**Transcript**

***Dr Roland Burke – The global opposition to universal human rights***

Yes, well, my research is about the history of opposition to universal human rights, the rights of the 1948 universal declaration. So it looks at the arguments that were made against human rights in the second half of the 20th century. So, you know, we, I guess the story of the rise of human rights is one that’s now very well told but people generally haven’t looked so much at how people opposed, subverted and argued against rights and my work will be the first to do that.

Well, the key outcome will be a historical monograph that will look at what were the arguments themselves? The most obvious one is the argument that human right were specific to the West and had no application to countries across Asia and Africa. And, it’s an interesting argument but where did it come from? Did this argument emerge from dictatorships themselves? Well, generally they’re not that clever and not that articulate so what I’ve been finding is in fact these ideas often migrated from the academy, from universities, and from researchers who put forward these ideas in a scholarly fashion and then they were mobilised for a political purpose. So, the outcome is to see how did the argument circulate, where are they from and what influence did they have and it will have ideally at the end of the project a very good sense of the origins of the arguments and I think that goes some way to telling towards their legitimacy.

Human rights are, at least officially, a very strong element in Australian foreign policy and Australia does aim to promote human rights both bilaterally with our neighbours and our friends as well. And, often, we I suppose, run into the challenge of well are we lecturing on values which are just our own? So, I think the main outcome will be a better understanding of the legitimacy of universal human rights. Are they merely Western constructs? Are they appropriate to countries which are developing? You know, is it appropriate for countries to pour all of their efforts into development rather than individual freedom? And ideally, I think, at the end of the project we’ll have a sense of the legitimacy of human rights, or a better sense of the legitimacy of human rights by looking at the arguments against them, where they came from and how they influenced the human rights order in the second half of the 20th century.