



SELF PROGRAM 2025/2026

Introduction to International Human Rights Law

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Course information

Number of credits : 6 credits

Contact hours : 30 hours

Hours taught per week : 3 hours

Teaching period : Spring Semester 2026

Course description:

Session 1: What are human rights?

Learning Objectives :

- Definition of human rights. (basic vocabulary)
- Historical development (from Magna Carta to the United Nations)
- Keys principles: universality, equality, dignity with examples: freedom of expression in different countries (universality), the right to education linked to freedom of expression (indivisibility), torture cannot be justified (inalienability).

Session 2: UN protection of Human Rights: framework and institutions

Learning Objectives :

- Understand the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) and the International Bill of Rights.
- Distinguish between declarations and binding treaties.
- Identify the main UN institutions for human rights protection, including the Human Rights Council (HRC), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the treaty bodies.
- Understand core mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), state reporting, and individual complaint procedures.
- Critically assess the strengths and limits of the UN system in protecting and promoting human rights.

Session 3: The European Human Rights System

Learning Objectives:

- Understand what the European Human Rights System is
- Learn key facts about the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)
- Explore the role of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)
- See how ordinary people can use this system to protect their rights
- Discuss real-life cases and their impact

Session 4: The African Human Rights System

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the purpose and structure of the African human rights system
- Learn about the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights ("Banjul Charter")
- Explore the role and functions of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights
- Discuss real-life examples of rights protected and challenges faced in Africa
- Appreciate the regional diversity in human rights protection

Session 4: The Asian Human Rights System

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the unique features and challenges of human rights protection in Asia
- Explore why Asia does not have a formal, binding regional human rights court like Europe or Africa
- Identify and describe the key regional organizations and mechanisms related to human rights in Asia, including the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), and their roles, mandates, and limitations.
- Discuss the role of national human rights institutions (NHRIs), courts, and civil society organizations in protecting and promoting human rights within Asian countries.

Session 5: The inter- American Human Rights System

Learning Objectives :

- Understand the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man (1948) and the American Convention on Human Rights and its significance (Pact of San José) including their historical context, scope, and legal importance.
- Identify the main institutions of the Inter-American Human Rights System including the Organization of American States (OAS), the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR).
- Explain the role and function of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR)

Session 6: midterm exam

Session 7: Protecting the Future: Human Rights for Women and Children

Learning Objectives:

- Explain the role and function of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR)
- Understand key international treaties and instruments protecting the rights of women and children, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) that drive global efforts to promote equality, safety, and dignity.
- Identify the specific human rights challenges faced by women and children within the international human rights framework.

Session 8: Migration and Human Rights: Protecting Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the basic rights of migrants: Learn about the key human rights protections for migrants, especially refugees and asylum seekers.
- Know the international laws protecting migrants: Understand important documents like the 1951 Refugee Convention and Universal Declaration of Human Rights that protect the rights of migrants.
- Learn about refugee protection: Understand the rights of people seeking refuge, and what international laws say about it.
- Discuss challenges faced by migrants today: Understand the current struggles migrants face in different parts of the world and how international law can help protect them.

Session 9: International Economic Institutions and Human Rights: Challenges and Opportunities

Learning Objectives:

- Explain the roles and functions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank in the global economic system.
- Describe how economic policies and lending conditions set by these institutions can affect human rights, particularly economic, social, and cultural rights.

- Analyze key criticisms related to the human rights impact of structural adjustment programs and conditionalities imposed by the IMF and World Bank.
- Assess real-world case studies where IMF and World Bank interventions influenced human rights outcomes in affected countries. (Greece's Financial Crisis and IMF Conditionalities)
- Discuss emerging approaches and efforts to integrate human rights considerations into international economic governance.

Session 10: Final exam

Prerequisites :

- This course is thoughtfully designed as an **introductory overview of international human rights law**, specifically tailored for students from a wide range of academic backgrounds.
- No prior legal knowledge or experience is required. Key legal concepts and terminology will be clearly explained in accessible, straightforward language to ensure that all students can engage fully and confidently with the material. This approach not only broadens participation but also enriches interdisciplinary understanding of human rights issues, making the course valuable and relevant across diverse fields of study.

Course objectives:

- To Define the key concepts, sources, and instruments of international human rights law (treaties, conventions, declarations).
- To explain the historical development and evolution of human rights norms globally.
- To identify and evaluate the roles of major international human rights organizations (UN, Council of Europe, OAS, African Union).
- To understand the functioning and jurisdiction of international human rights courts (**European** Court of Human Rights, Inter-American Court of Human Rights, African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights).
- To explore the rights of vulnerable groups, including women, children, refugees, migrants, within international human rights law.
- To apply the knowledge gained to analyze real-world cases and scenarios involving human rights violations, including case studies from international human rights courts.

- To encourage students to debate and reflect on ethical and legal questions in human rights law, such as the right to self-determination, the right to asylum, and non-refoulement.

Assessment:

- **Midterm:** Multiple-Choice Questions exam.
- **Final Exam:** A group presentation on a chosen topic (approximately 15 minutes, depending on the number of students), which will be collectively defined during the first few sessions, accompanied by a short written report on the presented subject.

Attendance:

In order to participate, students must be present. Nevertheless, a maximum of 2 (two) unexcused absences will be allowed; otherwise no mark will be given. An unexcused absence at a test (final test or continuous assessment) means no credits for the course.

Bibliography:

Books:

- CRANSTON, Maurice, *What are Human Rights?*, New York, Basic Books, 1973, 128p.
- DE SCHUTTER, Olivier, *International Human Rights Law: Cases, Materials, Commentary*, Cambridge University Press, 2019, 1146p.
- LUINI, David Evan Trent (ed.), *The international protection of human rights*, New York, Praeger, 1976, 384p.
- MOWBRAY, Alastair, *The European Convention on Human Rights: A Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 2012, 936p.
- NICKEL, James, *Making Sense of Human Rights*, Wiley-Blackwell Press, 2007, 276p.
- OREND, Brian, *Human Rights Concept and Context*, Broadview press, 2002, 272p.
- SIKKINK, Kathryn, *The Justice Cascade: How Human Rights Prosecutions Are Changing World Politics*, W. W. Norton & Company, 2011, 352p.
- WACHSMANN, Patrick, *Les droits de l'homme, 6e Edition*, DALLOZ, 2018, 200p.

Official texts:

- Articles of Agreement of the International Monetary Fund, 1944.
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

- The European Convention on human rights, 1950.
- Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951.
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966.
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966.
- The American convention on human rights, 1969.
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979.
- The African charter on human and peoples' rights, 1981.
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.
- The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, 2000.