

Travel Report for the 81st ILA Conference International Law in a Fluid World

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During the three-day conference, I attended several oracles, parallel sessions, and committee meetings. I met many new scholars and learnt about several new topics on important issues of international law. I also had the opportunity to reunite with many friends and colleagues who have been working on similar topics.

Below is a short summary of the main sessions I participated in.

1. Parallel Session on Sustainability and Climate Change

This panel covered various fields of international law in the context of promoting sustainable development and addressing the adverse impacts of climate change. The topics discussed by the speakers include: the interactions between the domestic implementation of climate-related obligations (as articulated in SDG 13, UNFCCC and Paris Agreement) and international trade law; the right of education in regions that have been severely affected by the impacts of climate change induced natural disasters; gaps in green financing and the protection provided by international investment law; innovative means to implement commitments under SDGs through international law; the relations between the rule of law and the role of powers in a fast-moving political world; perspectives from the African countries; and the potential role of new technologies for climate change protection.

2. Parallel Session on Gender Perspectives in International Law: Ways Forward

This panel was formed in response to the call for papers on the four themes and was mainly represented by early career researchers. The speakers explored both the theoretical and practical challenges facing international law from a gender perspective. The topics covered include the evolving concepts of intersectionality and feminism; a historical review of Italy's clash of fascism and gender; a case study on the impacts of a gendered education system in South Africa; the efforts of incorporating gender in the development of international trade governance and law; challenging gender stereotypes through judicial intervention in the European human rights jurisprudence; and the gendered impacts on women by climate change and biodiversity loss.

3. Parallel Session on The Seas of Our Future

This panel focuses on the flexibility and stability of the law of the sea regime, and whether it has been resilient towards globalization. The various topics explored by the panel include the increasing interactions between international environmental law, human rights law and the law of the sea; the evolving scope and interpretation of the freedom of navigation and exclusive flag State jurisdiction; the progressive development through the negotiation of the BBNJ Agreement; challenges to the implementation of the BBNJ Agreement; the blurring boundary between threats to maritime security and the act of war at sea; the role of non-State actors; protecting international and national justice system at sea; and the impacts brought by technological development.

4. Committee on Submarine Cables and Pipelines under International Law (Closed and Open)

I joined the Committee in 2023 and contributed to the discussion and finalization of the Third Interim Report, which was released at the 81st Conference. The Third Report focuses on the international law that governs the measures that States can take in response to intentional acts of damage to submarine cables and pipelines committed by States and non-State actors in peacetime. During the closed session, the members focused on discussing the next phase of the work. It was agreed that the Committee will work towards a set of principles applicable to the monitoring and prevention of intentional acts of damage against submarine cables and pipelines and enforcement measures after such acts with accompanying commentary. The goal is to have this set of principles ready to be presented at the ILA 2026 biennial conference. During the open session, the Chair and the Rapporteur presented the Third Report and how it fits within the previous and ongoing work of the Committee. The Committee's work is gaining recognition and significance given the developments since 2022 in the aftermath of the Nord Stream incidents, the EU and NATO activities, the publication of the ICPC best practices and the UN General Assembly Resolution urging States to take measures to protect submarine cables and pipelines from hybrid threats.

5. Committee on International Law and Sea-Level Rise (Open)

The Committee was established in 2012 and presented its final Report at the 81st Conference. In the final phase, the Committee focused its study on the question of statehood and other issues of international law and international security prompted by the partial or complete inundation of State territory and/or its uninhabitability, as well as the gradual depopulation prior to this, involved a medium to long-term perspective, based on the scientific predictions of sea level rise. The final Report concluded that, as recognized by some States, climate change-related sea level rise should not cause the loss of statehood of any State nor its membership in the United Nations, its specialized agencies, or other international organizations. The Report identified a series of measures to safeguard the effectiveness of the international legal personality of the affected States, including physical measures to safeguard the territory and their legal implications, legal measures concerning State territory as a consequence of sea level rise, and the right to self-determination of peoples affected by sea level rise.

6. Committee on Protection of People at Sea (Open)

The Committee was established in 2024 to address the emerging issue of how to protect all people who are at sea and their human rights. The mandate of the Committee in its first four years is to focus on the jurisdiction of States for the purpose of protecting people at sea. It will in particular address three aspects: 1) how the notion of “jurisdiction” in human rights law, which was mostly developed with regard to situations on land, operate at sea; 2) how the concept of jurisdiction under the law of the sea, pointing to the allocation of power among States, implies for the human rights obligations of these states; 3) how the notions of jurisdiction under human rights law and the law of the sea interact and how they can be combined to maximise the protection for people at sea. During the open session, the Chair and the Rapporteurs presented the concept of the Committee’s mandate and outlined the work plan for the first two years.