

Africa, Culture, and International Law

October 17-18, 2025, Maputo, Mozambique

CALL FOR PAPERS

**14TH ANNUAL
CONFERENCE**



**AFRICAN
SOCIETY OF
INTERNATIONAL
LAW**



The African Society of International Law (AfSIL) is pleased to invite paper proposals for its fourteenth annual conference on the theme “Africa, Culture, and International Law.”

African cultural heritage constitutes one of humanity’s most diverse intellectual and artistic legacies, created over millennia by thousands of ethnic groups across 55 nations, and perpetually enriched by contributors from both the continent and its diaspora. From sophisticated mathematical principles in architecture, groundbreaking medical knowledge, and astronomical calculations, to complex philosophical systems like Ubuntu and advanced agricultural techniques, this heritage encompasses vast domains of human achievement. The continent’s artistic expressions have fundamentally shaped global culture—from the geometric precision of textile traditions like Kente, to musical innovations ranging from Mandinka djembe rhythms to contemporary Afrobeats, and the sophistication of visual arts spanning Benin bronzes to modern installations. This intellectual and artistic wealth, preserved across over 2,000 languages and passed down by communities, griots, and poets, has not only survived centuries of colonial suppression and looting but continuously evolved, influencing global culture even under subjugation—from the birth of blues, jazz, and salsa to the foundations of modern art, from literary traditions to contemporary fashion.

Today, African culture stands at a pivotal moment on the international stage. While its cultural heritage has long faced depletion, appropriation, and displacement, we are now witnessing a surge in its global influence and recognition. The success of Afrobeats, alongside the rising prominence of African fashion and art in global markets, underscores how African culture is shaping contemporary creative industries.

On the other hand, the urgency of cultural heritage protection in Africa has been starkly illustrated by recent conflicts on the continent. The destruction of ancient manuscripts and mausoleums in Timbuktu, Mali—recognized as war crimes by the International Criminal Court—and the current threats to Sudan’s archaeological treasures demonstrate how armed conflicts continue to endanger irreplaceable cultural heritage. Beyond active conflicts, the persistent challenge of illicit trafficking in cultural objects calls for innovative legal responses and stronger coordination between national, regional, and international authorities.

The conference seeks to explore how international law has historically mediated African cultural expressions and heritage—sometimes enabling their displacement, other times offering protection—and how it can be shaped to better serve African cultural interests and innovation in the future. This includes not only addressing historical injustices through restitution and reparation, or reinforcing current frameworks for the protection of cultural heritage, but also developing robust legal frameworks to protect and promote African cultural industries in the global marketplace. As African cultural

expressions gain unprecedented international recognition and market value, we must ensure that the benefits flow back to African communities and creators. This requires careful consideration of how various branches of international law can be mobilized to protect African interests while enabling cultural exchange and economic opportunity. Additionally, it requires examining how African culture, narratives and legal practices, long marginalized in international legal discourse, have in fact influenced international law and can continue to enrich international legal frameworks. The conference will thus provide an opportunity not just to consider how to make international legal culture more inclusive, but also to ideate and innovate, from a place of agency and excitement, as Africa's foremost scholars and practitioners in international law and culture gather to share and build upon their latest and boldest ideas.

Conference Themes

Theme I: Historical Justice and Legal Issues related to Restitution of Looted African Art and Artifacts

- State responsibility and reparations for colonial cultural dispossession
- Legal frameworks for restitution of cultural artifacts: investigations, litigation, alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, and negotiations
- Immunity issues in cultural heritage litigation
- Digital repatriation and virtual museums: legal status and legal implications

Theme II: Contemporary Protection of African Cultural Heritage and Cultural Practices

- Implementation of the 1970 UNESCO Convention in African contexts
- Protection of cultural heritage in conflict and post-conflict situations: the examples of Mali and Sudan
- Role of regional and international institutions in heritage protection
- Protection of traditional knowledge systems, cultural heritage, and cultural practices and the environmental threat
- Intangible cultural heritage preservation
- International disputes concerning the protection of cultural heritage

Theme III: Intellectual Property Frameworks for the Protection of African Traditional Knowledge and Cultural Expressions

[Traditional knowledge (TK) is knowledge, know-how, skills and practices that are developed, sustained and passed on from generation to generation within a community, often forming part of its cultural or spiritual identity.

Traditional cultural expressions (TCEs), also called “expressions of folklore”, may include music, dance, art, designs, names, signs and symbols, performances, ceremonies, architectural forms, handicrafts and narratives, or many other artistic or cultural expressions.]

- Implementation of the WIPO Traditional Knowledge Action Plan in African contexts
- Enforcement of the Swakopmund Protocol on the Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Folklore within the Framework of the African Regional Intellectual Property Organization (ARIPO)
- Traditional cultural expressions in fashion and design industries: protection of traditional design rights, issues related to cultural appropriation

Theme IV: African Creative Industries in International Markets

- Legal framework for the global African music industry (Afrobeats, Amapiano): cross-border music licensing, streaming rights, royalties
- Contemporary African art market: issues related to international sales contracts, authenticity, provenance, export controls
- Legal issues related to filmmaking in general and Nollywood in particular, as one of the largest film industries: copyright and intellectual property, distribution and trade law issues, dispute resolution
- Cultural industries under the African Continental Free Trade Area and WTO frameworks
- International contracts and African creators’ rights (art, fashion, music...)
- Digital markets and cultural industries: blockchain-based rights management under international IP law, AI-generated works and copyright implications
- Issues related to foreign investments in creative industries in Africa: protection of investment, dispute resolution, cross border intellectual property litigation

Theme V: Cultural Rights in International Human Rights Law

- Cultural rights in international human rights law (ACHPR, ICECSR...)
- Collective cultural rights claims before regional and international jurisdictions
- Cultural identity of indigenous communities and self-determination under international law

Theme VI: Regional Integration and Cultural Governance in Africa

- Role of the African Union, the African Regional Intellectual Property Organization (ARIPO) and other regional organizations in cultural promotion and protection
- History of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) practices and initiatives to promote African culture across the continent, for instance adoption of the Cultural Charter for Africa (1976), coordination of Union of National Radio and Television of Africa (URTNA)

- Regional economic communities and cultural policy
- Enforcement mechanisms for regional cultural protection

Theme VII: Africa and the Culture of International Law

- Influence of African cultures on international law
- African narratives in international law
- African customary law and international law
- Africa and the culture of international legal education

Paper proposals may address one or more of these themes or other related topics that advance our understanding of the intersection of Africa, culture, and international law.

Submission Guidelines

Please submit an abstract of 250-500 words (in English or French), along with:

- Title of the paper submitted
- Author's name and affiliation
- Brief biography or CV
- Contact details

All submissions should be sent to contact@afsilsadi.org

Timeline

- Abstracts due: 21 February 2025
- Notification of acceptance: 14 March 2025
- Draft papers due: 15 August 2025

Venue and Expenses

The conference will take place in Maputo, Mozambique. No virtual participation will be possible. AfSIL is unable to cover travel and accommodation expenses for participants.

For any questions regarding the conference, please contact contact@afsilsadi.org