

CONFERENCE ON INTERNATIONAL LAW AND THE PROTECTION OF SUBMARINE CABLES AND PIPELINES: MULTI-DIMENSIONAL PERSPECTIVES



CIL

CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL LAW
National University of Singapore

16 & 17 SEPTEMBER, 2025 (TUESDAY & WEDNESDAY)



Orchard Hotel, Singapore

BACKGROUND

Submarine cables and pipelines traverse the ocean floor, connecting countries and continents and facilitating vital communication and energy services to states and their citizens. They have been described by the General Assembly as “vitally important to the global economy and national security of all States.”

Since the attacks against the Nord Stream pipelines in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of Denmark and Sweden in 2022, the vulnerability of submarine cables and pipelines to intentional damage has been thrust into the spotlight. A spate of media reports on damage to submarine fibre optic and power cables in Europe and Asia between 2022 and 2025 have exacerbated concerns about the risks to submarine cables and pipelines against a background of increasing geopolitical complexities, grey zone tactics and armed conflicts. These concerns centre on the potential ramifications for vital government functions, including disruption to essential services to populations and economic. Damage to submarine cables and pipelines may also cause harm to the marine environment and associated ecosystem services.

International law is a critical component of policies and strategies on the protection of submarine cables. Several areas of international law set out the ambit of states’ rights and obligations on different aspects of the protection of submarine cables and pipelines and also provide frameworks for state cooperation. International law also shapes how states, international and regional bodies regulate industry actors, who play a vital role in the protection of submarine cables and pipelines. However, international law typically articulate states’ rights and obligations in general terms, and operationalizing such rights and obligations in practice faces challenges. Moreover, many of these international legal frameworks were adopted at a time when the reliance on submarine cables and pipelines was not foreseen and may not fully address the constantly evolving challenges that confront the protection of submarine cables and pipelines.

OBJECTIVES

It is against this background that the Centre for International Law (CIL) at the National University of Singapore (NUS) is organising a 2-day conference on “International Law and the Protection of Submarine Cables and Pipelines: Multidimensional Perspectives” on 16 and 17 September 2025 at Orchard Hotel, Singapore. The Conference brings together international lawyers, government officials, policy makers and industry experts to examine the international law that applies to the protection of submarine cables and pipelines from intentional acts of damage by states and non-state actors, with a specific focus on the law of the sea, the law on the use of force, the law of armed conflict and legal frameworks on the protection of submarine cables and pipelines as critical infrastructure.

The Conference aims to deepen an understanding of existing international legal frameworks and to provide a forum for discussing practical solutions consistent with international law to effectively protect submarine cables and pipelines. The Conference will examine a range of issues including:

- Monitoring, detection and information sharing of threats to submarine cables and pipelines;
- National laws and regulations on the protection of submarine cables and pipelines;
- Enforcement and other prevention measures at sea to threatened or actual damage to submarine cables and pipelines
- State responsibility and liability for damage to submarine cables and pipelines
- Grey zone operations, armed conflict and the protection of submarine cables and pipelines
- Protection of submarine cables and pipelines as critical infrastructure
- The role of international and regional bodies on the protection of submarine cables and pipelines
- Recommendations for the strengthening of international law on the protection of submarine cables and pipelines

DAY 1 - SEPTEMBER 16, 2025 (TUESDAY)

All times in SGT

08:30 - 09:00	Registration
09:00 - 09:10	Welcome Remarks Dr. Nilufer Oral, Director, CIL
09:10 - 09:30	Keynote Address Mr. Lionel Yee, Deputy Attorney-General, AGC, Singapore
09:30 - 11:00	Session 1: Monitoring, Detection and Information Sharing
11:00 - 11:30	Break
11:30 - 13:00	Session 2: National Laws and Regulations
13:00 - 14:00	Lunch
14:00 - 15:30	Session 3: Enforcement and Other Prevention Measures at Sea
15:30 - 16:00	Break
16:30 - 17:30	Session 4: State Responsibility and Liability
17:30	Close of Day 1
18:00 - 20:00	Welcome Reception

DAY 2 - SEPTEMBER 17, 2025 (WEDNESDAY)

09:00 - 10:30	Session 5: Grey Zone Operations and Armed Conflicts
10:30 - 11:00	Break
11:00 - 12:30	Session 6: Submarine Cables and Pipelines as Critical Infrastructure
12:30 - 13:30	Lunch
13:00 - 15:00	Session 7: The Role of International and Regional Bodies
15:00 - 15:30	Break
15:30 - 17:00	Session 8: Future Directions

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