

International Organizations, with a focus on international human rights bodies

Summer in Spain Program 2025

M/T/W/TH 10am-12pm

Professor Vincent Ploton

Course description

This course will offer a comprehensive overview of the UN human rights bodies, their origins, composition, functions relevance and impact. Based on practical, real-life examples, students will understand the role of different actors, how to engage and for what purpose. They will explore different approaches and tactics for effective international human rights advocacy and diplomacy. Based on the study of success stories, they will identify how to make the most of the UN human rights bodies in international litigation, advocacy and diplomacy. The course will provide an overview of the theory of international human rights law complemented with a deep dive into the actual practice of IHRL and the functioning of IHRL and accountability mechanisms and institutions.

Required readings

Students will be required to read, review, visit or watch the manuscripts, websites, databases and videos listed below in preparation for each modules. The resources are extracted from various sources, including the [ISHR Academy](#), a free online course on international and regional human rights mechanisms co-designed by the Guest Lecturer, as well as the [UN OHCHR capacity building programme](#).

Learning outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Identify and recognize all UN human rights bodies, and map them based on where they belong
- Describe their mandates, functions and corresponding substantive rights covered
- Understand how to engage with each mechanism and for what purpose
- Identify the roles of different actors in those mechanisms

- Design strategies and propose approaches or steps to pursue specific goals with UN human rights bodies

Students interested or willing to work in international human rights law will be offered tips, avenues and resources to develop their knowledge, skills and networks in that area.

Schedule of assignments

1. Introduction to the UN human rights bodies

Video: <https://youtu.be/6lZplzFqSuw>

Reading: https://academy.ishr.ch/un_bodies_comparison_table

2. UN Treaty Bodies: the periodic review process

Reading: [ISHR Academy module on UNTBs](#), including section 1.5; 1.10; 3.4; 3.5 and 3.6

Reading: [The implementation of Treaty Body recommendations](#) (Vincent Ploton, SUR v.24 n.25, 2017)

3. UN Treaty Bodies: individual communications

Reading: [ISHR Academy module on UNTBs](#), including section 1.6; 2.3; 3.7; 3.8

Reading: [Guide for Third Party interventions before UN human rights Treaty Bodies](#) (ISHR, 2022)

4. Soft law standards: General Comments

Reading: [ISHR Academy module on UNTBs](#), including sections 1.7; 3.9; 3.10

Reading: [UN Human Rights Committee General Comment N°36 on right to life](#) (Art. 6 ICCPR)

5. UN Special Procedures

Reading: [ISHR Academy module on UNSPs](#)

Reading : [A Rough Guide to the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council](#) (Universal Rights Group, URG)

6. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

Reading: [ISHR Academy module on the UPR](#)

7. Jurisprudence and findings of IHRL bodies

Juris [database of UNTB jurisprudence](#)

[Universal Human rights index](#)

Special Procedures [communications database](#)

Uwazi, [the UPR database](#)

Reading: [Human Rights Indicators: A Guide for Measurement and Implementation](#) (OHCHR, January 2012)

8. National Mechanisms on Reporting and Follow up

Reading: OHCHR [practical guide on NMRFs](#)

Reading: [Clustering and the integrated implementation of recommendations](#) (URG, June 2019)

9. The role of OHCHR

- The role of OHCHR [in relation to UNSPs](#)
- The role of OHCHR [in relation to UNTBs](#)
- The role of OHCHR and the UN in [accessing the Human Rights Council](#)

Reading: [Finding its voice: the OHCHR in the digital age OHCHR, human rights violations, social media and press releases](#) (Conall Mallory & Rhona Smith, October 2024)

10. The UN Human Rights Council

Reading: ISHR Academy [module on the HRC](#)

11. UN Commissions of Inquiry

Focus on the [Col Syria](#)

Focus on the [Col on Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel](#)

Reading : [How to secure accountability for serious human rights violations?](#) (Universal Rights Group, 2021)

12. The human rights roles of UN investigative mechanisms

The [International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism - Syria](#)

- Video: <https://youtu.be/fUSO1c1jmPY>

The [Independent Investigative Mechanism on Myanmar](#)

Reading : [Options for the establishment of a Standing Independent Investigative Mechanism](#) (International Commission of Jurists, September 2022)

13. The human rights functions of the International Criminal Court

Reading: [Duterte, Netanyahu, and Putin: The ICC's Power Play](#) (Safia K Southey, *Opinio Juris*, 17.04.2025)

Reading (book): *An Introduction to the International Criminal Court* (William A. Schabas, 2011). Chapter 4 "Triggering the jurisdiction"

14. Example of a regional human rights mechanism: the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

Reading: [ISHR Academy module on the ACHPR](#)

15. The human rights functions of the International Court of Justice

Reading: [Who is the Final Interpreter in Human Rights: the ICJ v CERD?](#) (Geir Ulfstein, *Ejil: Talk!* 22 February 2021)

Reading: [Application of the CERD Convention \(Qatar v UAE\) and "Parallel Proceedings" before the CERD Committee and the ICJ](#) (David Keane, *Ejil: Talk!* 17 May 2019)

16. Testing your knowledge

The last course will be dedicated to a review of some of the legal standards, issues and topics which students will wish to explore or discuss further.