



International Human Rights Law
Syllabus

Course # 5397, Section # 25624
Spring 2026
Fridays from 9 am to 12 noon
In-person

Mary Ghandour, J.D.
(646) 946-6751
mghandour@refugeerights.org
Adjunct Faculty of Law
Office hours via Zoom by appointment

COURSE INFORMATION

I. Course Description

The course will discuss the modern system of international human right law, including its history, its various components and actors, its successes, and its flaws. We will examine the legal frameworks of both the United Nations and regional systems related to the protection of, *inter alia*, the rights of migrants and refugees, political and cultural rights, and human rights at the intersection of the law of armed conflict. Through primary legal texts, case decisions, scholarly articles, and case studies, students will gain a foundational understanding of international human rights law and grapple with the growing critiques about its efficacy and enforceability, its colonial and imperial legacies, and the conflict between law and power.

II. Course Objectives & Learning Outcomes

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

- Articulate a foundational understanding of the history, sources, and actors involved in the international and regional human rights law systems;
- Evaluate the current challenges and criticisms of the modern international human rights framework;
- Identify the most pressing modern-day human rights issues with reference to relevant legal instruments and contemporary cases; and
- Present a basic understanding of the practice of international human rights law.

III. Teaching Methodology

Class time will be used for a combination of lectures, discussions, and group exercises. Participation is very important in this course (*see* V. Grading, Assignments, and the Final Exam below). Students will be asked to offer analyses of various concepts, share their reflections, and express their opinion on issues throughout the semester. The format of this course is meant to be as interactive and collaborative as the class size will allow with the goal of providing a practical opportunity for students to interactively synthesize the materials into a broader understanding of the subject.

IV. Required Textbook

The main textbook for this course will be: **Ilias Bantekas & Lutz Oette, *International Human Rights Law and Practice* (4th edition, 2024).** This book is available online at retailers like Amazon. There will be a number of other required complementary and suggested readings throughout the semester that will be noted throughout the syllabus below.

V. Grading, Assignments, and the Final Exam

- **Attendance and Participation (20%):** You are expected to attend every class session and to come prepared to be engaged and substantively contribute to class discussions and exercises.
 - Attendance: Attendance will be recorded at the beginning of each class through a roll sheet that will be distributed for student signature. It is your responsibility to ensure that you have initialed the attendance sheet before you leave the classroom each week.
 - Participation: If, for any reason, you are unprepared to participate in class on a given day, please let me know in advance via email. Students whose participation needs improvement will be notified in writing near the midpoint of the semester.
- **Midterm Paper (30%):** A midterm paper of approximately 2,500 words will be due on **Friday, March 27th**. Further instructions for the midterm paper, including the topic and requirements, will be provided the first week of class.

- **Final Exam (50%):** There will be a 3-hour in-person, open-book final exam. The exam format will be short answer and essay questions and will cover both substantive legal principles and legal practice concepts. All answers must be exclusively your own work.

The midterm paper and final exam will be nonanonymous. The midterm paper will be a formative assessment while the final exam will be a summative assessment.

VI. Syllabus Changes

Please note that the instructor may need to make modifications to the course syllabus. Notice of such changes will be announced as quickly as possible through email.

STUDENT WELL-BEING AND CLASS EXPECTATIONS

I. Classroom & Community Expectations

This class will discuss many heavy topics that touch on the fundamental rights of human beings and the violation of those rights around the globe. All students are expected to show respect for both the other students in the class and the dignity of the communities of people who are impacted by the law and policies that we will discuss. International human rights law is not merely a theoretical or aspirational framework but goes to the very core of the standard of rights all persons should be afforded.

It is imperative that all students feel welcome, supported, and heard in class. Classroom discussions are subject to the Chatham House rule: participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speakers, nor that of any other participant, may be revealed outside the classroom. This rule, which applies to students and any guest speakers, is meant to encourage frank discussion and allow students and guest speakers to speak with candor. Robust but respectful debate is expected. All participants are expected to speak with the kind of respect and dignity expected if we were in court, even if there is deep disagreement. If you have any questions or concerns about class discussions—or feel in any way uncomfortable speaking in class for any reason—please come see me.

Above all, I encourage students to prioritize their well-being throughout the semester as we explore human rights issues that may be disturbing or distressing. If any deadlines or topics from class present major difficulties for the entire class or an individual student, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can work out a solution. If any student needs additional support throughout the semester, whether academically or otherwise, please reach out to me.

Students should also utilize the University of Houston's [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS). No appointment is necessary for the [“Let’s Talk” program](#), a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations (including online) and hours around campus.

The University of Houston has a number of resources to support students’ mental health and overall wellness, including CoogsCARE and the UH Go App. UH Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) offers 24/7 mental health support for all students, addressing various concerns like stress, college adjustment and sadness. CAPS provides individual and couples counseling, group therapy, workshops and connections to other support services on and off-campus. For assistance visit uh.edu/caps, call 713-743-5454, or visit a Let’s Talk location in-person or virtually. Let’s Talk are daily, informal confidential consultations with CAPS therapists where no appointment or paperwork is needed.

Need Support Now? - If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call CAPS crisis support 24/7 at 713-743-5454, or the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: call or text 988, or chat 988lifeline.org.

II. Accommodations

I am committed to providing an academic environment that is accessible to all students.

Please let me know if you require any accommodations to fully engage with this course. Per the UHLC Student Handbook, requests for accommodations should be directed first to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, with appeal to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. However, I encourage students to also discuss with me should any accommodations be needed.

The University of Houston is committed to providing an academic environment and educational programs that are accessible for its students. Any student with a disability who is experiencing barriers to learning, assessment or participation is encouraged to contact the Justin Dart, Jr. Student Accessibility Center (Dart Center) to learn more about academic accommodations and support that may be available to them. Students seeking academic accommodations will need to register with the Dart Center as soon as possible to ensure timely implementation of approved accommodations. Please contact the Dart Center by visiting the website: <https://uh.edu/accessibility/> calling (713) 743-5400, or emailing jdcenter@Central.UH.EDU.

The Student Health Center offers a Psychiatry Clinic for enrolled UH students. Call 713-743-5149 during clinic hours, Monday through Friday 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. to schedule an appointment.

The A.D. Bruce Religion Center offers spiritual support and a variety of programs centered on well-being.

The Center for Student Advocacy and Community (CSAC) is where you can go if you need help but don't know where to start. CSAC is a "home away from home" and serves as a resource hub to help you get the resources needed to support academic and personal success. Through our Cougar Cupboard, all students can get up to 30 lbs of FREE groceries a week. Additionally, we provide 1:1 appointments to get you connected to on- and off-campus resources related to essential needs, safety and advocacy, and more. The Cougar Closet is a registered student organization advised by our office and offers free clothes to students so that all Coogs can feel good in their fit. We also host a series of cultural and community-based events that fosters social connection and helps the cougar community come closer together. Visit the CSAC homepage or follow us on Instagram: @uh_CSAC and @uhcupbrd. YOU belong here.

III. Law Center Attendance Policy

The UH Law Center has a minimum 80% attendance policy for students. With this class meeting only once a week, **students may not miss more than two classes** and attendance will be recorded at the beginning of each class. Notwithstanding exigent circumstances, a student's nonadherence will be notified to the office of Student Affairs (OSA).

If you expect to be absent from class for more than two weeks in the coming semester, please contact me immediately.

IV. Remote Class Participation

This course is designated as a face-to-face course, and students are expected to be physically present in the classroom for all class sessions (unless, as noted below, a specific class date has been designated on the syllabus or via email/Canvas announcement in advance as a remote class session to be held via Zoom due to unforeseen circumstances or scheduling needs).

On occasion, there also may be extenuating circumstances (such as student illness, car accident, etc.) where an individual student attends a class session remotely via Zoom while the instructor and other students are in the classroom. Students who need to attend a class session remotely must email me at least thirty minutes in advance of the class start time to notify me of the extenuating circumstances. Unless there are extremely unusual circumstances (for example, major illness requiring hospitalization, etc.), students may utilize remote presence to attend class for no more than a quota of **2 classes** over the course of the semester; exceeding this will be considered a lack of preparation and may result in a deduction to your final grade. Per school policy, attending remotely beyond the allowed quota will also

count as absences even if allowed by the instructor. Conversely, remote days within the quota do not count as absences; I will mark your attendance as “Remote” on the roll sheet for those days.

V. Law Center Honor Code

The UHLC Honor Code applies to all aspects of this course. You are responsible for knowing all Honor Code provisions and for complying with the Honor Code. Please inquire if you have any questions regarding how the Honor Code’s provisions apply to specific activities or situations related to this course. Your continuing enrollment in this course is deemed to be a pledge by you under the Honor Code to comply with the Honor Code in relation to this course and to comply with the instructions in the course syllabus.

VI. Title IX/Sexual Misconduct

Per the UHS Sexual Misconduct Policy, your instructor is a “responsible employee” for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and state law and must report incidents of sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual intimidation, intimate partner violence, or stalking) about which they become aware to the Title IX office. Please know there are places on campus where you can make a report in confidence. You can find more information about resources on the Title IX website at <https://uh.edu/equal-opportunity/title-ix-sexual-misconduct/resources/>.

VII. Women and Gender Resource Center

The mission of the WGRC is to advance the University of Houston and promote the success of all students, faculty, and staff through educating, empowering, and supporting the UH community. The WGRC suite is open to you. Stop by the office for a study space, to take a break, grab a snack, or check out one of the WGRC programs or resources. Stop by Student Center South room B12 (Basement floor near Starbucks and down the hall from Creation Station) from 9 am to 5 pm Monday through Friday.

VIII. Use of AI throughout the Course

Generative artificial intelligence is a form of machine learning that creates new and original output based on the data it has been trained on or has access to, employing algorithms to generate content in response to prompts. Examples of the technology include what are known as generative “large language models” (LLMs). Two well-known LLM implementations are ChatGPT and Claude. LLM output can include text, images, music, code, and more. This syllabus policy covers the textual output of generative LLMs (AI-Generated Work Product)—which can include computer code or programs and human-language content. Because AI-Generated Work Product can often mimic human intelligence, it

could potentially be used as a substitute for a student's own work product. Such use is potentially problematic to the extent that it becomes a substitute for internalized student understanding of the material or creates a dependency on AI-Generated Work Product, which may be strictly prohibited in settings that include the bar examination.

Subject to the exceptions immediately below, your continuing enrollment in this course constitutes your pledge not to generate or to use any AI-Generated Work Product, including ChatGPT and Claude—whether from yourself or others—in relation to any assessment in this course. The term “assessment” means any graded or ungraded work product for this course that is submitted to the instructor, presented in a class session, or used in an oral or written graded assessment for this course.

The following AI-Generated Work Product uses are exceptions to the preceding prohibition. The exceptions' intent is to allow the generation and use of AI-Generated Work Product for specific, narrowly defined activities related to this course.

- You may generate and use AI-Generated Work Product for class preparation, although you must disclose the full extent of that use if your instructor asks. You may generate and use AI-Generated Work Product for study supplements to aid with general understanding of course content. This could take different forms that include creating examples or explanations of a concept, generation of diagrams and flow charts, “gamification” of course content, flash cards for study, or sample questions and answers.
- You may generate and use AI-Generated Work Product for an outline that summarizes the course content.
- You may use AI-Generated Work Product to check your originally drafted text for misspellings, grammar and punctuation errors, strength and clarity of prose, verbosity, effective transitional language and thesis sentences, word choice, excessive passive voice, and like things.
- You may use AI-Generated Work Product for the purpose of language translation.

COURSE TOPICS & READING SCHEDULE

Please note that the required reading is listed below. Additional suggested readings may be provided via email or Canvas throughout the semester in advance of any given class.

MODULE 1: Introduction to the international and regional human rights law systems, enforcement, and challenges.

Class 1: Friday, January 23

Topics:	Required Readings:
• The development of human rights & international human rights law; and • The normative framework.	• Textbook: ○ Chapter 1: Pgs. 1-25; ○ Chapter 2: Pgs. 51-102 • Matua, M., <i>Human Rights Standards: Hegemony, Law and Politics</i>, available at https://soar.suny.edu/bitstream/handle/20.500.12648/7133/9781438459417.pdf?sequence=1 ○ Preface: Pgs. vii-x ○ Introduction & Chapter 1: Pgs. 1-21

Class 2: Friday, January 30

Topics:	Required Readings:
• The United Nations Charter System; • The United Nations Treaty System; and • The International Bill of Human Rights.	• Textbook: ○ Chapter 4: Pgs. 158-195 ○ Chapter 5: Pgs. 197-243 • United Nations Office of the High Commissioner, <i>International Bill of Human Rights: A brief history, and the two International Covenants</i>, available at https://www.ohchr.org/en/what-are-human-rights/international-bill-human-rights

Class 3: Friday, February 6 (via Zoom)

Topics:	Required Readings:
• A deeper dive into civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights; and • International courts, tribunals, & quasi-judicial bodies.	<i>Please note that class will be via Zoom this week so the live class will be shorter. In lieu of the full 3-hour class, additional reading has been assigned below and students will additionally have a pre-recorded lecture to watch.</i> • Textbook: ○ Chapter 8: Pgs. 360-421; ○ Chapter 9: Pgs. 424-474 • Koh, H., <i>How is International Human Rights Law Enforced?</i>, available at

	https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2279&context=ilj
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Class 4: Friday, February 13

Topics:	Required Readings:
Regional human rights treaty systems, including the European Human Rights System, the Inter-American Human Rights Systems; and the African Human Rights System.	- Textbook: - Chapter 6: Pgs. 245-310 - Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, <i>Anastasio Hernandez Rojas and Family v. United States</i>, Report No. 60/25, Case 14.042, available at https://assets.nationbuilder.com/alliancesandiego/pages/4674/attachments/original/1746027917/Report_60.25.pdf?1746027917=&emci=9d760b35-d25-f011-8b3d-6045bded8cca&emdi=5d285705-e225-f011-8b3d-6045bded8cca&ceid=6218956

Class 5: Friday, February 20

Topics:	Required Readings:
- The application of human flights in armed conflict; - Human rights and international criminal justice.	- Textbook: - Chapter 16: Pgs. 744-774; - Chapter 17: Pgs. 776-810 - Defeis, E., <i>The Responsibility to Protect and International Justice</i>, available at https://law.hofstra.edu/pdf/academics/journals/jibl/jibl_issues_v10n01_responsibility_to_protect.pdf - O'Donnell, M., <i>Genocide, the United Nations, and the Death of Absolute Rights</i>, available at https://lira.bc.edu/files/pdf?fileid=33aac265-2acb-4ddc-b58f-46a75e970005 - Illingworth, R., <i>Gaza and the failure of atrocity prevention: Placing the responsibility to protect on stronger cosmopolitan foundations</i>, available at https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/00108367251321440

	• Suggested reading: ○ Human Rights Watch, <i>How Does International Humanitarian Law Apply in Israel and Gaza</i>, available at https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/27/how-does-international-humanitarian-law-apply-israel-and-gaza
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Class 6: Friday, February 27

Topics:	Required Readings:
• Human rights and “counter-terrorism”; and • The human rights obligations of non-state actors.	• Textbook: ○ Chapter 18: Pgs. 811-849; ○ Chapter 19: Pgs. 851-899 • Luban, D. and Newell, K., <i>Personality Disruption as Mental Torture: The CIA, Interrogational Abuse, and the U.S. Torture Act</i>, available at https://scholarship.law.georgetown.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3232&context=facpub (only pgs. 334-377; 385-387) • Suggested readings: ○ <i>Yamil Luna Gutierrez v. Kristi Noem</i>, Plaintiffs-Petitioners’ Opposition to Motion to Dismiss, available at https://refugeerights.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/ECF-033-Opposition-to-MTD.pdf

Class 7: Friday, March 6

Topics:	Required Readings:
• Human rights in practice; • Victims rights and reparations; and • Individual complaints procedures.	• Textbook: ○ Chapter 3: Pgs. 104-156; ○ Chapter 7: 313-358; ○ Chapter 15: Pgs. 691-753.

Class 8: Friday, March 13

Topics:	Required Readings:
• The current challenges and critiques of the international human rights system; • Globalization and its impact on human rights; and • Select case studies of today's most pressing human rights crises.	• Textbook: ◦ Chapter 1 (excerpt): Pgs. 25-49; • Mutua, M., <i>Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphors of Human Rights</i> (2001), available at https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/236359735.pdf. • Mutua, M., <i>Human Rights Standards: Hegemony, Law and Politics</i>, available at https://soar.suny.edu/bitstream/handle/20.500.12648/7133/9781438459417.pdf?sequence=1 ◦ Chapter 7: Pgs. 165-183. • OHCHR, <i>Sudan: Entrenched impunity fuelling gross human rights violations and abuses</i>, available at https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/02/sudan-entrenched-impunity-fuelling-gross-human-rights-violations-and-abuses ◦ Please also skim the linked report: https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/58/29

----- Friday, March 20: NO CLASS -----

Class 9: Friday, March 27 - MIDTERM PAPER DUE

Topics:	Required Readings:
• Group rights: Self-determination, minorities, and indigenous peoples; • Children's rights; and • The protection of other recognized groups and persons.	• Textbook: ◦ Chapter 10: Pgs. 476-521; ◦ Chapter 12: Pgs. 559-590; ◦ Chapter 13: 592-638.

MODULE 2: International human rights law in domestic legal systems & emerging areas of law and practice.

Class 10: Friday, April 3

Topics:	Required Readings:
• International law in domestic courts; • International human rights law in the U.S. legal system; and • International human rights law and international relations.	• Sandholtz, W., <i>How Domestic Courts Use International Law</i>, available at https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=2384&context=ilj • Mulligan, S., <i>International Law and Agreements; Their Effect upon U.S. Law</i>, available at https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/RL32528; • Abebe, D., <i>Why Comparative International Law Needs International Relations Theory</i>, available at https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5574&context=faculty_scholarship

Class 11: Friday, April 10

Topics:	Required Readings:
• The current state of forced displacement; • International refugee law; and • The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.	• UNHCR, <i>Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2024</i>, available at https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2024 • Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, available at https://www.unhcr.org/media/1951-refugee-convention-and-1967-protocol-relating-status-refugees; • Arenilla, S. L., <i>Violations to the Principle of Non-Refoulement Under the Asylum Policy of the United States</i>, available at https://www.scielo.org.mx/pdf/amdi/v15/v15a8.pdf • CGLJ, <i>Immigration and Migrants' Rights: What Rights to Migrants Have?</i>, available at https://cglj.org/human-rights-law/thematic-research-guides/immigration-migrants-rights/ • Amnesty International, <i>The Trump administration's call to 'reframe' the global asylum system would harm people seeking safety</i>, available at

	https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/09/trump-reframe-global-asylum-system-would-harm-people-seeking-safety/
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Class 12: Friday, April 17

Topics:	Required Readings:
• The right to development and sustainable development; and • The emergence of international environmental law.	• Textbook: ◦ Chapter 14: Pgs. 641-689 • Hunter, D., <i>International Environmental Law</i>, available at https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_education/publications/insights-on-law-and-society/volume-19/insights-vol--19---issue-1/international-environmental-law/ • IACtHR, <i>Advisory Opinion on the Environment and Human Rights</i> (2017), available at https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/opiniones/seriea_23_ing.pdf ◦ Pgs. 20-32 • Bodansky, D., <i>The Art and Craft of International Environmental Law: Chapter 1</i>, available at https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1529&context=fac_artchop

Class 13: Friday, April 24

Topics:	Required Readings:
• Human rights and technology: the use of social media in human rights movements and open source investigations; and • Business and human rights: corporate responsibility.	• Gheyntanchi, E. and Moghadam, V., <i>Women, Social Protests, and the New Media Activism in the Middle East and North Africa</i>, available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/43496487; • Deutch, J. and Habal, H., <i>The Syrian Archive: A Methodological Case Study of Open-Source Investigation of State Crime Using Video Evidence from Social Media Platforms</i>, available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327872

	838 The Syrian Archive A Methodological Case Study of Open-Source Investigation of State Crime Using Video Evidence from Social Media Platforms ● Berkeley Protocol on Digital Open Source Investigations, available at https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/OHCHR_BerkeleyProtocol.pdf (skim only) ● OHCHR, <i>Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights</i>, available at https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_en.pdf (skim) ● <i>Newsun Resources Ltd. v. Araya</i>, 2020 SCC 5, [2020] 1 S.C.R. 166., available at https://decisions.scc-csc.ca/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/18169/index.do
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Class 14: Friday, May 1

Topics:	Required Readings:
● Course recap; ● Group reflections; and ● Final exam preparation.	● Nowrojee, B., <i>The Future of Human Rights in a Changing World Order</i>, available at https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/newsroom/the-future-of-human-rights-in-a-changing-world-order (you can read the lecture or listen to the recording) <i>Additional final readings will be circulated in advance of the final class.</i>