



MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE
FOR COMPARATIVE PUBLIC LAW
AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN



Call for Papers

for a workshop on

Protest Movements and International Law

Heidelberg, Germany

2-3 November 2023

convened by

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Nonviolent protests have become the primary form of waging fundamental societal conflicts. Since the early 2000s the number of nonviolent protest movements has surpassed the number of violent conflicts significantly. In particular, the “decade of protest” between 2011 and 2020 saw that highest number of peaceful protests registered in history.

International Law has only slowly adapted to this trend. Whereas International Humanitarian Law sets out specific rules for waging violent conflict, the legal framework for nonviolent conflict has to date not been established. Traditionally, international legal doctrine placed protest movements as an internal affair beyond the reach of international law. However, recent trends in literature and practice of international organizations have highlighted the relationship between international law and protest movements.

The Human Rights Committee adopted General Comment 37 in 2020. This marks the first General Comment concerning Art. 22 ICCPR’s right to peaceful assembly. The Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Assembly and Association applied the General Comment’s reasoning to the situation of protests for the first time in 2022 (A/HRC/50/42). Likewise, nonviolent protests have had a significant impact on international democracy regimes. In particular, the manifold changes of government in Africa during the Arab Spring have challenged the African Union’s understanding of an “unconstitutional change in government” and provoked manifold decisions by the African Union’s Peace and Security Council. Furthermore, many debates in the United Nation’s Security Council have centered on the legality of foreign state support to nonviolent protest movements. During and after the Ukrainian Euromaidan Revolution in 2013/14, the Russian Federation, Bolivia, and Belarus claimed that the European Union and the United States of America had illegally intervened in Ukraine’s internal affairs by verbally supporting the protests and meeting with protest leaders. In turn, the European Union and the US justified their support towards the protests in Ukraine as a promotion of international human rights law and democracy standards.

These examples show the emerging international legal regulation of protest movements. Yet, there remains much to discover and research. Therefore, we invite submissions for a two-day workshop in Heidelberg on all aspects pertaining to protest movements in international law.

We are particularly interested in submissions on:

- Human Rights protection of protest movements
- Protest movements and international Human Rights adjudication
- Protest movements in international and regional democracy frameworks
- The prohibition of intervention and support to protest movements
- Invocation of international law through protest movements
- Case studies on protest movements from an international law perspective
- The democratic or anti-democratic impact of protest movements
- Protest movements and their relationship to regional and international organizations
- Distinguishing violent from nonviolent protests from a perspective of international law
- A right to revolution or rebellion in international law

Abstracts will be selected for the on-site conference in Heidelberg in November 2023. Afterwards, the conveners plan to submit selected papers as a Special Issue to an international law journal.

We will provide for accommodation for presenting participants. There is limited funding available to cover travel costs. Please indicate whether you require funding when submitting your abstract.

Please submit abstracts of no more than 500 words alongside a short CV of one page to kriener@mpil.de by 30 April 2023. Applicants will be notified by the end of May.