CIL
CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL LAW
National University of Singapore

Changing the Narrative: International Law for Peace Conference 2026

23 January 2026 | 9:00 am – 5:00 pm
Orchard Hotel, Singapore

About the Conference

The Centre for International Law at the National University of Singapore convened a one day international conference titled “International Law for Peace: Changing the Narrative”on 23 January 2026,in Singapore. The conference brought together leading scholars, practitioners and policymakers from around the world to explore how international law can be reframed as a positive force for peace and cooperation in a world facing persistent conflict and institutional strain. The event underscored the need for a shift away from narratives that focus on the limitations and failures of international law, toward recognising its past and future role in promoting and building peace through legal frameworks and institutional practice.

Opening Session and Keynote Address

Opening Remarks: Dr. Nilüfer Oral

Dr. Nilüfer Oral, Director of the Centre for International Law at the National University of Singapore, delivered the welcoming comments to an in-person audience of over 300. In her opening address, Dr. Oral framed the conference's objectives, underscoring the urgency of placing peace at the centre of international law legal theory and practice rather than treating it as a peripheral or derivative concern.

Keynote Address: Professor Christine Chinkin

Professor Christine Chinkin delivered a powerful keynote speech in she started with a reflection on the legacy of the United Nations Charter system and the evolving capacity of international law to advance peace while challenging dominant legal narratives. She emphasized the importance of normative imagination, sustained institutional engagement, and legal cooperation in strengthening multilateral frameworks for peace. Professor Chinkin traced how early regulation under Article 26 of the UN Charter was shaped by the advent of the atomic bomb and by claims of exceptionalism, while significant areas of international legal activity developed beyond formal oversight. Over time, peace became increasingly conflated with national security, measured through logics of protection and deterrence rather than articulated as an autonomous legal objective. As a result, peace is often treated as legally relevant only in post-conflict or conflict-affected territories, while elsewhere it remains fragmented and indirectly governed through specialized legal regimes. She noted that the right to peace is formally recognized in only a only a limited number of instruments, most notably the African Charter and the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, and is largely absent from global human rights

global human rights frameworks. Many existing legal norms, particularly within soft law, continue to reflect colonial, racist, and heteronormative assumptions. Contemporary peace-making practice, they argued, frequently adopts a minimalist orientation, prioritizing survival and harm reduction for victims rather than articulating a more expansive vision of peace. Against this backdrop, Professor Chinkin proposed an alternative narrative, demonstrating how international law and its institutions can generate pathways to peace beyond highly visible conflict settings such as Gaza, Israel, or Myanmar. She argued that legal education is central to this project and that peace must be taught as an integral component of international law. Drawing on examples including the Maputo Protocol, the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, disarmament initiatives, and evolving State practice, she illustrated how peace-oriented norms already exist within the legal landscape. She further highlighted the contributions of the Human Rights Council's special procedures, including the work of mandate holders such as Francesca Albanese, as well as developments within the CEDAW Committee, particularly General Recommendation No. 30. These mechanisms, alongside the work of local women's groups, the creation of zones of peace, and the provision of legal assistance to migrants and asylum seekers, offer concrete, real-time contributions to peacebuilding. People's tribunals, including the Ukraine Tribunal on Aggression and tribunals addressing Gaza and gender persecution in Afghanistan, were presented as valuable pedagogical resources capable of expanding legal perspectives beyond mainstream and State-centric narratives.

Professor Chinkin concluded by urging that international law be understood simultaneously as a source of resilience and as a form of resistance to fragmentation and conflict. By dismantling disciplinary silos and drawing on a century-long tradition of peace activism, lawyers and educators can reimagine international law not merely as a framework for preventing violence but as a proactive instrument for cultivating peace.

FIRESIDE CHAT
"80 Years Backwards, 80 Years Forward: The UN Charter System and the Future of Peace"

(1000 - 1230)

Moderator: Prof. Nilüfer Oral (Director, NUS-CIL)
Prof. Tommy Koh (Ambassador at Large, Singapore)
Dr. Namira Negm (Director, African Migration Observatory | Former Legal Counsel, AU)
Director-General Nakamura Kazuhiko (Director-General, International Legal Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan)
Prof. Antony Anghie (Head, Teaching and Research International Law in Asia Programme, NUS-CIL | Professor of Law, University of Utah)

The fireside chat examined the continuing relevance of the UN Charter system and the broader architecture of international law to contemporary and future peace efforts. Framed around both historical reflection and forward-looking inquiry, the discussion explored how collective security, legal cooperation, and normative resilience might be reimagined over the next eight decades of multilateralism. Moderated by **Dr. Nilüfer Oral**, the session brought together a distinguished panel comprising **Professor Tommy Koh, Dr Namira Negm, Director-General Kazuhiko**

Nakamura and **Professor Antony Anghie**. Framed as an interactive session, Dr. Oral asked each of the panellists a set of questions starting with Ambassador and Professor Koh.

Drawing on his experience as the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy, **Professor Koh** reflected on his role in facilitating the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Baltic States, illustrating the Charter system's capacity to enable peaceful outcomes through diplomacy and legal process. They highlighted the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea as a paradigmatic example of how international law replaces disorder with structured governance through compulsory dispute settlement. He also referred to their work chairing WTO dispute settlement panels, underscoring how legal adjudication has historically enabled the peaceful resolution of trade disputes, notwithstanding the current challenges facing the WTO system. Professor Koh concluded by pointing to ASEAN as a counterexample to dominant narratives of pessimism in international law, emphasizing its potential to sustain peace through regional cooperation.

Ambassador Namira Negm addressed the relationship between migration and the UN Charter system, arguing that international law has largely adopted a reactive posture toward conflicts generated by migration rather than articulating a robust and proactive legal mandate to address human mobility. She examined how migration exposes systemic failures across multiple sub-disciplines of international law, including human rights, humanitarian law, and development.

Dr Negm warned of the growing impact of climate-induced migration and identified specific regions and legal frameworks where its consequences will be most acutely felt. She concluded with a call to restructure the normative foundations of the next phase of multilateralism,

advocating for stronger and more coherent linkages between development, climate change, and migration governance.

Mr Kazuhiko Nakamura, Director-General, focused on the rules-based relationships grounded in the UN Charter that shape peace and security, with particular emphasis on regional dynamics in East and Northeast Asia. He traced the evolution of security and sanctions-related functions in the region over the past eighty years, noting that East Asia hosts several permanent members of the Security Council. As a result, regional states have invested significantly in legal instruments to stabilize peace, including long-standing treaties such as the Treaty of Amity, now in force for five decades. Looking ahead, Mr Nakamura argued that new regional initiatives to secure peace must remain firmly anchored in Charter principles in order to retain legitimacy and effectiveness.

Professor Antony Anghie offered a Global South perspective on peace, grounding his intervention in the historical foundations of Third World engagement with international law. Referring to a recent speech by Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, he observed that mainstream political discourse increasingly echoes arguments long advanced by the Third World concerning inequality and structural unfairness. Acknowledging the discomfort such critiques often generate, Professor Anghie argued that military interventions undertaken by NATO, including in Libya under the banner of peace and security, have directly contributed to the migration crises now confronting Europe.

He recalled the Bandung Conference of 1955 as a formative moment when newly independent Afro-Asian States affirmed their commitment to international law while simultaneously confronting sovereign inequality, threats to territorial integrity, and political subordination. Despite this commitment, these States were excluded from decision-making on conflicts that directly affected them, such as the war between France and Vietnam.

Professor Anghie suggested that this pattern of exclusion continues to resonate today, particularly in contexts such as Palestine and Gaza. Drawing connections between the assassination of Count Bernadotte, the ICJ's Reparations advisory opinion, the establishment of UNRWA, and the recent destruction of UNRWA's headquarters in East Jerusalem, he argued that international law must reckon with its historical continuities and exclusions if it is to sustain a credible narrative of peace.

Professor Anghie emphasized the UN General Assembly as the principal forum through which the Global South can articulate a collective political and legal voice, contrasting this with earlier moments of exclusion such as the Berlin Conference of 1884–85. While the institutional structures of international law remain largely unchanged, he argued that the political configuration has shifted decisively, with the Global South now constituting the majority of the world's population. Drawing parallels with contemporary calls for "middle paths" and plural alignments, he suggested that rigid alliance politics, particularly automatic deference to the United States are no longer inevitable.

Instead, the present moment offers an opportunity to rethink political and legal identities and to work toward a more just international order grounded in the realities of a Global South majority.

In the final segment, Dr. Oral opened the floor to questions. Three interventions were raised by distinguished participants: one concerning the potential role of the American "Board of Peace"; a second on whether AALCO could serve as a regional vehicle for advancing Global South voices in a renewed "Bandung moment"; and a third addressing the intersection of artificial intelligence and migration. The session concluded with a collegial and spirited exchange between Professors Koh and Anghie on the continuing relevance of the Global South in light of voting patterns at the UN General Assembly on Ukraine.

PANEL 1
Reclaiming the Narrative - International Law as an Instrument of Peace

(1130 - 1245)

Moderator: Amb. Marja Lehto (Ambassador for International Legal Affairs, Finland)
Prof. Makane Moïse Mbengue (Distinguished Visiting Scholar, NUS-CIL | Professor of International Law, University of Geneva)
Prof. Sarah Nouwen (Professor of International Law, European University Institute)
Prof. Joseph Weiler (Co-Head, ASEAN Law and Policy, NUS-CIL | Professor, NYU Law)

Moderated by **Ambassador Marja Lehto**, the session brought together a distinguished panel comprising, **Professor Sarah Nouwen, Professor Makane Moïse Mbengue,** and **Professor Joseph H. H. Weiler**. This panel focused on foundational legal doctrines and norms that support peace. Presenters analysed how key international legal principles such as peaceful dispute settlement, humanitarian law and the prohibition of the use of force function to prevent conflict and foster legal order. The discussion highlighted the proactive role that legal norms can play in structuring interstate and intrastate relations toward peaceful outcomes. **Moderator Ambassador Marja Lehto** reminded the panel that international law continues to provide the vocabulary for peace and invited interventions on how international law has helped with international peace processes, trade regimes and a case study of the European Union as a peace project.

Speakers examined negotiation, mediation, adjudication and institutional mechanisms that contribute to conflict prevention and durable dispute resolution. The panel emphasised the interplay of legal processes with political and diplomatic strategies in concrete dispute contexts.

Professor Sarah Nouwen opened with emphasis on the "reclaiming" aspect of the title of the panel and remarked on the audacity of the CIL to convene a conference on peace at a time of chaos. They argued that international

peace processes are increasingly focused on merely ending violence, disregarding the societal transformation through fostering democracy, education and the rule of law, which is necessary for meaningful peace. In some contexts, such as the war in Ukraine, “peace” appears to be acquiring a negative connotation, as it implies an imposed peace, or one that is closer to appeasement. They remarked on how peace is simultaneously too ambitious (to be the focus of comprehensive peace agreements) and not ambitious enough (on the field like in Sudan where the population settles for much less) as a political project. As international lawyers, Prof. Nouwen reminded the group that for mediators in interstate disputes, peace was never really part of the formula for negotiations - Arts. 2 (4) and 2 (3) don't apply in intrastate conflicts, and there is little normative weight when persuading States to resolve their domestic disputes peacefully. Instead, international law provides ancillary norms that, while not explicitly focused on brokering peace, provide general rules and institutions for settling disputes peacefully. For example, boundary delimitation rules and arbitral proceedings were used following the secession of Sudan from South Sudan. Prof. Nouwen held that reclaiming the narrative of international law as an instrument of peace requires emphasising that international law provides a range of rules and institutions, outside of Art. 2(4), to facilitate peace processes. Additionally, when the predominant narrative is of the difficulties that international law poses to peace processes, there must be a careful separation of international legal rules from the broader international norms. Overly broad interpretations of the rules, while appearing to promote justice and accountability, often threaten to derail peace processes. Conflicts are instead resolved by looking at the precise law that is applicable.

Professor Makane Moise Mbengue made his intervention on unequal trade regimes in

international law and how they impact peace. The session examined the long-standing assumption that trade fosters and sustains peace, interrogating the historical and legal foundations of this claim. Professor Mbengue framed the discussion around a critical question: while peace is widely understood as enabling trade, does trade in fact produce peace, and under what conditions? He traced the dominant affirmative answer to what he termed the "liberal peace" narrative. This tradition originates in eighteenth-century European thought, particularly in the work of Kant and Montesquieu, drawing inspiration from Grotius. Montesquieu's claim that "peace is the natural effect of trade" became the intellectual foundation for the idea that economic interdependence would limit the resort to war. By the end of the nineteenth century, this belief was firmly embedded in European political and legal thinking and crystallised in what became known as the "trade for peace" paradigm.

Professor Mbengue challenged this narrative by asking why, if liberal peace was so well established, the First World War nonetheless occurred. They argued that the trade arrangements then were not instruments of peace but were instead characterised by deeply unequal treaties grounded in military and economic domination. These arrangements exacerbated social injustice and instability and ultimately contributed to the outbreak of war rather than its prevention. The Versailles Peace Conference marked a recognition of the need to reshape international trade law to align it more closely with the ideals of liberal peace. Professor Mbengue identified three key protagonists in this moment, which he evocatively described as a "father, son, and holy ghost" troika. The "father" was President Woodrow Wilson, whose Fourteen Points included a commitment to equitable trade conditions as a foundation for peace. The "son" was Franklin D. Roosevelt, then Assistant Secretary of the Navy and heavily influenced by Wilson, who shared a minimalist vision of international trade law as an incentive structure supporting peace rather than as a fully developed legal order.

The "holy ghost" of this triad was John Maynard Keynes, who participated in the Versailles Conference as part of the British delegation. Deeply disillusioned by the proceedings, Keynes published The Economic Consequences of the Peace in 1919, offering a trenchant critique

of the settlement. Unlike Wilson and Roosevelt, Keynes assigned international law a central role in sustaining peace, viewing it not merely as an incentive mechanism but as providing both substantive and procedural structure for a just international order. Professor Mbengue argued that the multilateral trading system, from the Havana Charter through to the World Trade Organization, is best understood as the inheritance of this Keynesian vision. It was conceived not as a free-trade enterprise per se, but as a peace project. Regional and multilateral arrangements have at times realised this ambition, as illustrated by Mercosur's establishment in 1991, which contributed to preventing armed conflict between Argentina and Brazil. However, Professor Mbengue warned that the contemporary moment represents a profound departure from this peace-oriented tradition. They described the current era as one in which the multilateral trading system is increasingly instrumentalised as an anti-peace project. Keynes, they suggested, would be shocked for three reasons. First, the principal actor undermining the system today is the United States, a State Keynes once regarded as central to building a stable international economic order. Second, the processes of liberal peace have been replaced by what he described as "liberation day" politics, in which tariffs are deployed as tools of threat and coercion. Third, the language of trade has itself become militarised, with disputes routinely framed as "trade wars" rather than legal or economic disagreements. They noted that recent analyses, including reports released ahead of the World Economic Forum in Davos, describe "geo-economic confrontation" as the new normal. Even the European Union has threatened the use of a "trade bazooka" in disputes with the United States, including in relation to Greenland, underscoring the extent to which trade rhetoric has shifted from cooperation to confrontation.

Professor Mbengue concluded by arguing for the urgent need to reclaim international law as a foundation for a renewed peace narrative in international trade. They identified two elements as essential to this project. First, the centrality of people: Keynes had warned that the impoverishment of populations is a direct driver of war, and trade regimes that ignore social consequences cannot sustain peace. Second, the need to move from a

conception of negative peace, defined merely by the absence of conflict, to positive peace grounded in sustainable development and environmental protection. These commitments are explicitly articulated in the preamble to the WTO Agreement but remain largely unrealised. Fulfilling this promise, they argued, is essential if the multilateral trading system is to recover its original purpose as an instrument of peace.

Professor Joseph H. H. Weiler argued that the European Union's self-understanding (a Dr. Jekyll / Mr. Hyde dialectic) as a peace project rests not merely on the absence of war but on a deeper transformation of how power is exercised among European States. In their intervention, they underlined the EU's greatest achievement lies in replacing the logic of force and domination that characterised Europe's past with a legal and constitutional order grounded in mutual restraint, shared sovereignty, and the discipline of law. The Union's commitment to resolving conflicts through legal norms, judicial review, and institutionalised cooperation, rather than through coercion, explains why it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012. For Weiler, however, the Nobel recognition also carried an implicit warning: peace in Europe is sustained not by technocratic integration or market efficiency alone, but by continued fidelity to the Union's normative foundations, including respect for democracy, constitutional pluralism, and the ethical limits of integration itself. Under the Versailles framework, Germany was stripped of the capacity to wage war: it was denied a standing army, limited to a militia, and constrained economically in the belief that poverty and institutional oversight through the League of Nations would prevent renewed aggression. This approach proved disastrous. Rather than securing peace, Versailles produced humiliation, inequality, and instability, culminating in the Second World War, a far greater and more devastating conflict that exposed the treaty as a spectacular failure. In response, the postwar architects of

European integration adopted the opposite logic. The 1951 Treaty of Paris establishing the European Coal and Steel Community framed peace not as restraint imposed on a defeated enemy but as integration among equals. Its preamble explicitly articulated peace as the objective, and its institutional design operationalised that aim by binding former adversaries together so tightly that war became irrational. Germany was admitted as a full and equal partner, without special restrictions, restoring dignity and creating a shared stake in the system. This strategy of radical inclusion proved effective, producing the longest sustained period of peace in Western Europe and ultimately earning the European Union the Nobel Peace Prize. The success of this peace project, however, carried a critical flaw. The failure of the proposed European Defence Community, rejected by France, meant that European integration proceeded without a corresponding security architecture. As a result, Europe outsourced its defence to the United States, relying on American military power and the assumption of a durable Pax Americana.

This original error has had enduring consequences. First, despite its economic strength and population of over 450 million, the EU has struggled to translate its soft power into geopolitical influence. Second, its dependence on Washington has constrained its ability to act autonomously in international crises, including in the Middle East, where European leverage has often gone unused for fear of American disapproval. Third, this dependency has left the EU ill-prepared for a world in which US leadership is no longer predictable. As the postwar alignment between Washington and Moscow has collapsed, and as global politics enters a more volatile phase, Europe risks finding itself, once again, unarmed in a dangerous world. Echoing the warning in Christopher Clark's The Sleepwalkers, Weiler concluded with the question of whether Europe is once more drifting into crisis without fully grasping the consequences of its own structural choices.

Moderator Ambassador Lehto opened the floor to the audience and Prof. Weiler received a question on whether the EU model could server as a template for ASEAN. Prof. Nouwen had a

question on how international lawyers can ensure more consistent responsibilities for violations of international obligations. The third question on Trump's intentions towards Greenland was directed to Prof. Weiler. Prof. Mbengue had a question on what the concrete recipe would be for international trade law to become a formula for peace.

PANEL 2
Building Peace Preventing and Resolving Disputes

(1330-1500)

Moderator: Prof. Chiara Giorgetti (Professor, University of Richmond Law School)
Anees Ahmed (Distinguished Visiting Scholar, NUS-CIL | Chief of Rule of Law, UN Mission in South Sudan)
Wu Ye Min (Regional Director, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue)
Rodman Bundy (Senior Partner, Squire Patton Boggs)
Celine Lange (Lead, Programme Development, International Dispute Resolution, NUS-CIL)

Moderated by Prof. Chiara Giorgetti the session brought together a distinguished panel comprising, **Anees Ahmed, Wu Ye Min, Rod Bundy** and **Celine Lange**.

The Moderator **Professor Chiara Giorgetti** opened the panel by highlighting the timeliness and urgency of discussing peace in the current global context, adopting the dual lens of a realist and an optimist. They framed the discussion around a central question: how can we prevent disputes using the tools currently available under international law? Drawing on recent observations, they referred to the Annual Lecture delivered by the Director of Chatham House, Browen Maddox, in January 2026, who noted that the global state of democracy is increasingly fragile. Prof. Giorgetti highlighted crises in Israel, Ukraine, Sudan, Gaza, Thailand, and Cambodia, emphasizing that one of the most significant developments has been the United States' unexpected rejection of key principles of international law, which has challenged global norms and surprised observers worldwide. Prof. Giorgetti structured their remarks around three main points. First, they

reflected on the concept of an "annus horribilis" for international law, emphasizing the critical role of the time factor. They noted that global expectations have shifted and certain events cannot be undone, raising urgent questions about whether these developments are short-term crises or indicative of longer-term systemic challenges. Invoking Winston Churchill's maxim, they stressed that crises should not be wasted and argued that even in turbulent times, there is potential for reform and constructive action. Second, they underscored the continued importance of international dispute settlement mechanisms. Despite widespread violations of international law, institutions such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) remain central to maintaining legal order. Prof. Giorgetti pointed out that the ICJ has been busier than ever, with high levels of participation across diverse types of proceedings and regions, reflecting sustained reliance on formal mechanisms to resolve disputes. Third, Prof. Giorgetti highlighted the critical role of regional mechanisms in promoting peace and stability. They drew attention to the Council of Europe, ASEAN, and the European Union, emphasizing that regional institutions can complement global frameworks, offering practical avenues for dispute resolution and cooperative engagement in areas where local context and expertise are particularly important. In conclusion, Prof. Giorgetti argued that while international law faces considerable challenges in the current geopolitical climate, it remains both a moral and practical imperative to utilize the existing legal and institutional tools. Strengthening both global and regional mechanisms, they suggested, is essential for preventing disputes and sustaining peace in the long term.

Anees Ahmed provided an overview of the evolution of United Nations peacekeeping operations (PKOs) and the integration of rule of law mandates into peacebuilding. they noted that with the end of the Cold War, both the proliferation and the nature of peacekeeping missions changed. Missions were no longer limited to military observation or "good offices" roles but increasingly became tasked with stabilizing and building sustainable peace. Early successes included Namibia, Angola, Sierra Leone, and Cambodia, while Rwanda illustrated the challenges when a

a peacekeeping presence preceded a genocide. Around the same period, ad hoc tribunals were established to address impunity, and for the first time, peacekeeping mandates explicitly incorporated the protection of civilians. Ahmed outlined three main types of PKO mandates: (i) physical protection, often involving military and police deployments to safeguard populations and separate parties; (ii) "good offices," focused on dialogue and engagement to mediate disputes; and (iii) mandates aimed at creating a sustainable environment for peace, which went beyond immediate security to build institutional resilience. In these cases, the cessation of violence often triggered the end of a mission, highlighting the link between peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

From this context emerged the UN's Rule of Law Office within the Department of Peacekeeping Operations at UN Headquarters. Its mandate has two core components: first, assisting national justice institutions to strengthen their capacity, and second, supporting security sector reform, including oversight mechanisms and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs. The overarching goal is to use rule of law frameworks to prevent relapse into violence, enabling peacekeeping missions to eventually withdraw while leaving functioning institutions behind. Ahmed described three historical methods through which PKOs implement rule of law mandates. First is the reshaping of national institutions to ensure that disputes can be resolved without violence, detention facilities meet humane standards, and courts remain accessible–a "bricks and mortar" approach to justice. Second is assistance to hybrid or internationalized justice institutions. For example, while the International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecuted Thomas Lubanga, UN personnel from the DRC and Rwanda helped operationalize the mandate under a headquarters agreement between the ICC and the UN. Similarly, in the Central African Republic, MINUSCA was mandated to assist a special court, with Security Council authorization to arrest individuals on behalf of the court. This raised the question of whether supporting such institutions risks compromising the perceived neutrality of a PKO. In contrast, UNAMID in Darfur did not have a mandate to assist the ICC in prosecuting Al Bashir, while in Côte d'Ivoire, the PKO did support the arrest of Laurent Gbagbo. The third method involves assistance to transitional justice institutions, such as Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in South Sudan, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, where PKOs helped

establish mechanisms for justice and reconciliation. Finally, Ahmed emphasized that successful integration of rule of law mandates depends on clear political backing, sustained financial support, and the clarity of mission mandates. These factors are critical to ensure that PKOs can operate effectively, build institutional capacity, and support lasting peace without overstepping their operational boundaries.

Wu Ye Min focused on the centrality of dialogue and negotiation in sustaining peace processes. They emphasized that durable peace depends not only on formal agreements but also on the cultivation of trust among parties, which underpins successful negotiation and conflict resolution. Drawing on Singapore's experience, Wu highlighted how inclusive dialogue, patience, and consistent engagement allowed deeply divided communities to reach compromise and institutionalize peaceful processes over time. They stressed that peace cannot be imposed from the outside but requires local ownership, confidence-building measures, and ongoing communication between stakeholders. Trust, they noted, is both fragile and essential, shaping whether peace initiatives endure or collapse. Wu argued that these lessons are applicable beyond Singapore, offering guidance for contemporary peace processes where polarization and lack of mutual confidence threaten long-term stability.

Rodman Bundy discussed the role of international law and institutions in facilitating peace, using landmark cases to illustrate how legal mechanisms can prevent and resolve conflicts. They highlighted the ICJ's handling of the Preah Vihear case between Thailand and Cambodia as a key example, showing how the Court applied principles of international law to adjudicate a longstanding territorial dispute while simultaneously encouraging dialogue and cooperation between the parties. Bundy emphasized that the ICJ not only clarified legal rights but also helped broker practical

arrangements that reduced tensions on the ground such as in Ethipia v. Eritrea. They further pointed to other ICJ cases and International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) decisions where the judicious application of international law contributed to conflict management and stability. These examples, they argued, demonstrate that international judicial bodies can serve both as neutral arbiters of legal disputes and as instruments for broader peacebuilding, reinforcing the idea that legal processes and diplomacy are mutually reinforcing in resolving conflicts.

Celine Lange highlighted the critical role of international and regional judicial institutions in sustaining peace through the rule of law. They emphasized that bodies such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the Permanent Court of

Arbitration (PCA) provide neutral forums for states to resolve disputes, setting legal precedents that help prevent escalation of conflicts. Beyond global institutions, Lange drew attention to regional human rights courts, including the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR), and the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, as key contributors to the peace model that complements United Nations and other regional mechanisms.

By upholding human rights, promoting accountability, and ensuring access to justice, these courts help create a stable environment in which diplomatic and peacekeeping initiatives can succeed. they provided examples such as ICJ rulings on boundary disputes, PCA-facilitated arbitration of maritime claims, ECHR judgments that have defused tensions in member states, and IACtHR and African Court decisions that have strengthened domestic legal systems while preventing the recurrence of violence. Lange argued that these institutions collectively reinforce the

architecture of international and regional peace, demonstrating that law and justice are integral to long-term conflict prevention and sustainable peace.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION
A Lasting Peace Restorative Justice and Reconciliation in International Law

(1500 - 1645)

Moderator: Prof. Larissa van den Herik (Distinguished Visiting Scholar, NUS-CIL | Professor of Public International Law, Leiden University)
Prof. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer (Professor, University of the Philippines | Ramon Magsaysay Awardee)
Prof. Patricia Galvao Teles (Professor, Autonomous University of Lisbon | ILC Member)
Rashmi Raman (Research Fellow, NUS-CIL)
Milan Jovancevic (Senior Legal Advisor, UN Support to the ECCC)
Prof. Tiyanjana Maluwa (Professor of Law, Dickinson School of Law of Pennsylvania State University | Former Legal Counsel, Organisation of African Unity)

Moderated by **Professor Larissa Larissa van den Herik** the session brought together a distinguished panel comprising, **Professor Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, Professor Patricia Galvão Teles, Rashmi Raman, Milan Jovancevic** and **Professor Tiyanjana Maluwa**.

In this closing roundtable, experts engaged in a conversation on how international legal frameworks can support restorative justice reconciliation and societal healing after conflict. The discussion brought attention to transitional justice practices, reparative mechanisms and the role of international courts and tribunals in shaping post conflict legal orders.

Professor Miriam Coronel-Ferrer spoke about peace as both a process and an outcome grounded in inclusive negotiation, trust building, and institutional transformation, drawing on their decades of work in the Bangsamoro peace process in the Philippines. As the first female chief negotiator in the world to

sign a final peace agreement with a non-state armed group, Prof. Ferrer led the Philippine government's panel in talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front that culminated in the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), which ended decades of armed conflict and laid the foundation for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. The insights they shared drew on their extensive experience and published account of the process, including their book We Chose Peace: An Insider's Story of the Bangsamoro Peace Talks (2024), where they detailed how careful process design, inclusion of diverse stakeholders, and trust between parties were central to sustaining progress amid intermittent violence and political challenges. Ferrer emphasized that peacebuilding cannot be reduced to signing instruments alone but must encompass mechanisms that build local capacity, integrate women and broader civil society voices, and support ongoing implementation and transformation. Their contribution also highlighted how gender inclusivity–as evidenced by women's participation in both formal negotiations and community engagement–strengthened dialogue and helped foster mutual understanding between parties, illustrating that peace emerges from sustained engagement, respect for grievances, and shared commitment to institutionalizing justice and governance reforms. Ultimately, Ferrer's reflections underscored peace as a continually nurtured achievement rooted in negotiation, trust, and inclusive political processes.

Professor Patricia Galvão Teles spoke of how their doctoral research and related publications examine how the colonial relationship between Portugal and East Timor shaped subsequent conflicts, Indonesia's involvement, and the struggle for self-determination, situating these historical dynamics within broader questions of law, sovereignty, and transitional justice. Prof. Teles's work on "Autodeterminação em Timor-Leste: dos Acordos de Nova Iorque à consulta popular de 30 de Agosto de 1999" explores the

legal and diplomatic processes that led to the 1999 popular consultation on independence, tracing how Portugal's status as the administrating power after centuries of colonial rule created legal obligations and expectations under international law, and how competing local political visions and external pressures from Indonesia complicated these pathways to self-determination. Their analysis highlights that East Timor's colonial past, rooted in Portuguese legal and political frameworks, continued to influence negotiations, the framing of legal options for autonomy or independence, and the broader international responses to Indonesian occupation and annexation. This historical-legal context laid the groundwork for transitional justice measures after the 1999 referendum, including the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor (CAVR) and the Indonesia–Timor Leste Commission on Truth and Friendship, which sought to document abuses, acknowledge truth, and facilitate reconciliation between former adversaries. Prof. Teles's comments connected the colonial and legal origins of conflict with post-conflict peacebuilding mechanisms, showing how understanding colonial legacies and legal frameworks for self-determination is essential to designing transitional justice institutions that contribute to sustainable peace. Their contribution underscored that rebuilding peace in contexts like East Timor requires not only negotiation and institutional intervention, but also grappling with historical legal relationships and their impact on contemporary justice and reconciliation processes.

Rashmi Raman reframed the understanding of international criminal justice as a practice that performs peace rather than only delivering outcomes like convictions or acquittals. Building on the ideas expressed by earlier speakers, they argued that transitional justice and international law shape peace through narrative choices, evidentiary practices and institutional rituals that operate even while violence continues. By treating institutions as live practices, Raman emphasized that they actively determine

whose harms are recognized, when violence is acknowledged to have ended, and how reconciliation is imagined. This perspective shifts attention from formal legal outcomes to the ongoing processes by which societies engage with, contest, and live with the legacies of conflict. Raman illustrated their argument with concrete examples of international mechanisms. The Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) collects, consolidates, and preserves evidence of crimes without prosecuting, performing peace by framing the narrative of the conflict, engaging civil society, and recognizing victims' experiences. Similarly, residual mechanisms like the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals and the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) maintain justice as a continuing presence through witness protection, archive preservation, public outreach, and educational initiatives. They also referenced emerging and analogous mechanisms such as IIIM Syria, UNITAD in Iraq, and the Special Tribunal framework for Ukraine, highlighting how documentation, structured engagement, and multilateral cooperation stage justice as an ongoing civic and moral process, shaping collective memory and reconciliation long before trials conclude. Raman concluded that international law is most peace-enabling not when it claims to end violence, but when it helps societies narrate it, contest it, and live with its aftermath in ways that are politically and socially grounded.

Milan Jovancevic provided a detailed account of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), underscoring how this hybrid tribunal continues to contribute to transitional justice and peacebuilding even in its residual phase. According to the latest Secretary-General reports on the ECCC's work in 2025, the Court has been implementing its residual functions aimed at supervising enforcement of sentences, protecting victims and witnesses, preserving and managing archives, and disseminating information to the public - tasks designed to ensure continuity of justice and to

embed the tribunal's legacy within Cambodian society. The period initially slated to conclude in 2025 has been extended through 2027 by agreement between the Cambodian government and the United Nations, reflecting the ongoing importance of these activities. Significant progress includes establishment of a permanent archival repository and a resource centre to enhance public access to case files and educational outreach; these efforts are intended to strengthen public awareness of the Khmer Rouge atrocities and the rule of law more broadly. Despite continuing financial challenges, the ECCC's residual work, including outreach programmes and national engagement, is positioned as a core mechanism for maintaining the memory of past violence, supporting reconciliation, and shaping collective understanding of accountability long after formal trials have ended.

Professor Tiyanjana Maluwa highlighted how African regional legal systems and institutions have long articulated concepts of peace and human rights that predate and in some respects go beyond other regional or international frameworks, thereby richly contributing to global understandings of law and peace. Drawing on their extensive scholarship on post-colonial Africa and international law, Maluwa argued that African states did not simply adopt Eurocentric models but actively shaped international legal norms through regional multilateral treaties and institutions. They emphasized that the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, adopted in 1981, built into its rights framework the idea that peoples have the right to national and international peace and security, reflecting a foundational regional commitment to peaceful coexistence and rights protections that African legal bodies have championed. African legal architecture, they noted, has served as a platform for linking human rights, conflict prevention, and dispute settlement in ways that inform both regional mechanisms such as the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Union's peace and security agenda and wider international law development. Their work demonstrates how

path-breaking African Union and Organisation of African Unity treaties supplement global norms and illustrate the continent's active role in shaping legal tools for peace and justice, thereby enriching the global peace model that sustains United Nations and regional mechanisms alike.

Prof. van den Herik, as moderator, invited all panelists to reflect on critical questions regarding how their individual accounts of peace might be challenged or contested. they encouraged speakers to examine the limits and assumptions of their own frameworks and to consider alternative perspectives on peace, justice, and the role of law. Following these reflections, they opened the discussion to the floor, facilitating a dynamic exchange between panelists and audience members. their moderation emphasized the importance of dialogue and reflexivity in understanding peace as a multidimensional and contested concept, while ensuring that the panel's discussion remained coherent, interactive, and intellectually rigorous.

Closing Session

In her closing remarks, after thanking everyone, Dr. Nilüfer Oral explained that she saw this conference as having launched a project on peace and international law; and that the conference - like the "Bandung moment" several speakers referred to - could be seen as a "Singapore moment." She expressed satisfaction that the conference was an important step in reformulating our thinking , perspectives and narrative on how we can use all the tools international law provides to promote international law as an instrument for peace. She hoped that this important discussion would continue.

Key Takeaways:

1. Peace as a Core Goal: International law must prioritize peace proactively, not just as a response to conflict, integrating it into legal education, norms, and institutions.

2. Inclusive and Contextual Design: Effective peace requires inclusive negotiation, trust-building, local ownership, and recognition of historical and colonial legacies, especially for Global South actors.

3. Legal Mechanisms to Enable Peace: International and regional courts, UN peacekeeping, and dispute resolution bodies actively prevent, manage, and transform conflicts, beyond delivering formal verdicts.

4. Trade and Integration Matter: Multilateral trade systems and regional integration can sustain positive peace if grounded in equality, development, and social justice.

5. Restorative and Transitional Justice: Mechanisms like hybrid tribunals and residual courts contribute to reconciliation and societal healing, framing peace as an ongoing process.

6. Normative Reimagination: Law, diplomacy, and civil society must dismantle silos and reinterpret norms creatively to address modern challenges like migration, climate change, and structural inequalities.