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HONORING THE PAST, GROUNDING THE PRESENT

CSWE ANNUAL CONFERENCE | ATLANTA, GA | OCTOBER 22–25, 2026

Honoring the Legacies of Eleanor Roosevelt and Katherine Kendall in a Challenging Global Context

A Connect Session of the Katherine A. Kendall Institute for International Social Work Education

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Overview of the Connect Session

This connect session draws inspiration from the contributions of Eleanor Roosevelt and Katherine Kendall in defining human rights and sustainable social development. The session will highlight the decolonization of knowledge, furthering its utility and cultural humility as they pertain to marginalized groups, to promote courageous action in a hostile environment.

Eleanor Roosevelt and Katherine Kendall



Eleanor Roosevelt, Julia Henderson (from the UN Public Information Office), and me. Katherine Kendall



Legacies of Roosevelt and Kendall

- Both Eleanor Roosevelt and Katherine Kendall contributed significantly to advancing human rights and social development.
- They were deeply committed to improving human well-being, nationally and globally. Separated by about 25 years; Roosevelt lived 1884-1962 and Kendall, 1910-2010.
- Roosevelt was born into wealth in New York City
- Kendall immigrated to the U.S. from Scotland at the age of 10. Classmates in Chicago made fun of her homemade clothes. Kendall became a U.S. citizen in 1940.

Roosevelt and Human Rights

- Roosevelt advocated for working women and labor rights, civil rights of African Americans, and rights of immigrants.
- She sometimes disagreed—even somewhat openly-with her husband's policies. One example was opposition to the internment of the Japanese during WWII. She also advocated for accepting more Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Europe. In some of these efforts, she was thwarted by members of Roosevelt's cabinet.
- After Franklin's death, she gained even more prominence through her work at the United Nations, especially in human rights. Later, she was appointed to chair President Kennedy's Commission on the Status of Women.

Kendall: Advancing Human Rights and Development through Social Work Education

- After considering other careers, Katherine earned her MSW from LSU, later followed by a PhD from the University of Chicago (where she studied with some of social work's famous foremothers).
- Beginning her career as a caseworker, she soon became international, first with the Red Cross and then, the U.S. Children's Bureau where she provided technical assistance to Latin American social work educators.
- She joined the UN Secretariat in 1947 where she conducted a global study of social work education, the first of 5 such UN studies.
- Her work resulted in a landmark UN resolution, adopted by the General Assembly.
- This officially recognized social work as a global profession and called for formal education in the field. It spurred UN involvement in assistance to growth of social work education in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean.

Achieving Human Rights and Development Through Social Work Education

- Katherine believed in the power of social work to strengthen human rights and contribute to social development
- As part of this, she advocated for strong professional organizations at the national and global levels and served as head of both CSWE and IASSW.
- She worked to make IASSW more inclusive and worked closely with colleagues in all parts of the world.
- Kendall secured a large multi-partner grant to build social work educators' capability to address family planning. 20 countries participated in a 6 year effort.
- The project design was built on human rights and cultural humility. It also fit with many national development plans.

“Retirement” contributions

- Kendall officially retired from IASSW in 1978. For the next 30 years, she was an active volunteer with both CSWE and IASSW. She continued to be an advocate for social work and for human rights.
- Among her projects was to lead CSWE’s Foreign Equivalency Service for 18 years. This provided immigrant scholars and practitioners access to employment and graduate school through evaluation of their foreign-earned degrees.
- As important was her mentoring and support of emerging and established social work educators throughout the world. Katherine made time for all who wanted to talk with her and helped many think through their path to move forward.

Eleanor & Katherine

- Eleanor Roosevelt was appointed to the UN as a US delegate in 1945
- She was the first woman to represent the US at the UN
- In 1947 Katherine Kendall joined the UN
  - Conducted global survey of social work training & assessed qualifications needed in the field of social welfare
- She was one of the founders of CSWE and later became its Executive Secretary /Director

Decolonization

- Eleanor Roosevelt viewed traditional colonialism as outdated
- Supported global decolonization and self-determination
- Was a human rights advocate.
- During UN debates in late 1950s and 1960s, highlighted that major powers managed or retained colonial dependencies
- To pursue decolonizing knowledge, UN itself needs to engage in democratizing UN
- UN has not done this, CSWE needs to actively engage in this

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- Expand the UN Security Council and including world's largest democracy.
- Legacy of former colonies have dominated the UN and UN Security Council
- Eleanor Rosevelt served as the first chairperson of the UN Commission on Human Rights
- She contributed to the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948
- This commission had 18-member state delegates
- Out of 18-member state delegates, the only country that represented Africa was Egypt

Julia Henderson

- Ms. Julia Henderson (flanked by Eleanor & Katherine) served UN from 1945-1970; Director of UN Division for Social Welfare from 1950-54.
- In 2001, Richard Jolly interviewed Ms. Henderson in Venice, FL. Jolly, from the UK, privileged background, studied at Yale, states to Ms. Henderson, important part of the social work, relates to women— “gender issues”; advancement of women
- Joy’s bias: India has had long traditions of looking at women in a very different way from the way we do in America or in the industrial countries. Did folks say, Julia, you shouldn’t press this. You need to give more attention to the cultural traditions of these countries.” Do you remember that sort of argument?
- Julia responds It might have taken place, but I don’t remember it.



Julia Henderson, cont.

- Jolly did not refer to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was the first Indian woman to hold a cabinet post in pre-independent India; Served as the 8th President of the UN General Assembly, from 1953 to 1954
- Ms. Pandit was Indian Ambassador to Soviet Union 1947-49; US & Mexico 1949-51
- The two current wars Global South has nothing to do with it, yet impacted adversely

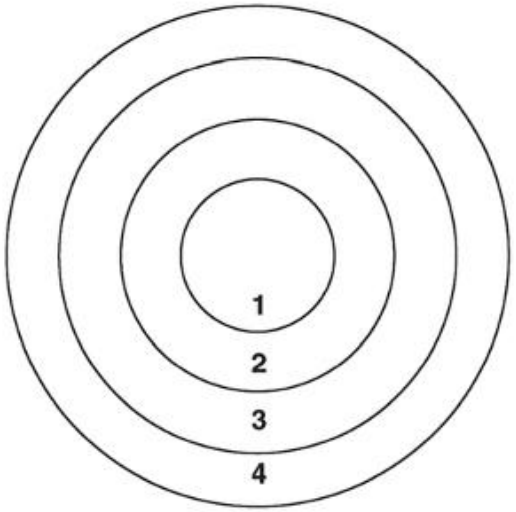
Eleanor & Katherine's vision

- Eleanor Roosevelt dedicated her life to promoting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Urged UN involve women in international affairs. Her formal role as a delegate ended in 1952
- Eleanor & Katherine's vision for a peaceful and just world, laid the groundwork for future human rights initiatives.
- I have been inspired by Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore's saying of 1905, Ekla Chôlo Re, is a Bengali patriotic song
- This was often quoted in the context of sociopolitical change movements and was a favorite of Mahatma Gandhi

Decolonization of Knowledge

- “Do what you feel in your heart to be right—for you’ll be criticized anyway. You’ll be damned if you do, and damned if you don’t.” —Eleanor Roosevelt
- I share Tagore’s saying endorsed by Gandhiji and Eleanor Rosevelt’s saying in the context of decolonizing knowledge
- UK PM and World War Hero Winston Churchill responsible for upwards of 3.8 million Indians during the Bengal famine (1943-1944)
- Decolonizing knowledge, challenging disproportionate Western standards that determine the validity of knowledge, engaging in reciprocal learning that places cultural humility at the center of it all, and that peace and social development are directly proportional.
- OM SHANTI (Sanskrit Word – translates to ‘Universal Peace.’

Spheres of Influence and Personal Action Planning



1. Self: Educating yourself, understanding your values and feelings, examining how you want to change.
2. Close family and friends: Influencing the people closest to you
3. Social, school, and work relationships: Friends and acquaintances, co-workers, neighbors, classmates, people with whom you interact on a regular basis
4. Community: People with whom you interact infrequently or in community settings

- Both women understood social change is both personal and collective.
- This activity invites us to consider the same question they confronted: What is my responsibility given the influence I have?
- Neither Katherine Kendall nor Eleanor Roosevelt advanced justice without risk

Action Planning Worksheet

1. What action do you want to take to help promote equity, human rights, and equity?

_____

2. What resources or materials (people, space, information, etc.), if any, would you need?

_____

3. How can you access those resources?

_____

4. What behaviors or steps on your part would this action entail?

_____

5. What is a realistic timeline for carrying out the steps involved in this action plan?

_____

6. What are the hazards or risks involved?

_____

7. Is this action worth taking the risk? (If not, go back to #1 and choose a different action).

_____

8. What obstacles might you encounter?

_____

9. What could you do to reduce the obstacles?

_____

10. What supports do you have?

_____

11. Where could you find additional support?

_____

12. How will you measure your success?

_____

Complete these questions for two action items: 1) Your own practice 2) choose one other sphere of influence – family, community, work place, etc.

Conclusion

- Professionals' awareness of the law is limited
- Fear and constraints in practice have increased
- Marginalized groups have been negatively impacted by the aftereffects of these limitations.
- Epistemic dependency
  - Decolonizing policy awareness and advocacy requires recognizing how dominant policy narratives have historically marginalized the knowledge, experiences, and priorities of communities most affected by structural inequities.

Takeaways

- What Eleanor and Katherine would have said on this topic
  - Social workers can challenge colonial assumptions embedded in policy processes,
  - Elevate community-rooted knowledge,
  - Take courageous action, and
  - Promote advocacy strategies grounded in cultural humility.

QUESTIONS

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