

**ESIL 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on ‘International Law and Universality’  
Manchester 2018**

**ESIL Interest Group on International Human Rights Law Pre-Conference Roundtable**

*Call for Papers*

*The Universality Challenge to Human Rights Law: a Sword, a Shield, or Neither?*

On the occasion of the 14<sup>th</sup> ESIL Annual Conference in Manchester, the Interest Group (IG) on International Human Rights Law (IHRL) invites submissions from all members for a pre-conference roundtable on ‘The Universality Challenge to Human Rights Law: a Sword, a Shield, or Neither?’

**The Topic**

The roundtable will focus on two interrelated questions: what are the challenge(s) and opportunities that universality presents for human rights law? How has human rights law perceived and responded to these challenges and opportunities?

On the one hand, the notion of universality in human rights law has been criticized as a Western idea that rests on the plausibility of certain minimal criteria for human dignity and the protection of basic means of subsistence. According to this view, universality is impermeable to the redeeming effect of ‘progress’, and its ability to accommodate the particular are variegated. On the other hand, universality has been held up as a guardian of the integrity of human rights, something which protects it from divergent standards of protection.

The aim of the roundtable is to critically explore different perspectives on the value and utility of the concept of universality in human rights law.

To this end, we welcome papers that:

- Investigate what is meant by the universality of IHRL, or universality in IHRL’s day-to-day operation: in what ways can we measure and analyse the universality of the substance, means, and praxis of IHRL? Which norms, processes, and actors contribute to the social construction of universality in IHRL (or that may sustain and entrench its vacuity)?
- Interrogate the relationship between universality and IHRL, whether and why it matters: is universality still a useful standard to hold IHRL to? To what extent are the traditionally dominant paradigms of universality still relevant to contemporary IHRL? Does universality matter for IHRL, and if so why, and indeed how? How does it interact with other challenges and problems of IHRL, such as its politicisation and fragmentation?
- Analyse the impact that the universality challenge has had on the legitimacy of IHRL and purchase of IHRL norms: what are the manifestations and effects of the universality challenge in domestic, regional and international fora? Has it diluted the protective force of human rights, or increased it?

- Consider the potential for re-conceptualising the universalization of IHRL as a project: how can the relationship between universality and IHRL be reworked in the service of HRL? Can the universality of IHRL be used to challenge common tropes and understandings of universality? What prognosis is offered by recent political and judicial developments in IHRL and its associated fields?

The Interest Group is particularly interested in receiving proposals that examine the universality of IHRL debate from the perspective of non-Western states and actors. Equally, we are interested in critical and interdisciplinary approaches, or otherwise innovative perspectives on the state of affairs within IHRL itself with regards to universality. In depth case studies are also welcome.

### **The Application Process**

Submissions should consist of (1) an abstract of no longer than 400 words and (2) a short curriculum vitae containing the author's name, institutional affiliation, contact information and e-mail address. Please provide both in the same document.

Submissions should be made to [ESILhumanrightsIG@gmail.com](mailto:ESILhumanrightsIG@gmail.com) by 1 May 2018.

Abstracts will be reviewed by the interest group's co-conveners. All applicants will be notified of the outcome of the selection process by 15 May 2018. Accepted full papers are due by 15 August 2018.

The Interest Group is unfortunately unable to provide funds to cover the conference registration fee or related transport and accommodation costs.

We look forward to receiving your abstracts, and are available for any questions and suggestions

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