corollary how do we, as citizens take active steps to fight and oppose these abuses?

Great question, and thank you. This is something that we've been incredibly involved in both of the detention issue and a bunch of related issues, including what I'm happy to speak about.

This very perverse policy called the Migrant protection protocols, which we call the migrant persecution protocols, which involves essentially forcing silent applicants to return to Mexico often an extraordinarily dangerous situations, places that the State Department will not permit its own employees, to be for example two dangerous to loss every day drop migrants off there, defense hesel.

What are we doing about this for its entire history? Human Rights First has been one of the leading, if not the leading, coordinator, and so pro bono for free legal representation to a silent seekers in the US legal system. So we've been doing asylum since the organization existed.Four decades of this.

We have a legal team that is at the absolute forefront of the area of law and we do a lot of policy work on this area of law, and have for a long time, when I say we do policy work, I'm referring to things like this organization essentially drafted the Refugee Act of 1980 that created the system we've never seen and never anticipated the level of political attack and abuse of the system, we're seeing now, we seem to be facing a government that is essentially attempting to destroy its on a silence system.

And so her response to that has been multi-fast. We're continuing to represent our clients provide them the very best legal representation we can provide, we're doing that in the face of an administration that is making that harder in every conceivable way that it can often in a pretty clear violation of law.

We're in the litigation business in the way we have it bent its large part. The Hardy's leadership, leadership, a reward of directors, the organization, not visually the kind of organization that files lawsuits we've filed, a number of them with our partners, we did that, not because we wanted to get into the business of doing shiny impact litigation, we did that because it was the best way to defend our clients or rites were engaged in Ellis advocacy and Congress in the federal government, most of that frankly, has been preventing even worse things from happening. We've been able to expose abuses though we're doing a lot of reporting on what's going on, we send our staff to places that are frankly, pretty high-risk places like No, I valeri.

We're currently compiling data to put up a microsite that will expose all the different instances that we can identify a violent abuse of migrant SONG, who've been subjected to NPP and documenting those cases.

We do it that later. Well, we'll see, but we're surfacing that evidence myself and many of my colleagues that made trips to the boardroom interests the exist of the word. Talk to people documented abuses testify before Congress, I testified before a House Oversight committee about what I had seen... What I documented.

We're doing this, as we're an on little as we can.

The teams tired.

It seems an running flat out for last three years, but what we're experiencing, is nothing compared to what our clients are experiencing, and we're gonna keep this fight up for as long as we have to...

What can you do if you're a lawyer, volunteer time, there's an infinite need for good legal representation.

If you're a lawyer, you're not look there in community, I promise you. This is not nearly a border issue, this is a great misperception. A son seekers, other migrants are detained in facilities all over the country, many of them in rural areas and there are members of this community.

I promise you within five square miles or less of this room, who are currently living in the shadows, and going through this process and need every kind of support that you can offer them, but they need to know more than anything else, is that if somebody comes for them their community will notice that they're seen enough to be protected and you can make yourself visible to them.

And what is that? They can't make themself visible to you, you have that power exercise that power.

And finally get involved with organizations like us, we need to help when our time... When is your effort as your voice politically and yeah, we need you money and if your money's five bucks, great, we need to re-tweet.

We need you to help us get the message out. And there are many, many organizations in this fight, but this is a time for engaged citizenship and again, it does not have to be at this esoteric level of call Congress every day it is in your community, the fight is in your community, and there's a human being many human beings and you're by and probably small scrap or organizations working with them and the value of you simply saying, I'm a citizen of this community, I'm a person of stature in this community, and I see you and I care what happens to you.

That could be transformative for them.

Is it possible that our political climate and the current leadership style of the United States will irreparably damage our position as a leading advocate of human rights?

No, I think it's a reportable... Nothing is a reportable.

Are we in a bad place?

Yeah, I just start for an hour about what a bad place were in. Yeah, we're in a bad place. It's true, without a doubt, but I can tell you this, we are not going to get out of it as a global community, unless the United States finds a way to repair itself, just do the geopolitical math. You can't do this without the United States on the right side of the ball, you can't, there's not enough horse power realistically in the US of the world to do it. You need the United States in the sign of a rights-based order.

We're a pretty low population country especially compared to our power which means all of us chest by virtue of being able to vote here or some of the most disproportionately powerful human beings in the world.

So I'm asking you to see yourselves and see your power in that way, but I'm also asking you to see yourselves and see your power in a much deeper way.

What can I as a citizen of a country where I'm relatively safe, where the legal environment is permissive where I have so many rights, and freedoms what can I do myself, to advance this 'cause whether my government is doing it or not?

And I think once you start to ask yourself that question and you sit with it for more than five minutes and you really look at your own capabilities, and your own power, especially collectively what all of us can do together.

You start to understand that the answer is pretty big.

That's the conversation I want occurs to have have a question you may be uniquely positioned to answer.

And what about Arden?

As military spending grows astronomically and development, social and diplomatic spending titans, I have seen a militarization of many Development and Rights projects that were previously run by civil government or non-profits. What's the effect of moving these functions into military spaces and what is the role of civil society and pushing back against or fitting into this new reality?

That's a really good question, it's a bit of a double-edged sword. So this question of everything's militarized. In my previous incarnation as the head of Truman one of the things we worked really hard to do was to create a conversation help convince everybody that climate change is a national security threat which was a really effective way of talking about the issue in terms, it's also true.

On the other hand, some of the pushback we got was... Wait a second, are you telling me that the military is the solution of Climate Change Answers. Now, of course, we're not saying but the conversation became tied with the security conversation, especially since 911, but the Cold War hangover is part of this too. A lot of artistes are had in the context of national security and talking about national security is as it turns out, a way to acknowledge a set of equities and to bring the conversation to a certain level.

So, activists do that a lot.

It a one point second point is that the United States in many ways dramatically and very expensively, reconfigured its national security and foreign policy, infrastructure to fight a series of counter-insurgency, wars nation-building wars whatever you wanna call them, right?

The United States into the business, unfortunately, through the lens of counter-insurgency of pulling all of these different ways of acting in the world. Into an attempt to have an integrated security strategy in a place that can be a good or bad thing, but it has major consequences. And then there's the budget and balance. Pentagon budget, is massive.

The one 50 account, which is the rest of foreign policy is really small, so these imbalances are a really big problem.

There's no simple answer to deal with any of it, unfortunately, but we have to acknowledge it.

I think, by and large, it's an estate to completely embrace a military National Security frame on Foreign Policy or Foreign Policy is deeply hampered by that.

On the other hand, I think it's also a mistake to dismiss. The national security apparatus is a place you can have productive conversations about human rights.

We've been doing that for 20 years, and early and as a result of those conversations, had done everything from change that go from tortured in a torture in a deposit was enacting specific reforms to reduce civilian casualties in combat over time.

So, engaging in military can have benefits. It's a tricky space to be in, but I think viewing it in a pragmatic way, is probably best way to think through.

I don't know if that answer is helpful, but I hopefully gave you a sense of the landscape.

How can activists and politicians at sub-national level, cities and states use human rights framing to advance policy in their spheres of influence? I often hear that talking about rights, doesn't feel effective for local politicians. Do you have ideas on community level human rights arguments that will resonate?

I do to an extent, yeah, absolutely right, human rights.

At the end of the day, our struggle as human rights as both a very broad concept is a really broad and it's a concept that I think has become a little bit far away from its underlying moral content and so that I think is the project... We talk about human rights. What do we mean?

I mean we're back to saying this great room of people, all these backgrounds, if I ask you all to define human rights, and we run it on the room, not only would we be here till Saturday but I don't know how many answers would get, but my guess is at least as many people's or the room, which is a challenge, it sounds for me. I leave an organization called Human Rights First, so if I leave an organization called un-definable, concept first, I'm in serious trouble from a comms perspective, right?

So what are we really talking about?

For me, I think it's about underlying values that underlie the rules and there we're talking about things like dignity we're talking about things like agency, we're talking about things like autonomy, we're talking about things like my ability to realize my own in a human potential in a society that fosters that and my ability to do all these things in relationship to other people in a web of community, other people have other ways of talking about it. But I think we've got a zero. And in that basic better language now, there are different ways of those values are enshrined international human rights principles and laws and obligations is one way the Constitution of the United States and the bill rights is one way many laws we have to protect us domestically at every level of our legal system is one way.

So I think we need to see these things as integrated and I think we need to focus on the content on the moral content of it and on the goal and the goal is that as we collectively create our future, we very consciously do it, in such a way that the future is a good place to be human, it's a good place to be a person, it's a good place to have dignity. It's a place to have agency, it's a place to have. Autonomy is the point to say I can reach my potential and then offer the very best within myself to my community, I can be encouraged to do that. It can be given the tools though that...

Okay, this will be our last question. And it's a bit does.

So the error in our... Violent wide extremist a threat to human rights that we are underestimating. If so, how does civil society act against them in a way that also inspires further state action? Yes, there throat "amanit yes, we are underestimating them.

This is something that I moved so quickly, but this is actually it turns out a fairly major focus of thought and new programming in our organization.

And let me talk a little bit about... But why I think it matters whether we're talking about and focusing our strategy, focusing our thought on the question of issues, the way we often think about issue formulations or whether we're focused on harm to human beings, if we think about this from the perspective of issues we can think about, as Human Rights First has done for a long time, I think uniquely in my major human rights organizations, we can think about anti-Semitism as a human rights issue as an attack on universal rights which it is, and we can have a program about that and we should... We can think about anti-Muslim bigotry as a different program, a different issue we can think about attacks and assaults on the rights of migrants for whatever reason has a different issue. Do you think about racism in the traditional American context, as a different issue?

Or we can look at the events of the last few years at the bulk of the violent harm inflicted, on humans.

The manifesto is a of people who shoot up, so go and Walmarts and El Paso and we can see that those manifestos match, we can see that there is an effort night these various strains of hate into a new form of Tanana Iona list authoritarian populism in the IED states, and the name that that goes by right now is violent white extremism. And we can ask ourselves, How do we stand up against that and we start to ask ourselves what shape that takes where that network operates, how that network is funded, is it only in the United States, or as international? It's international.

And we can ask ourselves, what tools do we need to confront it now we're not talking about issues anymore, necessarily. We still are now we're not a research organization anymore, putting out reports about how all each of these issues are getting worse. Maybe we're still doing that, but we're also asking ourselves, what are the tools I need to stand up and fight for my own community against them. And that's the uncomfortable reality of human rights. Human rights violations are not acts of God. Human rights violations are not extreme weather events. Human rights violations are almost always the conscious decision of a group of people to violate the rights of somebody else and that implies a certain approach. The way we think about fighting back. We're trying to change the incentive structures of people that think they can do that.

It's probably enough to say right now. Thank you.

[ APPLAUSE ]