



As a result of the challenge of COVID19, the Faculty of Law, University “St. KlimentOhridski” – Bitola, has decided to expand the topic of the International Scientific Conference: “TOWARDS A BETTER FUTURE: HUMAN RIGHTS, ORGANIZED CRIME AND DIGITAL SOCIETY” (October 02 - 03, 2020 / Bitola, Republic of North Macedonia) with a special section dedicated to: "HUMAN RIGHTS, IDEOLOGY AND COVID19".

The inspiration for this section came from the initiation of the pandemic with COVID19, which as a problem deep down includes brutal human rights abuses, mistrust of citizens and the prevention of any attempts to cast doubt on official state ideology. It all begins with the censorship by Chinese authorities of Li Wenliang, the doctor who first discovered the ongoing coronavirus epidemic. The death of the whistleblower Chinese doctor Li Wenliang has aroused strong emotions across China.

The Chinese government has tried to tackle the epidemic by brutally violating one of the basic human rights - freedom of speech - in order to protect the sanctity and infallibility of the ruling party and official state ideology, without taking into account the fact that it has allowed the rise of the ideology of lies, manipulation, and authoritarianism that threaten the world today, in parallel with the biological consequences of the coronaviruspandemic. Unfortunately, China does not appear to have learned lessons from the SARS epidemic. Despite the flourishing of social media, information is more tightly controlled in China than ever. In 2013, an internal Communist party edict known as Document No 9. ordered cadres to tackle seven supposedly subversive influences on society. These included western-inspired notions of press freedom, “universal values” of human rights, civil rights and civic participation. Even within the Communist party, cadres are threatened with disciplinary action for expressing opinions that differ from the leadership.

The predictable reaction to how the Chinese state has dealt with the epidemic is best rendered by Hong Kong-based journalist Verna Yu’s comment, “If China valued free speech, there would be no coronavirus crisis. Unless Chinese citizens’ freedom of speech and other basic rights are respected, such crises will only happen again (...) Human rights in China may appear to have little to do with the rest of the world but as we have seen in this crisis, disaster could occur when China thwarts the freedoms of its citizens. Surely it is time the international community takes this issue more seriously.”