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Law and the International Order

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It is tempting to conclude that international law's influence is receding in a context where power struggles are in the ascendant, especially between dominant nations. But the law still carries weight: as the ultimate constraint on the use of violence, as a shared language for all human communities, and as a framework for action for those who seek to invoke it. It doubtless needs to be rethought and adapted to changes in international relationships, but without losing sight of its day-to-day importance.

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In October 1998, against the backdrop of a decade scarred by the Balkan wars, the Rwandan genocide, and emerging conflicts in Kosovo and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Judge Rosalyn Higgins observed that: "[c]haos appears to be all around us. It is hard not to share the sentiment that the international order today consists of disorder. And yet that disorder is surely not random, but is rather the consequence and result of the overall international system that obtains today. Chaos is an undeniable part of the international system, but certainly is not a satisfactory description of the international system".[2] She concluded that international law is a facilitating discipline, its purpose being "to assist in the achievement of an international stability that is consistent with justice and the realization of shared values".

1. This article is based on a version of the "Lecture in Transnational Justice" organized by the Centre for Transnational Legal Studies, delivered by Professor Webb in London on April 8, 2026.
2. R. Higgins, "International Law in a Changing International System", *Cambridge Law Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 1, 1999.

Writing more than a quarter of a century later, it is tempting simply to echo her opening words: chaos appears all around us. Today's conflicts have multiplied from Ukraine to Gaza, from Sudan to Iran. In 2024, there were 61 active State-based conflicts—the highest number since 1946[3]—and the highest level of conflict-related deaths in 30 years.[4] Amid nuclear threats and a "new normal" of high conflict levels,[5] the Doomsday Clock is at 85 seconds to midnight, the closest it has ever been to catastrophe. In the first three months of 2026 alone, the United States (U.S.) has withdrawn from 66 international organizations; launched a large-scale military operation in Caracas; captured the sitting Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and transported him to New York to face trial on narco-terrorism charges; launched a joint military offensive with Israel against Iran; killed Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in airstrikes on Tehran; and launched joint military operations in Ecuador against designated terrorist organizations.

The response of many has been to challenge the continued role of international law in the international order. In his instantly famous Davos 2026 speech, Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney called on middle powers to "stop invoking rules-based international order as though it still functions as advertised". This sentiment has been echoed in academic reactions to President Donald Trump's latest actions. Yuval Shany and Amichai Cohen argue[6] that whilst the international legal order has not been "irreparably broken", we have now moved toward a return to "illegal but legitimate" justification and a reemergence of the "right of self-preservation". Stacie E. Goddard and Abraham Newman argue[7] that we may be witnessing the emergence of a neo-royalist world order, dominated by powerful patrons and informal hierarchies. Guglielmo Verdirame and John Bew warn[8] of the danger "that we end up as curators of an old system rather than active participants in a new world in which power is being more nakedly asserted". Others characterize[9] international law as a "moral ghost" hovering over the world.

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3. S. Aas Rustad, "Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946-2024", *PRIO Paper*, The Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2025, available at: www.prio.org.
4. K. Ahmed, "Battlefield Deaths from Global Conflicts Hit 30-Year High, Study Finds", *The Guardian*, June 22, 2024, available at: www.theguardian.com.
5. "Conflict Index & 2026 Watchlist", Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, 2026, available at: https://acleddata.com.
6. Y. Shany and A. Cohen, "The International Community at a Crossroads over Iran: The Reawakening of 'Illegal but Legitimate' or the 'Law of Self-Preservation'?", *Just Security*, March 6, 2026, available at: www.justsecurity.org.
7. S. E. Goddard and A. Newman, "Further Back to the Future: Neo-Royalism, the Trump Administration, and the Emerging International System", *International Organization*, Vol. 79, No. 1, 2025.
8. J. Bew and G. Verdirame, "British Statecraft Needs More than Internationalist Legal Orthodoxy", *The Telegraph*, March 29, 2026.
9. I. Mann, "Farewell to the Rules-Based Order", Verfassungsblog, November 8, 2024, available at: https://verfassungsblog.de.

In this article, we present a different picture. International law continues to have an important place in the international order: as a stabilizing force, as a framework, and as a common language. It is not perfect, and there is much work and innovation to pursue. But it would be a serious, even fatal, error to abandon it.

We begin by reflecting on the purpose of international law. The second section outlines three contemporary challenges facing the effective fulfilment of that purpose today. The final section considers where international law may go from here.

What International Law Was Designed to Do

What do we mean when we speak of "international law"? At its most practical, it is the framework governing the legal responsibilities of States in their conduct with one another and with private entities or individuals. Article 38(1) of the Statute of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) identifies three sources of international law: treaties, custom, and general principles of law recognized by nations. Judicial decisions and teachings of highly qualified publicists serve as subsidiary means for the determination of rules of law.

But international law is also a normative system—a "continuing process of authoritative decisions" that enables it to remain responsive to a changing political world by accommodating political and social factors rather than ignoring them. To speak of international "law" is to speak of something more than a static body of rules. As Rosalyn Higgins put it,[10] "[i]nternational law is the entire decision-making process, and not just the reference to the trend of past decisions which are termed 'rules'". It is this dynamic quality, orientated toward future policy alternatives as much as past decisions, that allows international law to reflect common interests.

Accounts of the function of these rules differ. For Hersch Lauterpacht, international law's central function is judicial.[11] For Hans Kelsen, international law determines the respective spheres of validity of national legal orders.[12] Mortimer S. Sellers argues that its fundamental purpose is "to

10. R. Higgins, "Policy Considerations and the International Judicial Process", *International & Comparative Law Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1968.
11. H. Lauterpacht, *The Function of Law in the International Community*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, p. 6.
12. H. Kelsen, *Principles of International Law*, New York: Rinehart, 1952.

advance justice", including corollary aims of peace and order.[13] Harold Hongju Koh makes a case for law as resistance, where international law is intended for use by less powerful actors to defend themselves against powerful States.[14]

We align most closely with the cooperation thesis. In 1964, Wolfgang Friedmann famously argued[15] that international law was shifting from a "law of coexistence" to a "law of cooperation"—from a system concerned merely with managing the boundaries between sovereign States, to one capable of advancing shared interests through States working together. This move from an essentially negative code of rules and abstention to organized and positive rules of cooperation reflects the reality that the international order is prone to disorder. The system provides States and other actors with infrastructure to have their disputes heard, and in doing so, can give them new reasons to disagree. As reflected in Rosalyn Higgins' earlier observation, international law permits, and can result in, chaos and disorder—but within a framework which renders such chaos structured and such disorder systematic.[16] It does not, nor has it ever, promised a world free of conflict or the self-interested behavior of powerful States.

Three Contemporary Challenges

International law currently faces at least three challenges. First, there is a challenge of the incentive for States to cooperate. Second, there is a challenge to the legitimacy of what is being cooperated around. Third, there is a challenge to the enforcement mechanisms that make cooperation meaningful. Each of these challenges strikes at a different dimension of international law's role: as a stabilizing force, a common language, and a framework.

Incentive: challenging international law as a stabilizing force

The cooperation basis for international law assumes that the States with the greatest capacity to shape and enforce international law have a systemic interest in its maintenance. If great powers can exit the system without bearing reputational or material consequences, the incentive

13. M. N. S. Seller, "The Purpose of International Law is to Advance Justice – and International Law Has No Value Unless It Does So", The American Society of International Law, 2018, available at: www.ila-american-branch.org.
14. H. Hongju Koh, *The Trump Administration and International Law*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
15. W. Friedmann, *The Changing Structure of International Law*, Londres: Stevens & Sons, 1964, pp. 60-61.
16. R. Higgins, "International Law in a Changing International System", *op. cit.*

structure underpinning cooperation collapses,[17] and international law's stabilizing function fails. As noted above, the U.S.—the hegemon most responsible for constructing the post-1945 rules-based order—has withdrawn from 66 international organizations. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, in flagrant violation of Article 2(4) of the United Nations (UN) Charter, and China's persistent pattern of forced labor involving ethnic minorities, further illustrate that three permanent members of the UN Security Council are actively undermining international law.

But cooperation incentives can still be sustained through several mechanisms. The European Union (EU)'s ongoing financial and institutional support for Ukraine following the U.S.' partial withdrawal of assistance in early 2026 shows middle and regional powers stepping into the gap left by hegemonic retreat rather than allowing the cooperative framework to collapse. Mark Carney has pursued what he calls "variable geometry"—different coalitions for different issues, based on common values and interests—by embarking on a diplomatic tour of India, Australia, and Japan, launching trade negotiations, critical mineral partnerships, and defense cooperation agreements.[18]

As opposed to multilateralism, this is sometimes called "minilateralism". The idea is that small groups can act faster and more flexibly than the universal forums that we are seeing deadlocked.[19] Bethlehem has suggested[20] that instead of operating through Conferences of the Parties that seem to move very slowly and with a lot of frustration, we could bring together the "Climate 6": the three States that hold roughly half of the world's rainforest (Brazil, the DRC, and Indonesia) and the three largest emitters (China, the U.S., and India).

There are also countervailing forces at the institutional level. As Alan Boyle and Christine Chinkin recognize, "a dissentient State—even the most powerful—cannot assume it will be able to dictate the outcome against the wishes of the majority".[21] Coalitions of like-minded States and non-State actors can act in conjunction to successfully promote legal

17. R. O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.
18. "Prime Minister Carney to Diversify Canada's Trade, Attract New Investment, and Secure New Partnerships with Visits to India, Australia, and Japan", Prime Minister of Canada, February 23, 2026, available at: www.pm.gc.ca.
19. J. Kenny, "What Can be Expected of International Law? Contemporary Developments and the Future of the International Legal Order", British Institute of International and Comparative Law, March 17, 2026.
20. D. Bethlehem, "Project 2100: Looking Back, Looking Forward. A 2020's Perspective on the International Legal Order", Arnold & Porter and the Lauterpacht Centre for International Law Lecture, November 13, 2023.
21. A. Boyle and C. Chinkin, *The Making of International Law*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

change through treaty-making, which can strengthen the negotiating power of weaker States and provide a structural counterweight to hegemonic pressure.

Legitimacy: challenging international law as a common language

The second challenge is to the legitimacy of what is being cooperated around, and with it, to international law's function as a common language. The Global South has long contested whether the rules-based order reflects genuinely universal values or the interests of Western architects, arguing that the system was constructed largely without their participation and has been maintained largely for others' benefits.[22] It has been argued that "practices, norms, histories and scholarly works of the Global South must be taken from the fringes to the center"[23] if international law is to command the legitimacy on which it depends.

But this relativism of rights is more apparent than real. As Rosalyn Higgins observed: "It is sometimes suggested that there can be no fully universal concept of human rights, for it is necessary to take into account the diverse cultures and political systems of the world. In my view, this is a point advanced mostly by states, and by liberal scholars anxious not to impose the Western view of things on others. It is rarely advanced by the oppressed, who are only too anxious to benefit from perceived universal standards."[24]

The selective enforcement of international law has been relied on as an illustration of the legitimacy deficit. Although, as the French saying goes, "*comparaison n'est pas raison*", the contrast between the international community's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine—including unprecedented sanctions and sustained institutional condemnation[25]—and its response to the conflict in Gaza, where calls for ceasefires were repeatedly vetoed and International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrants for Israeli officials were met with open defiance from Western States, has been cited as evidence that the rules-based order operates differently depending on whose interests are at stake. But this contrast is not as stark as it once

22. D. Van Den Meerssche, "Global South Perspectives on Methodology and Critique in International Law", *Leiden Journal of International Law*, Vol. 37, No. 4, 2024.
23. S. Hammouri, "When the Negation of Critique Becomes Bloody Business: To Be an International Lawyer in the Times of Genocide" in: T. Krever *et al.*, "On International Law and Gaza: Critical Reflections", *London Review of International Law*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2024.
24. R. Higgins, *Problems and Process: International Law and How We Use It*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 96.
25. See e.g.: "Russia's War Against Ukraine: EU Sanctions", Council of the European Union, available at: www.consilium.europa.eu ("massive and unprecedented sanctions"); UN General Assembly Resolution ES-11/1, March 8, 2022, paragraph 2: "deplores in the strongest terms".

appeared. At the time of writing, President Volodymyr Zelensky faces intense U.S. pressure to accept unfavorable peace terms, including demands that Ukrainian forces withdraw from parts of the Donbas still under Kyiv's control—territory that, according to a January 2026 survey, 54% of Ukrainians categorically refused to cede. And the ICC arrest warrants for President Vladimir Putin and Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova remain unenforced.

Nonetheless, the conduct of States today suggests that the system retains genuine, if imperfect, legitimacy across the globe. Two-thirds of UN Member States are currently making arguments based on international law in ICJ proceedings.[26] On climate change, the greatest collective challenge and opportunity of our time, courts around the world are being actively mobilized. We now have Advisory Opinions from the ICJ, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, as well as judgments and communications by the European Court of Human Rights and UN Human Rights Committee on climate-related issues.[27] A request for an Advisory Opinion from the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights is pending at the time of writing.[28] Participation spans every region and extends beyond civil society to other actors—from Pacific Island youth movements to senior Swiss women[29]—triggering historic cases and litigating the shared language of international law.

Nor have the universal values been abandoned by the Global South. The Hague Group—a coalition founded in January 2025 by Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Honduras, Malaysia, Namibia, Senegal, and South Africa, and now encompassing over 40 nations, including G20 members Brazil and Saudi Arabia—was formed in defense of international law. The Group's founding statement noted that its members were "guided by the

26. P. Webb, "Double Waiver of Immunity and Ripple Effects", *ICSID Review – Foreign Investment Law Journal*, 2025.
27. "Obligations of States in Respect of Climate Change. General List No. 187", *Advisory Opinion*, International Court of Justice, July 23, 2025; "Climate Change and International Law. ITLOS List of cases No. 31", *Advisory Opinion*, International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, May 21, 2024; "Climate Emergency and Human Rights. AO-32/25", *Advisory Opinion*, Inter-American Court of Human Rights, May 29, 2025; "Verein Klimaseniorinnen Schweiz and Others v. Switzerland. Application No. 53600/20", European Court of Human Rights, April 9, 2024; "Ioane Teitiota v. New Zealand. Communication No. 2728/2016", United Nations Human Rights Committee, October 7, 2020.
28. "Request for Advisory Opinion No. 001 of 2025: In the Matter of a Request by the Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU) for Advisory Opinion on the Obligations of States with Respect to the Climate Change Crisis", African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, May 2, 2025.
29. "History Made the World's Highest Court", Pacific Students Fighting Climate Change, available at: www.pisfcc.org; S. Schug, "How a Human Rights Case Brought by Swiss Women Could Reignite Climate Policy", *The Parliament*, April 12, 2024, available at: www.theparliamentmagazine.eu.

purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations" and "refus[ed] to remain passive in the face of international crimes". Members have called on all States to join their renewed commitment to "an international order based on the rule of law and international law, which, together with the principles of justice, is essential for peaceful coexistence and cooperation".

Enforcement: challenging international law as a framework for resolving disputes

The cooperation thesis relies on the reputational and institutional costs of illegality to discipline State behavior when conflicts do arise. There is much about the current moment to suggest those costs can be absorbed. Ukraine remains under sustained military assault. Azerbaijan's ongoing military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh continues despite the ICJ provisional measures. Israel's military operations in Gaza have generated ICJ provisional measures, ICC arrest warrants, and a substantial body of legal opinion concluding that core rules of international humanitarian law have been violated, yet Western arms supplies have continued largely uninterrupted. The U.S.' conduct against Venezuela and Iran in 2026, meanwhile, has shown that a powerful State can give belated, scattered and contradictory justifications for international law violations with relative impunity. The absence of an international judicial body with jurisdiction over U.S. conduct exacerbates this difficulty.[30]

But unlike domestic legal systems, international law has always operated without a centralized enforcement authority, and the cooperation function was never premised on the assumption that violations would be met with immediate sanction.[31] In 1952, Hans Kelsen referred to the "decentralization" of international law.[32] What the system provides is a normative framework within which violations must be justified, collective interests achieved, and disputes insulated.

Moreover, flagrant violations of that framework can themselves generate new cooperative initiatives. In an age where sovereignty is increasingly tied to industrial and resource resilience, to respond to the U.S.' sweeping tariffs on Canadian goods, Canada is actively entertaining exploratory talks to link the EU with the Trans-Pacific Partnership (a 12-nation Indo-Pacific trade bloc), to create a new trading block of 1.5 billion

30. "International Court of Justice and the United States of America", Geopolitical Thinker, March 2, 2025, available at: https://geopoliticalthinker.com.
31. M. Hakimi, "The Work of International Law", *Harvard Law Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 1, 2017.
32. M. Kelsen, *Principles of International Law*, *op. cit.*

people. This partnership would harmonize rules of origin and cumulate supply chains across nearly 40 jurisdictions, explicitly framed as a hedge against U.S. tariff coercion.

The Future of International Law

The three challenges examined here should not be minimized. But rather than letting them undermine the role that law can play in the international order, we argue that we must instead consider what international law can continue to achieve, and what it can be asked to do differently. It is to these questions that we now turn.

There is a temptation, in moments of crisis, to conclude that the international legal order is uniquely endangered. That the levels of non-compliance visible today are without precedent and that the system is, finally, beyond repair. That temptation should be resisted. The debates provoked by the latest atrocities are not new. They were seen after every moment of chaos that the international community has endured, and each time, the obituaries proved premature. It was in 1979 that Louis Henkin made his now-famous observation that "almost all nations observe almost all principles of international law and almost all of their obligations almost all of the time".[33] That observation remains true today.

We need to recall what a lawless world can lead to: the terrible costs of two world wars, the millions of deaths, the shattered societies and economies. Whilst these costs make clear the stakes of allowing the system to fall into atrophy, they also show what international law must be equipped to do, and expose the gap between its present form and what it must become.

Daniel Bethlehem has argued with some urgency that there is a need to reconfigure: to look beyond the crises of the present moment and ask what the international legal order should look like in the longer term, a question that the international legal community has been too slow to confront until now.[34] He observed that we, as lawyers, too often retreat into a defensive posture, ceding the field of strategic thinking to others at precisely the moment when long-term vision is most needed. The prohibition on the use of force should be strengthened, not qualified; the commitment to core human rights should be deepened, not traded away for easier engagement; and sovereignty should not be permitted to trump all.

33. L. Henkin, *How Nations Behave*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1979.
34. D. Bethlehem, "Project 2100: Looking Back, Looking Forward. A 2020's Perspective on the International Legal Order", *op. cit.*

That long-term vision requires resisting international law's tendency to operate as what Hilary Charlesworth[35] famously termed "a discipline of crisis". The crisis mindset narrows the horizon of legal imagination to the event in front of us, frames our task as a binary choice between competing principles, and mimics the approach of politicians "keen to truncate the range of policy options". It is also characterized by a lack of analytical progress—a tendency to move from crisis to crisis without accumulating wisdom. What is needed instead is what Hilary Charlesworth proposed as an alternative: an international law of everyday life, that attends not to the dramatic violations that demand rapid response, but to the structural conditions that make those violations possible.

What a reimagined international law would look like is currently up for debate, but it must be allowed to function in accordance with the changing legal order. In this regard, the trajectory of the world is still being written, but it is clear that it is not only great powers holding the pen. At the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly, gathered against a backdrop of conflicts powered by might and power, representatives affirmed that the rules-based order remains the "best defense" against the law of the strongest. The Dominican Republic argued that the anniversary "should not be a ritual of nostalgia", but a vibrant call to renew humanity's alliance with itself. Nigeria warned that the session should be "a moment of truth" to measure shortcomings and turn values into action. Switzerland observed that: "[w]e are in the midst of a critical phase, and the next chapter of history has yet to be written. This means that we can play an active role in shaping it".

Rather than repudiating the system, we contend that the better approach is one of "incremental creativity"[36]: deploying existing exceptions and mechanisms in innovative ways to generate meaningful progress, all while defending the core—especially the prohibition on the use of force and the fundamental principles that anchor the system—rather than giving into complacency and appeasement.

For international lawyers and scholars to realize this progress, Marko Milanović has proposed three action points. His first point is to defend democracy and the rule of law at home by speaking up against

35. H. Charlesworth, "International Law: A Discipline of Crisis", *The Modern Law Review*, Vol. 65, No. 3, 2002.
36. P. Webb, "From Crisis to Epoch: How to Understand this Era of International Law?", *Melbourne Journal of International Law*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2024.

democratic backsliding and advocating internally for the value and necessity of international legal compliance.[37] Second, he argues that we must hold our own States to account for international law violations. Third, Marko Milanović argues that we should embark on strategy prioritization—concentrating efforts on those rules most at risk in an increasingly authoritarian international environment and refusing to normalize their erosion through complacency.

We add three further action points to that list. First, we must continue to resort to litigation and judicial mechanisms. International, regional, and domestic courts remain among the most powerful instruments for articulating legal norms in the face of political resistance. The climate cases from around the world have clarified legal obligations of States in ways that will reverberate through domestic litigation and negotiations for years to come. Domestic prosecutions of Syrian officials for crimes against humanity through universal jurisdiction have shown that, where international mechanisms stall, domestic courts may fill the gap.

Second, we must promote the engagement of civil society and the cultivation of public constituencies for international law. The campaign that produced the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons demonstrated that determined civil society mobilization, working in partnership with like-minded States, can generate binding international instruments even against the resistance of major powers.

Third, we must equip and empower the next generation of international lawyers. The commitments described above will endure only if they are transmitted. There is both an obligation and an opportunity to ensure that future practitioners inherit not merely the technical tools of the discipline but also its purposes: an understanding of why these rules exist, what they protect, and what is lost when they are abandoned.

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International law, as Gerry Simpson observes, has "been killed off a thousand times—interred, disinterred, and critiqued to within an inch of its life".[38] And yet it continues, as he acknowledges, to fascinate and mobilize people—lawyers and students, Pacific Island youth and senior

37. M. Milanovi, "Dystopian International Law", *American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 120, No. 1, 2026.
38. G. Simpson, *The Sentimental Life of International Law: Literature, Language, and Longing in World Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Swiss women, former prosecutors and sitting judges—in ways that no dismissive account of the discipline can adequately explain.

International law has been compared to gravity: you do not see it, but it is there. It is there as a stabilizing force in the mechanisms for dispute settlement, in the condemnation of genocide, and in the provision of humanitarian assistance in times of armed conflict. It is there as a common language in the public safety that we value: in the fights against human trafficking and terrorism; the bans of child prostitution and pornography; the advancement of gender equality; and the prohibition of enslavement or torture. It is there as a framework in the coordinated legal arguments of two-thirds of UN Member States before the ICJ, and the climate cases brought by local communities. But it is also there in our daily lives: when we tell the time; use the same WhatsApp, Facebook, or LinkedIn worldwide; or even read Harry Potter books around the globe…

Rather than dwelling on the scale of the challenge and resorting to the crisis mindset, let us choose to feel hope, and put it into practice. Hope, as Angela Davis reminds us, "is a discipline. We should not have a passive relation to hope, but we should be generating and creating hope—that's the work of activists. We have to believe that a different world is possible".[39]

Our hope today is not unfounded. It is present in Fatou Baldeh, who survived female genital mutilation and then returned to the legal arena to defeat efforts to re-legalize it in the Gambia. It is present in Nadia Murad, who has refused, in the face of sustained impunity, to stop demanding that the sexual violence perpetrated against the Yazidi people be named, prosecuted, and punished under international law. It is present in Memory Banda, who watched her sister being forced into marriage at the age of eleven, and then spent the next decade mobilizing girls, community leaders, and ultimately her government to raise the legal marriage age in Malawi to eighteen, and continues to fight for this law to be enforced.

There is still much to hope for when it comes to the role of international law in the legal order, not because it is perfect, or even adequate to every challenge before it, but because we keep choosing it—as a stabilizing force, as a common language, as our framework.

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39. T. Coombes, "The Science of Communicating Hope: A Reminder of Why We Need Stories of Hope in Dark Times", Substack Hope-Based, February 12, 2025, available at: https://hopebased.substack.com.