



## Boğaziçi University International Law Conference

### JUSTICE AND RECONSTRUCTION IN POST-CONFLICT SOCIETIES

5 - 6 July 2025

Conflicts, and wars inevitably raise a fundamental question for the affected societies: what comes next? These upheavals generate both expectations and conditions for transformation, offering possibilities for renewal yet risking further fragmentation and failure. Contemporary international law itself is a product of conflict—emerging as both a tool and a post-conflict reconstruction project. Its institutionalisation followed the devastation of European wars and, in this sense, international law repeatedly promises the containment of violence and the realisation of justice yet frequently delivers the opposite. Can international law serve as an emancipatory tool in post-conflict societies—such as Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Palestine, and the Congo—or is it structured to exacerbate global power hierarchies?

Post-conflict reconstruction is not a neutral process; it is embedded in histories of colonial domination, foreign intervention, and economic extraction. International law operates not merely as a framework for regulating post-conflict spaces but as a mechanism of liberal peacebuilding, reinforcing dependency and exploitation under the guise of stability and reform. The post-colonial state, born into a dynamic of vulnerability and predation, remains subject to imperial interventions: from military coups to the forced imposition of neoliberal economic policies. Iraq serves as a striking example of this trajectory. Initially framed as a model for multilateral action in the 1990s, its invasion in 2003 became one of the most egregious violations of international law, deepening domestic fractures and destabilising the wider region. Today, the ongoing security threats in Iraq and their consequences are invoked as justifications for continued US military presence, including in Syria. Inspired by such events of the past decades, this conference will examine the complex role of international law in the aftermath of conflicts.

Across regions that have been subjected to neo-colonial interventions, instability is often framed as an intrinsic characteristic. Yet, such instability is not an organic outcome of internal dynamics; rather, it is a condition manufactured through layers of legal, material, and political violence. We thus invite colleagues to explore the paradoxes of international law's post-conflict engagements, and its oscillation between inertia and selective activism as evidenced by the contrasting responses to conflicts in Syria and Ukraine. Despite its structural biases and failures, international law continues to generate expectations among communities seeking justice with the promises of democracy, development, and stability, continuing to inspire—mystify—post-conflict states.

In light of shifting global dynamics, we aim to explore alternative approaches to just reconstruction that centre indigenous legal, cultural, and economic knowledge, challenging dominant liberal narratives. We welcome contributions from scholars, practitioners, and activists who are interested in rethinking the role of international law in post-conflict contexts and generating new conversations about transformative and emancipatory approaches to justice that gaze beyond the usual flawed parameters.

## Central Themes

### **1. Security and Order**

Security transcends its own value after conflict, war, or revolution, as uncertainty on the ground prevails. It manifests in many ways, such as maintaining social stability, improving economic relations, and enforcing the law. Despite fundamental challenges, post-conflict environments, with a new social consensus, offer opportunities to develop an indigenous security understanding—a new vernacular for the globe. Where does security emerge after conflict: from the international community or local populations? Do security regimes imposed by international actors align with local aspirations or extend global power structures? Does ‘securitisation’ justify ongoing external interventions, and to what extent does it undermine local agency in governance and law enforcement?

### **2. Refugees, Return and Rebuilding**

Returns become complex, particularly in protracted conflicts. Refugees, having built connections and new lives in host countries, may struggle with returning, especially considering conditions in war-torn homelands. Meanwhile, host governments’ early emphasis on repatriation can fuel anti-refugee sentiment when returns are slow. These raise critical questions: What might refugee-centred return approaches look like? How can host country and refugee interests be reconciled? Meanwhile, returning refugees’ experiences in host countries can be invaluable for rebuilding. How can such experiences be institutionalised for effective reconstruction? What measures ensure smooth reintegration with local populations who remained in the country? What roles can non-state actors, NGOs, and international organisations like UNHCR and IOM play in this process?

### **3. The Contentious Terrain of Constitution-Making**

Constitutions are often born out of crises. Wars, revolutions, or periods of profound social upheaval—further complicates the task of crafting lasting frameworks. This raises critical questions: Under what circumstances does constitution-making become a viable undertaking? What are the key challenges in balancing competing interests and negotiating compromises during constitution-making, particularly in deeply divided societies? To what extent do external actors and international norms influence constitution-making processes? How can constitution-making processes address past grievances and injustices?

### **4. International Economic Law (IEL) and Post-Conflict Recovery**

Post-conflict societies face unique challenges in rebuilding economies, and ensuring sustainable development. IEL can act as a double-edged sword in these contexts: offering much-needed frameworks for stability and growth or posing risks of exacerbating inequities or regulatory constraints. These trigger the following essential questions: How can investment, trade and finance regimes attract foreign investment,

rebuild infrastructure, and foster resilience while balancing the rights of states, investors, and local populations? Can IEL integrate reparations and transitional justice? How can IEL ensure investment and trade contribute to peace and sustainability rather than injustice or impunity? How does the Bretton Woods legal order shape post-conflict reconstruction, and how can international law support more just, sustainable, and locally driven models?

## **5. Whither Sanctions: Recovery or Isolation?**

Sanctions, often propagated as stabilisation tools, obstruct reconstruction, and economic development in post-conflict societies. Sanctions might weaponise global finance, cutting off aid, investment, and markets, forcing economies into informal networks and alternative financial systems. Do sanctions serve as economic warfare, extending conflict in disguise to shape and control post-conflict reconstruction according to the agendas of global powers? Can sanctions be reimagined as reparative justice rather than coercion? This theme invites contributions to rethink sanctions as instruments oscillating between legal mechanisms of justice and tools of neo-colonial control, shaping the political and economic futures of recovering nations.

## **6. International Courts and Post-Conflict Justice**

International courts play a central role in delivering justice to victims, resolving international disputes, and fostering post-conflict stability. However, their effectiveness is often constrained by geopolitical biases, enforcement challenges, and selective application. Similarly, Western-centric transitional justice models, which prioritise retributive trials and truth commissions, frequently marginalise local epistemologies and reparative frameworks. This theme examines the potentials and contradictions of these institutions, including international criminal justice bodies, in shaping post-conflict accountability, alongside the role of regional courts, hybrid tribunals, and universal jurisdiction. Discussions may also explore corporate accountability through strategic litigation, human rights bodies, or alternative legal mechanisms for international law violations.

## **7. The Ecology of War and Peace**

Conflicts devastate ecology, yet accountability mechanisms remain fragmented. How can states, especially occupying powers, corporations, and individuals be held responsible for environmental harm —including the impact of depleted uranium, landmines, and chemical weapons—? How can post-war justice frameworks integrate environmental and ecological reparations and restorations as well as compensation mechanisms? How can international law evolve to incorporate environmental justice as a core element of transitional justice and post-conflict recovery? The theme also opens the floor for practical, legal and theoretical approaches to address the complexities of protecting both natural and cultural heritage during peacebuilding and reconstruction.

### **8. Maritime Rights and Reconstruction**

Maritime disputes often arise in post-conflict reconstruction, particularly in littoral states where shifts in sovereignty, jurisdictional and resource claims, and marine boundaries shape regional stability. This theme addresses the delimitation of maritime zones and rights in pressing cases such as Palestine, Syria, and Ukraine to assess how post-conflict legal and political frameworks will define sovereignty, security, and economic dependencies in the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean. Prominent issues include port reconstruction, fisheries, and offshore energy resources while avoiding external economic dependencies; accountability and reparations for war-related environmental destruction; and the integration of sustainable blue growth with post-war infrastructural needs to ensure both economic recovery and ecological preservation.

### **9. Civil Society, Regional Organisations and Reconstruction**

Post-conflict reconstruction is often framed as a state-led or international initiative, yet non-state actors also play a crucial, and sometimes contested role in shaping transitional justice, governance, and economic recovery. Civil society can contribute to reconstructing social fabrics fractured by war and rebuilding identity. On the other hand, non-state actors often step into governance vacuums, providing social services and transitional justice mechanisms. Does this enhance popular participation, or does it substitute for state responsibility and entrench dependency on international donors? This theme addresses how local communities reclaim their agency through cultural resistance, and counter-hegemonic education, resisting the imposition of externally determined narratives of justice and development.

### **Conference Format**

Each panel will comprise three to four presenters and a moderator. Each presenter will be allotted 15 minutes for their paper. The conference will be held in English only.

### **Submission procedure**

The deadline for abstract submission is April 27, 2024. Please submit your abstract (max. 300 words) via our website (<https://bilc.bogazici.edu.tr/submit-abstract>). Abstracts will be selected on the basis of their originality and relevance to the Conference theme.

### **Time and Venue**

The Conference will be conducted in person on July 5-6, 2024, at Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, Türkiye.

### **Costs**

There is no participation fee. Funding for travel and accommodation expenses is available for a limited number of selected papers.



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