

Conflict and International Law: Beyond the Promise of Peace

ESIL 2026 Pre-conference Annual Conference Workshop
September 2, 2026 (from 3 pm – 6 pm), 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>).

Our workshop aims to further complicate a discipline in crisis. International law was built on an emancipatory promise that legal norms could contain violence and orient communities toward durable peace. That promise, in fact, has often failed. At its worst, the promise has been implicated in the very harms it aims to prevent. From colonial pacification to contemporary catastrophes like Israel’s genocidal war in Gaza and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, international law’s ability to shield against power remains elusive. And at the same time, international law has animated and been central to anti-colonial resistance, self-determination struggles, and solidarity movements that refused to accept domination as a *fait accompli*. The contributions to this workshop, thus, ask what kind of peace international law can deliver, on whose terms, and at what cost. We will jointly examine international law at the threshold between conflict and peace, discussing the roles of those who practice, critique, and reimagine international law in reckoning with the responsibilities that our expertise and positions entail.

Program

3:00 pm – 3:15 pm Welcome Address by the Coordinating Committee

3:15 pm – 4:30 pm Panel 1: Conflict, Governance and Reconstruction of International Order

Chair: Julia Emtseva (HEC Paris)

- Suzana Rahde Grenchman (IHEID) and Claerwen O'Hara (Melbourne Law School), "The Board of Peace as a Gentlemen's Club: The Shifting Nature of International Law and Governance in the Trump Era"
 - Judith van Veldhuizen (EUI), "Pharmakonic International Law: Towards a Method of International Law as Structures of Survival and Sacrifice"
 - Chris Carpenter (University of Cambridge) and Dimitrios Kourtis (Aristotle University), "404: Justification Not Found! Use of Force and Legal Argumentation in a Fragmented International Order"
 - Leon Seidl (MPIL), "Economic Justice in Peace-making: The Promise and Peril of International Law"
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4:30 pm - 4:45 pm Coffee Break

4:45 pm – 6:00 pm Panel 2: Violence and the Ambivalence of Peace

Chair: Tim Lindgren (EUI)

- Michelle Staggs Kelsall (SOAS), "On Violence and Disordering International Law"
- Tania Atilano Camacho (University of Zurich), "Republicanism and International Law: Views of Peace and War from Nineteenth-Century Latin America"
- Shajoe Lake (University of Warwick), "International Law, Peacewashing and Antirblackness"
- Sjors Polm (EUI), "Making the Peoples' Law"