



**When?**

22 - 23 September 2023

**Where?**

University of Cologne

**Progress and International Law**

A Cursed Relationship?

Progress and international law are in an unsettled relationship. On the one hand, under the influence of Kant's philosophy, it is deeply ingrained within international legal scholarship that more international law is progress in and of itself. Different developments across various fields of international law are frequently portrayed as evidence of the progress of the discipline. International law as such is then itself seen as a tool of progress generally, with the ultimate mission of contributing to 'perpetual peace', solidarity and humanity. As such, the idea of progress taken as a self-evident truth appears to function as the guiding narrative of international law.

On the other hand, international law is frequently viewed as the mere result of a political process reflecting the respective time's power structures and ideologies. So, who decides what progress means? Does a common universal understanding exist, or is it rather a mirror of power structures in the global order? And do States really pursue peace, solidarity and humanity when they shape international law? In particular, the States' reluctance often prevents finding solutions to pressing issues at the international level. Can the question of progress and international law even be raised amid blatant violations of core principles of international law, above all the prohibition of the threat or use of force?

Indeed, reality seems to lag behind the narrative of international law being progressive. A glimpse at the current developments within different subfields of international law shows that international law often functions not as a motor of progress but, on the contrary, as a facilitator and stabiliser of the status quo or even as a barrier to progress. This creates the impression that international law in the 21st century can no longer keep up with the demands of a globalised, digitised and anthropogenically modified world. Under closer scrutiny, even the supposed evidence of progress might reveal biases, structural limitations and hidden agendas.

Against this background, the conference seeks contributions that reflect on the general relationship between the idea of progress and international law as well as on the progress narratives within specific fields of international law. The conference also invites reflections on the gap between the reality and the promise of international law as progress in its different sub-fields. Possible but

The Working Group of Young Scholars in Public International Law and the German Society of International Law

non-exhaustive research questions might focus on:

- What assumptions lie in the idea of progress in international law? Does the notion of progress and the transformative value of law have a specific meaning in international law? Is it possible to ascertain such meaning, and if so, how?
- How is the narrative of progress in international law constructed? What are the techniques of such construction? Who defines what progress is? What role can non-State actors play in that regard?
- If the idea of progress is deeply rooted in Western liberalism, what different perspectives on and alternatives to progress might exist in the Global South and what does this mean for international law?
- What are the hidden agendas, biases and limitations of the progress narratives across the different fields of international law, e.g. in international law-making, dispute-settlement, international institutional law, or human rights law?
- Has there been any recent progress in the various subfields of public international law and, if so, what progress has there been? In which fields of international law is the gap between reality and the promise of international law as progress most evident?

The Working Group of Young Scholars in Public International Law (*Arbeitskreis junger Völkerrechtswissenschaftler\*innen - AjV*) and the German Society of International Law (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationales Recht - DGIR*) are pleased to invite the submission of papers for their joint conference contemplating these and other questions and hope to cover a broad range of international law topics. We welcome all theoretical approaches and methods and explicitly invite doctrinal work as well as post-colonial, feminist, and other critical approaches.

The conference's main purpose is to bring together junior and senior scholars. We hence invite PhD students and early career researchers to present their work. Each speaker will receive individualised comments from an established scholar who will act as the discussant for the respective paper. Anonymised abstracts in English (max. 500 words) must be submitted by **16 January 2023** only via this link. Abstracts will be considered via a blind review process. Selected candidates will be notified by 13 February 2023. Paper drafts (max. 7000 words, including footnotes) must be submitted by 5 June 2023. We envisage publishing the contributions. The conference is currently planned as an on-site event. For those selected speakers whose participation in the conference will not be covered by other sources, we are aiming to cover both accommodation and travelling costs. Further information will be available upon the acceptance of the abstract.

**Please also visit our website**

The Working Group of Young  
Scholars in Public International  
Law and the German Society of  
International Law

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