



Right to Life at Sea: Navigating Peace, War and Uncertainty

Conference dates: **16-18 March 2027**

Venue: Norwegian Centre for the Law of the Sea, UiT the Arctic University of Norway,
Tromsø, Norway

The right to life occupies a central place in international human rights law. Its application at sea, however, raises a distinctive set of legal and practical questions arising from the interaction of multiple legal regimes, overlapping or fragmented jurisdiction, and the involvement of a wide range of public and private actors. These questions arise in contexts including migration, search and rescue, naval warfare and maritime conflicts; maritime law enforcement and security, commercial shipping, fishing, and offshore work.

This conference will examine the content and application of the right to life in the maritime domain, with particular attention to the relationship between human rights law, the law of the sea, maritime law, labour law and other relevant bodies of international law. It seeks to clarify the scope of applicable obligations, identify areas of legal uncertainty or uneven protection, and assess how the right to life can be given more effective practical expression at sea.

We invite papers addressing the following themes:

- **The content and scope of the right to life at sea:** e.g. positive and negative obligations, due diligence, prevention of foreseeable loss of life, investigation, accountability and access to effective remedies.
- **Duty-bearers and responsibility at sea:** e.g. the respective obligations and responsibilities of flag, coastal and port States; naval, coastguard and rescue authorities; shipowners, employers, masters, private security providers and other non-State actors.
- **Jurisdiction, extraterritoriality and protection gaps:** e.g. the application of human rights obligations beyond territorial waters; questions of effective control, authority and attribution; overlapping jurisdiction; and situations in which responsibility is contested, fragmented or unclear.
- **Variable standards of protection:** e.g. differences in the protection afforded according to location, legal status, vessel registration, nationality, migration status, employment relationship or the identity of the responsible authority.
- **The relationship between the right to life and other rights:** e.g. rights relating to liberty and security, health, non-refoulement, decent working conditions and access to remedies. This also encompasses the relationship between human rights law and international humanitarian law.



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The Conference will explore these cross-cutting themes in three main contexts:

1. **Use of force in the maritime domain:** the legal standards governing force in laws of naval warfare; policing; interdiction; anti-piracy; border control and maritime security operations; attacks on merchant vessels and seafarers; and current conflicts.
2. **Search and rescue at sea:** duties to render assistance; rescue coordination; disembarkation; the treatment of persons in distress; and the interaction of maritime, refugee and human rights obligations.
3. **Occupational risks to life at sea:** the prevention of fatalities and serious harm in shipping; fishing and offshore industries including unsafe vessels, fatigue, inadequate training, hazardous working conditions and employer or regulatory failures.

We welcome a variety of approaches or methods, but papers that examine points of tension between different legal regimes, identify gaps in existing standards, or offer concrete proposals for greater coherence and accountability are particularly encouraged.

Colleagues interested in presenting a paper at the Conference are invited to submit an abstract of up to 800 words, together with a short biographical note of up to 250 words, in one single document to rbarnes@lincoln.ac.uk by 22 November 2026. Abstracts must include a title and should clearly identify the principal research question, argument, methodology and contribution to the conference themes. Please ensure you use the following title for email submissions: **'BlueRights WG1 Conference submission'** to assist tracking of submissions.

We look forward to welcoming you to Tromsø

Richard Barnes

On behalf of the organising committee (Jessica Schechinger, Alexander Lott, and Youri van Logchem)