

# CALL FOR PAPERS

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## **International Humanitarian Law Beyond States:** *New Patterns, New Spaces, and New Actors in Armed Conflicts*

International Conference • 16 October 2026  
*University of Belgrade-Faculty of Political Science, Serbia*

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### **About the Conference**

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) has traditionally been built upon a state-centric understanding of armed conflict. Yet contemporary conflicts increasingly challenge this foundation. Armed violence today is marked by the prevalence of non-international armed conflicts (NIACs), the globalization of internal conflicts, the emergence of new domains of warfare, and the growing relevance of a wide range of non-state actors. These developments raise fundamental questions about the capacity of IHL to respond to evolving material realities and about the directions in which the law has adapted – or should further adapt.

This international conference aims to **critically examine how IHL grapples with these transformations**. It seeks to explore whether existing legal frameworks adequately reflect contemporary conflict dynamics and to identify emerging patterns that may require doctrinal, interpretative, or normative rethinking.

The conference is hosted by the University of Belgrade-Faculty of Political Science (FPS) – one of the oldest academic institutions engaging with IHL in Serbia. From research on the armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia to post-conflict and transitional justice initiatives, FPS has served as an important site of IHL scholarship and practice.

The conference is organized as part of the **IHL Day in the Republic of Serbia**, established to commemorate the date on which Serbia became bound by the 1949 Geneva Conventions. The IHL Day is marked annually by the Belgrade International Law Circle in cooperation with the University of Belgrade-Faculty of Political Science and the Red Cross of Serbia, and with the support of the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia.

### **Keynote Speaker**

The opening keynote will be delivered by **Marco Sassòli**, Full Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Geneva – one of the world's leading authorities on international humanitarian law.

### **Important Dates**

**Submission deadline:** 10 May 2026  
**Notification of acceptance:** 1 June 2026  
**Conference date:** 16 October 2026  
**Full paper deadline:** 15 November 2026 (for accepted presenters intending to publish)

## Thematic Panels

The conference will be organized around four thematic panels. Submissions are welcome on topics including, but not limited to, the following:

### Panel 1 — Beyond “Internal”: The Globalization of Non-International Armed Conflicts

This panel focuses on the dominant role of NIACs in today’s conflict landscape and their increasingly transnational character. Possible topics include:

- The erosion of the non-international/international armed conflict divide
- Cross-border dimensions of NIACs and foreign involvement
- Emerging patterns of organized violence
- Adaptation of IHL to the globalization of non-international armed conflicts
- Whether existing legal categories remain adequate

### Panel 2 — Civilian Protection at the Breaking Point

This panel examines how the contemporary conduct of hostilities is increasingly experienced by civilians as a systematic assault on the conditions of life, addressing the shift from incidental harm to the intentional targeting of survival infrastructure, psychological terrorizing tactics, weaponization of technology, and persistent accountability deficits. Possible topics include:

- Attacks on objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, including the systematic destruction of water, sanitation, and energy infrastructure
- Environmental destruction as an attack on the conditions of civilian life: long-term damage to land, water, and ecosystems and its qualification under IHL and ICL
- Environmental harm as a method of warfare: between military necessity, proportionality, and emerging accountability frameworks
- The weaponization of starvation: deliberate targeting of agricultural land, livestock, and markets as a method of warfare and its qualification under the ICC Rome Statute and IHL
- Legal and ethical implications of “hunting” civilians with low-cost loitering munitions and the dissemination of attack footage to spread psychological terror
- The collapse of “safe spaces”: the erosion of the protected status of humanitarian relief, medical personnel, and transport
- The survival of IHL: whether the current protective framework can withstand the “normalization” of systematic civilian suffering or if a normative shift in enforcement is required

### Panel 3 — New Spaces of Conflict: From Cyberspace to the Global Commons

This panel explores the spatial expansion of armed conflict beyond traditional battlefields. Possible topics include:

- Cyber operations and their qualification under IHL
- Civilian objects in cyber: from cloud services to undersea cables
- Satellites as dual-use objects
- Armed conflict at sea and contemporary maritime security challenges
- The applicability of IHL in outer space
- Armed violence in areas considered the common heritage of humankind
- Normative gaps and regulatory fragmentation

## Panel 4 — New Actors in Armed Conflicts

This panel addresses the diversification of actors involved in contemporary conflicts. Possible topics include:

- Individual responsibility for atrocities and the interplay between IHL and International Criminal Law
- Challenges to enforcement and the “culture of impunity,” including the obstruction of international investigative bodies (ICC, UNITAD) and the failure of domestic amnesties
- Accountability, compliance, and enforcement beyond the state
- Non-state armed groups, their legal status and obligations
- The role of non-state actors in law-making
- The role of international organizations
- Humanitarian organizations as actors within conflict environments

## Submission Requirements

Scholars wishing to present at the conference are invited to submit the following in a single document:

- Abstract (maximum 500 words)
- Keywords (5–8 keywords)
- Full name, institutional affiliation, and email address
- ORCID identifier if applicable
- Short CV (included in the same document)

Submissions should be sent to [janja.simentic@fpn.bg.ac.rs](mailto:janja.simentic@fpn.bg.ac.rs) with the subject line “IHL Beyond States — Abstract Submission”. Please include in the same email an indication of whether you intend to submit a full paper for future publication.

We warmly encourage submissions from scholars of all backgrounds, particularly those from underrepresented groups in international law and early career researchers.

## Evaluation Criteria

Abstracts will be selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- Alignment with the conference description and thematic panels
- Overall coherence of the conference and its panels
- Originality and significance of the issues to be examined

In composing the panels, gender, career stage, and geographic balance will be ensured. Special attention will be paid to early career scholars.

## Travel Grants

A limited number of travel grants are available to support participants who lack institutional funding. If you wish to be considered for a travel grant, please indicate this in the body of your submission email, together with your travel origin and an estimate of costs. The availability of grants cannot be guaranteed and will be allocated on a needs and merit basis.

## Publication

Abstracts of all accepted papers will be published in a conference abstract book. Accepted participants are invited to submit a full paper by 15 November 2026 for consideration in a post-

conference publication and a prospective edited volume. Further details on the publication process will be communicated to accepted participants.

## Scientific Committee

**Marco Sassòli** — Full Professor, University of Geneva – Faculty of Law

**Robert Goldman** — Professor of Law & Louis C. James Scholar, American University Washington College of Law

**Vesna Knežević Predić** — Full Professor, University of Belgrade – Faculty of Political Science

**Maruša T. Veber** — Assistant Professor, Director of the Institute for International Law and International Relations, Faculty of Law, University of Ljubljana

**Marko Svičević** — Researcher and Lecturer, Centre for International Humanitarian and Operational Law, Palacký University; Post-doctoral Research Fellow, South African Research Chair in International Law, University of Johannesburg

**Stavros-Evdokimos Pantazopoulos** — Teaching Fellow, NKUA School of Law; Visiting Researcher, Erik Castrén Institute, University of Helsinki

## Organising Committee

Dr. Miloš Hrnjaz,  Associate Professor, University of Belgrade-Faculty of Political Science

Dr. Janja Simentić Popović,  Assistant Professor, University of Belgrade-Faculty of Political Science

Goran Sandić, LL.M.,  Research Assistant, University of Belgrade-Faculty of Political Science

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## Optional City Walk: Belgrade Through an IHL Lens (Pre/Post-Conference)

Participants arriving in Belgrade on **15 October 2026** or staying **after the conference** are invited to join an optional walk-through sites that bring IHL to life in the city itself. Belgrade carries remarkable traces of the legal and humanitarian questions the conference addresses: buildings bombed in the 1999 NATO bombing and deliberately left unrepaired, the headquarters of the Red Cross of Serbia, a WWII concentration camp on the banks of the Sava, and museums that shed light on the context for the Yugoslav conflicts that transformed international humanitarian and criminal law.

Further details and sign-up instructions will be sent to accepted participants together with the conference programme.

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*Organized as part of the **IHL Day in the Republic of Serbia***

*University of Belgrade- Faculty of Political Science • Belgrade International Law Circle • Red Cross of Serbia  
With the support of the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia*