

International Organizations, with a focus on international human rights bodies

Summer in Spain Program 2025

M/T/W/TH 11:00am-12:50pm

Professor Vincent Ploton

Course description

This course introduces you to the nature and role of international organizations: institutions composed of three or more states, held together by intergovernmental agreement, and governed by international law, and the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This course focuses on organizations like the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the monitoring bodies of the core international human rights treaties, including the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the UN Convention against Torture, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, among others. The course will explore international human rights mechanisms, notably those under the UN Human Rights Council such as Special Procedures, Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Commissions of Inquiry and other investigative bodies.

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 [CoI Syria](#)

Focus on the [CoI 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.