

Call for Abstracts

15th UN research colloquium

The United Nations in Crisis: Threats, Transformations and Futures of International Law

Organizers: Working Group of Young UN Researchers in the United Nations Association of Germany (DGVN e.V.) and Centre for Human Rights Erlangen-Nuremberg

Time: November 12 - 14, 2026

Place: Centre for Human Rights Erlangen-Nuremberg (in-person event)

General Theme

Since 1945, the United Nations have been the central institutional anchor of the international legal order, stretching from their efforts in the prohibition on the use of force to measures in collective security, human rights and global public goods. Nonetheless, core Charter norms are increasingly violated, key organs paralysed by geopolitical rivalry, leading to states and other actors turning to alternative forums and coalitions. This conference seeks to explore whether we are witnessing institutional decline, structural transformation, or the consolidation of a more fragmented and contested global legal order. We invite diverse contributions from legal, historical, political, sociological and other interdisciplinary perspectives, including from TWAIL and other critical approaches, that examine not only threats to the UN's authority, but also practices of resistance, reform and reimagination.

We particularly welcome contributions from early-career researchers and students of all disciplines, as well as from practitioners and civil society actors. Contributions may be written in English or German. Interested listeners are also welcome to attend without presenting a paper. The participation in the conference is free of charge and will be accompanied by a keynote lecture and an additional supporting program.

The following suggested topics are intended as guidance rather than a fixed framework. We encourage original approaches and new themes connected to the general topic.

Suggested topics

- 1. Concepts and foundations** What does it mean to say the UN or international law is "in crisis"; what are its normative, institutional and material dimensions; what can historical crises tell us about the present? Contributions might consider, for instance, how core Charter norms have been challenged or reinterpreted, or what legal and legitimacy questions arise when states act outside or around UN authorisation.
- 2. Fragmentation, competition and accountability** How does the UN-centered legal order relate to competing and overlapping sites of global governance; what happens when political organs are blocked or bypassed? Contributions might examine, for instance, the role of regional organisations and informal coalitions, or how human rights bodies and investigative mechanisms are faring under geopolitical pressure.
- 3. Inequality, structural violence and alternative visions** What do critical and postcolonial approaches reveal about the foundations and limits of the UN system; whose interests does it serve and whose does it marginalise? Contributions might explore, for instance, TWAIL critiques of the Charter, or alternative visions of international law emerging from the Global South, feminist, Indigenous and environmental justice movements.
- 4. Crisis in practice** What does current UN practice reveal about the state of the international legal order; where are the limits of the UN's mandate and capacity? Contributions might focus, for instance, on specific conflicts or situations, the UN's role in transitional justice, or on efforts to deliver effective frameworks for climate, health and digital governance.

Organisation

The abstract should briefly set out the research question, the main argument or objectives, (if relevant) the theoretical or methodological approach, and a first outline of the planned argumentation or central theses. Please also include a short biographical note (affiliation, career stage, contact details).

- Deadline for **abstracts** (max. 300-500 words): 16 August 2026
Please register here: <https://forms.gle/KRyHqHeuoo9hwQ9z8>
- Notification of **acceptance**: 30 September 2026
- Deadline for **papers** (max. 5,000 words): 15 October 2026
- Deadline for **registration** (without paper): 31 October 2026
Please register here: <https://forms.gle/BUFcPsMuhuumQb2J6>



We particularly encourage contributions from individuals and groups that remain under-represented in academia and policy debates. We are therefore especially pleased to receive submissions from women, members of the LGBTQI+ community, Black and other racialised scholars, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, persons with a migration background, and scholars and practitioners from the Global South.

At this stage, we cannot guarantee full funding for travel or accommodation costs. The possibility to reimburse travel expenses is limited to those within German borders. We advise those travelling from outside Germany to also explore possibilities of institutional funding. Nonetheless, we will make every effort to secure financial support for participants who present a paper, with a particular focus on those without institutional funding.

A short report (in German) of the 2025 colloquium can be found on our website: <https://uno-forschung.de/>

For further questions, please contact: info@uno-forschung.de