

# Critical Approaches to International Law Interest Group

## Call for papers

ESIL 2026 Pre-conference Annual Conference Workshop  
September 2, 2026 (from 15.00 to 18.00), Malaga, Spain



"Polynesia: The Sky (Le Ciel)". Tapestry designed by Henri Matisse in 1946 and gifted to the UN by the Government of France. Photo credit: UN Photo/Manuel Elias (<https://www.un.org/ungifts/polynesia-sky-le-ciel>).

## Conflict and International Law: Beyond the Promise of Peace

The question of how 'law' might preserve peaceful and just relations across human communities has fascinated and troubled generations of legal scholars, philosophers, politicians, activists, public intellectuals and ordinary people alike. Since its institutionalisation post the World Wars, the "critical faith" in international law's emancipatory possibilities has been slowly eroded over the decades.<sup>1</sup> Numerous invasions, interventions and humanitarian struggles across the globe in the name of international law have progressively shattered confidence in the possibility of peace as a legal triumph. In contrast, ongoing systemic violence such as Israel's genocidal war in Gaza against Palestinians or Russia's aggression against Ukraine have not only cracked open foundational questions about the *raison d'être* of the discipline, but have also led

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<sup>1</sup> Sundhya Pahuja, *Decolonising International Law: Development, Economic Growth and the Politics of Universality* (CUP, 2011), 1.

to existential questions about 'doing international law' in this time and day. So what, then, do we as international lawyers understand ourselves to be doing?

At its most hopeful, international law is often presented as a normative architecture designed to contain violence and orient political communities toward peace. At the same time, peace is a complicated pursuit and never a neutral agreement. Negotiation processes like those in Ukraine or Palestine invite difficult reflections on the terms of peace settlements, including the role of international law and international lawyers in them. Similar reflections arise in relation to the long history of anti-colonial wars, movements for self-determination, civil rights campaigns and even revolutions. When does international law enable life to be lived in peace and under what conditions? And when does it entrench domination and dispossession?

**Driven by this existential question, this pre-conference workshop invites contributions that examine the roles that international law, international lawyers and institutions play in times of peace, war, and everything in-between.**

We are particularly interested in papers that seek to complicate the concepts of peace, war and conflict; the relationships between peace-war; the nation-state as a vehicle for pacification; the political economy of peace and war; and the responsibilities that international lawyers hold for the international law we uphold, critique and seek to reimagine. We are also interested in submissions that take a broader perspective on conflict, interrogating international law's role in mediating conflicts that arises in new and unaccounted ways (for example, conflicts between human and non-human actors).

We welcome contributions from scholars, practitioners, and activists engaging with critical legal methodologies to explore this theme. Specifically, we invite submissions that engage with, but are not limited to, the following questions:

- ethics of peace
- responsibility/irresponsibility
- the role of experts and expertise, including old and new forms of orientalism
- history and theory of international law in times of war and peace
- revolutions and the (international) legal recognition of resistance
- peace process and peace agreements
- solidarity movements
- tension between law and non-violence
- the political economy of peace, war and conflict

**Submission Details.** Submissions may take traditional academic formats or adopt alternative, experimental forms of critical legal writing and praxis.

**Abstracts** of no more than 300 words should be submitted by April 1, 2026 to [cailesilig@gmail.com](mailto:cailesilig@gmail.com). We aim to advise of the outcome by April 20, 2026.

The following information should be provided with each abstract in the same document:

1. Name the document using your last name and the IG acronym (eg, "Emtseva\_CAIL abstract")
2. The author's name, affiliation, and email address
3. The author's short biography (max 150 words)
4. Whether you intend to attend the workshop online or in person

**ESIL Early-Career Scholar Prize.** In their submission speakers should indicate their interest in being considered for the ESIL Early-Career Scholar Prize. Please check that you meet the [eligibility conditions and key information](#) about the Prize. The ESIL Secretariat must be informed of all selected speakers who wish to be considered for the Prize **before 30 April**.

**ESIL grants.** The Interest Group is unable to provide funding for travel and accommodation. Speakers will be expected to bear the costs of their own travel and accommodation. Limited [ESIL travel grants and ESIL carers' grants](#) will be available to offer partial financial support to speakers who have exhausted other potential sources of funding.

**General ESIL Conference information.** Please see the ESIL website for all [relevant conference information](#). All participants at ESIL Interest Group workshops are required to register for the Annual Conference. There will be an option to register to attend only the IG workshops. However, all participants are warmly invited to attend the entire event. Please note that it is yet to be determined whether this pre-conference workshop will take place in-person, online, or hybrid.

**Coordinating Committee Members:** Kanad Bagchi, Julia Emtseva, Tim Lindgren, Rohini Sen, Valeria Vázquez Guevara