



THE PROMISE INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AT UCLA

ANNUAL REPORT

2025

O U R F O U N D I N G S T O R Y

AWARENESS THROUGH THE ARTS

The Promise Institute owes its founding to Dr. Eric Esrailian, producer of the film *The Promise*. As the first feature film to tell the story of the Armenian Genocide, *The Promise* is a powerful example of the way art can connect history to action. The Armenian Genocide began in 1915, and in time more than 1.5 million people would perish in an atrocity driven by ethnic and religious intolerance.

Following the film's premiere, Dr. Esrailian and fellow producer Anthony Mandekic used the film's proceeds to launch our Institute. "The Promise Institute is so named because we are making the promise to refugees and people suffering from injustice that we will create the tools and train the people to address these crises."



The 2023 launch of the Europe location of The Promise Institute builds on this legacy, broadening the reach and impact of this work, and creating additional opportunities for law students training in the field of international justice. "This Institute is needed now more than ever," Dr. Esrailian said. "Given what is happening across the globe, it is clear what we risk when the perpetrators of human rights violations feel emboldened by the lack of consequences."

L A N D A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T

UCLA School of Law acknowledges the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Tovaangar (Los Angeles basin, So. Channel Islands). As a land grant institution, we pay our respects to the Honuukvetam (Ancestors), 'Ahihirom (Elders), and 'Eyoohiinkem (our relatives/relations) past, present, and emerging.

T H E Y E A R I N R E V I E W

In 2025, we witnessed unprecedented attacks on the rule of law and new levels of disregard for fundamental human rights. The Promise Institute for Human Rights at UCLA has approached these times with a renewed commitment to our mission to educate the next generation of human rights leaders and advance collaboration within our UCLA community in Los Angeles and around the world.

We are redoubling our efforts to meet this moment through education, legal advocacy, and scholarship. Our **clinical and experiential education** remains crucial as the world's need for skilled human rights lawyers becomes increasingly clear. This year, we had more students than ever complete the unique UCLA Law in The Hague program, and our Human Rights Litigation and Human Rights in Action clinics were oversubscribed. Our busy students have also rushed to fill the rosters of our pro bono projects, dedicating many hours of their time to advance human rights and accountability.

We retain our core values of **centering traditionally marginalized voices**, placing affected communities at the heart of our work. We expanded our educational offerings, with new courses on TWAIL and Black Traditions in international law, and supported post-graduate fellows in Sarajevo and in Ecuador. Our team has also continued its work in support of immigrants in the United States and abroad as well as communities unjustly deprived of their land in Honduras and across the African continent.

The Promise Institute also continues to deepen community collaboration at UCLA and beyond as a West Coast hub for human rights. In May we hosted the **2025 Human Rights and Humanitarian Forum at UCLA** together with the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, bringing together funders and humanitarian aid experts to address the importance of humanitarian action. The conference explored how cross-level collaboration—local, national, and international—can strengthen legal protections. In October we convened scholars from across the globe to discuss **Ecocide, Human Rights and Environmental Justice** at the University of London. This international conference showcased researchers, politicians, activists and diplomats in particular from the Global majority, and accompanies a dedicated Issue of the **International Journal of Human Rights**.

As we look ahead to 2026, we recommit to building on the intellectual resources at UCLA, and to training our students to further the work. We also acknowledge the many contributions of our Affiliated Faculty at UCLA Law and throughout UCLA whose deep expertise and commitment to human rights enrich all that we do. Thank you to you, our community, for standing with us in these significant times; the work of advancing education and human rights is work best achieved together.



CATHERINE SWEETSER
Interim Executive Director, Los Angeles



KATE MACKINTOSH
Executive Director, Europe



ANNA SPAIN BRADLEY
Faculty Director and MacArthur Foundation Chair

MISSION

To provide the premier legal education in the field of human rights; empower the next generation of human rights lawyers, scholars, and leaders; and transform the promise of human rights into reality for more people around the world.

VISION

Founded in 2017 at the UCLA School of Law, The Promise Institute for Human Rights at UCLA advances cutting-edge human rights education and scholarship, empowering the next generation of lawyers, scholars, and leaders to make meaningful impact in the world. The Institute serves as UCLA's hub for human rights education, research, and advocacy, with two locations at UCLA's School of Law and in Europe. Its vision is to promote globally inclusive approaches that connect people across borders and cultures through a common mission to promote universal human rights for all.

STRATEGIC GOALS

Provide the premier legal education in the field of human rights, offering globally-inclusive curriculum, and experiential learning opportunities through clinical education and internships.

Generate and support impactful knowledge production, research, and scholarship in human rights, international law, and related fields.

Advance research-driven initiatives and programs that promote universal human rights, working with, not for, those we seek to serve.

Serve as the intellectual hub for human rights at UCLA and on the West Coast.

Advance UCLA's mission and values as a public research university dedicated to education, research, public service, and the betterment of our global society.

LEADERSHIP



ANNA SPAIN BRADLEY

Professor of Law, Faculty Director, and MacArthur Foundation Chair



CATHERINE SWEETSER

Interim Executive Director,
Los Angeles



KATE MACKINTOSH

Executive Director,
Europe

ENDOWED CHAIRS



KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW

The Promise Institute Chair
in Human Rights



KAL RAUSTIALA

The Promise Institute Chair
in Comparative and International Law

LOS ANGELES OFFICE



JOSEPH BERRA
Human Rights in the Americas
Project Director



AMRIN VAJIFDAR
Program Coordinator



NATALIE MONSANTO
Communications Director

EUROPE OFFICE



AMANDA BROWN
Legal Associate



XUCHEN ZHANG
Legal Associate



JEANINE HOVIUS
Communications Director

RESEARCH ASSISTANTS



AYODELE BABALOLA

Europe



SANTIAGO BUSTOS GARCIA

Los Angeles



MOLLIE CUEVA-DABKOSKI

Los Angeles



JOHN DOVER

Europe



ANDREA MORALES QUIROZ

Los Angeles



AVA SCHUSTER

Europe

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity I've had to engage with leading scholars from a diverse range of academic and geographic backgrounds, particularly related to the topic of ecocide. From broad literature review, to focusing in on specific aspects of ongoing humanitarian and human rights crisis, my time with The Promise Institute has been exciting, intellectually stimulating, and substantive. I have been able to contribute to projects that were beyond the scope of what I could have hoped for, including a submission to the International Court of Justice.

JOHN DOVER J.D. '26

EDUCATION & STUDENT
OPPORTUNITIES



HUMAN RIGHTS CURRICULUM

A T U C L A L A W

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES FACING THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

Introduces students to international criminal law, then focuses on contemporary issues facing the International Criminal Court, with student papers published on ICCForum.com.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Examines the potential and limitations of international human rights law and international criminal law to protect the environment, with attention to the interrelationship between human health and well-being and that of the wider ecosystem.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND WAR CRIMES DIGITAL INVESTIGATIONS

Introduces the concepts and practice underlying human rights and war crimes digital open-source investigations, teaching practical skills and cutting-edge methodologies.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN INTERNATIONAL LAW

Examines the relationship of human rights to Indigenous Peoples' own laws and traditions, the self-determination of states and peoples, and the political traditions of nation states.

INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL LAW

Encompasses international crimes, the principles of jurisdiction, enforcement mechanisms, principles of international criminal responsibility, and procedural challenges involved in prosecution.

INTERNATIONAL DISPUTE RESOLUTION

A comprehensive exploration of the theory and practice of international dispute resolution drawn from international law, international relations, and conflict resolution.

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

An introduction to the law, theory, and practice of international human rights, together with the instruments, organizations, and arrangements that affect their implementation and enforcement.

LAWS OF WAR (INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW)

Provides a basic introduction to International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and explores some of the most pressing challenges that arise in the contemporary theory and practice of IHL.

PUBLIC INTERNATIONAL LAW

Introduces students to the basic concepts of public international law and the international legal system, dealing with a broad range of topics.

RECENTERING INTERNATIONAL LAW: BLACK TRADITIONS, TWAIL, AND GLOBAL CRITICAL RACE FEMINISM

Introduced in response to student demand, this class introduces students to the study and practice of international law from 1600 - present day by centering inclusive perspectives as the foundational epistemic approach while developing students' voices and skills as writers.

VISITING FACULTY 2025

These courses are funded by The Promise Institute as additions to the Law School curriculum.

Professor Gathii taught us to think critically about the efficacy of different regulatory regimes, particularly at the intersection of environmental, economic, and political justice. He exposed us to so much, from British impact litigation case law to socio-medical scholarship on vaccine apartheid, and he urged us to think beyond traditional political, temporal, and substantive legal boundaries. I cannot recommend the course more highly.

LUIS MARTÍNEZ, J.D. '25

HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE GLOBAL ECONOMY



JAMES GATHII

This J-Term 2025 course explored how the growing influence of the international human rights framework is implicated in settings such as overseas manufacturing of domestic companies, extractive mining industries, and China's huge infrastructure projects, particularly in Africa. Professor Gathii examined the history and theoretical origins of human rights in relationship to the international and regional legal framework, and how international, regional, and domestic courts — as well as other actors — have interpreted them.

CRITICAL ISSUES IN HUMAN RIGHTS



CHRISTINA HIOUREAS

This course was offered in a three-part series, one component of which was *Representing States and Advancing Human Rights before International Fora: Arbitration, Interstate Litigation, and the United Nations*. Focusing on the practice of international law and representation of sovereign States before international courts and tribunals, visiting faculty Hioureas drew on her own experience as head of the UN Practice Group at FoleyHoag, where she advances human rights through legal practice. Students deepened their understanding of major contemporary legal issues and honed legal reasoning/argumentation skills needed to practice law in these areas.

TRANSNATIONAL LITIGATION IN U.S. COURTS



KATHERINE GALLAGHER

This course covers transnational litigation with a focus on U.S. courts, centering the first half on jurisdictional basics for bringing claims while the second half details issues and affirmative defenses which arise when suing a corporation or government official. From key statutes to holistic appraisal of the legal landscape in this area, as well as larger advocacy strategies and partnership goals, this course trains students to understand which U.S. legal avenues are open to survivors of human rights violations and how to proceed with viable cases.

HUMAN RIGHTS LITIGATION CLINIC



The Human Rights Litigation Clinic and Garcia co-counsel (Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, Kirkland & Ellis LLP, and McGuireWoods) at a hearing at the Federal Courthouse in Downtown Los Angeles this November.

The Human Rights Litigation Clinic continues to handle cases on behalf of immigration detainees, unhoused people, and human trafficking victims.

This year, the Clinic was appointed class counsel in a case about the use of force at the Adelanto Detention Facility. The civil detainees there engaged in a peaceful protest about repeated lockdowns that were imposed on them in response to protests outside the facility. GEO Group, the corporation running the facility, used force against the detainees. Our clients allege that the corporation saturated their units with pepper spray and failed to adequately clean it afterwards or allow them to decontaminate properly.

In a major step forward in the case, the judge certified the plaintiffs as a class (meaning they can move forward as a class action suit), while denying Adelanto's motion for summary judgment.

The Clinic also supported lead counsel this June at the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in a human

trafficking case. Our clients were trafficked and forced to produce goods in Thailand, which a U.S. company then attempted to sell in the United States knowing that the goods were produced with forced labor. The key question in this case is about whether attempting to benefit from human trafficking and forced labor give the court jurisdiction. If we prevail, our clients will be able to pursue justice against the U.S. company that intended to profit off their enslavement.

Finally, the Clinic continues to support unhoused people as they insist on protection of their constitutional rights. Our clients were harmed by the City of Los Angeles, whose sweeps were and are conducted with a complete lack of due process. These sweeps result in people losing vital property—including property they need to stabilize their lives and help them secure housing in the future. Together with Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles and other co-counsel, we filed a motion for summary judgment early this fall on the lack of due process. The Clinic students attended a hearing in November and were able to hear firsthand from the judge about the constraints and realities which shape litigation. Prior students Amber Grimmer '26, Michelle Jimenez '25, and Cat Washington '25 were instrumental in investigating this case.

"Civil detainees do not give up their First Amendment rights under the California or federal constitutions when they are detained."

CENTRAL DISTRICT COURT

*Order Denying Defendant's Motion for Summary Judgment
Gonzalez v. The GEO Group, Inc., Case No. 2:22-cv-04014*

HUMAN RIGHTS IN ACTION CLINIC

The 2025 Human Rights in Action Clinic (HRAC) conducted field work in Honduras with our collaborative partner, the Consejo de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras (COPINH). COPINH is a Lenca organization founded by Berta Cáceres, the Indigenous environmental defender assassinated in 2016. COPINH asked the HRAC to accompany the struggles of eleven Lenca communities to obtain recognition of and legal title to their land and territory.

Our first task was to gather and organize the documentation of their claims. This consisted of unifying the COPINH files and obtaining, from the National Agrarian Institute and the National Property Institute, complete copies of their case files. We created a digital archive of the files that we systemized and reviewed for relevant information, and shared that with the COPINH team.

We then conducted field work with respect to three community struggles: La Nueva Esperanza, El Achiotal, and Rio Blanco. Rio Blanco is the community that resisted construction of a hydroelectric dam over the Gualcarque River, sacred to the Lenca people, and for which Berta Cáceres gave her life. We were able to obtain from the National Archives documentation of titles with regard to the respective land claims going back to the 18th century. We met with the communities of La Nueva Esperanza and El Achiotal to gather direct testimony of their

struggles. Each community has been criminalized for their attempts to occupy and gain title to ancestral territory. La Nueva Esperanza was forcibly evicted from their land and the community is now living on the side of the road under the surveillance of the National Military Police.

Upon returning to the United States, the Clinic continued their collaboration with COPINH, providing legal memos with respect to 1) analysis of the regulatory requirements, and the process for titling Indigenous lands and territories, and the strategy going forward in the case of Rio Blanco; 2) analysis and draft of an Executive Order to transfer state-owned property to the National Agrarian Institute for subsequent titling in favor of the community of La Nueva Esperanza; and 3) analysis of the legal justification for titling the community of El Achiotal under the international framework for the rights of Indigenous peoples. The clinic will continue to accompany these processes in the future.



El Achiotal community members took Clinic students on-foot through some of the contested territory.

UCLA LAW IN THE HAGUE

This key experiential program provides UCLA Law students with unparalleled opportunities to engage with international law and human rights. Participants intern in The Hague and visit the United Nations in Geneva, gaining firsthand experience at the heart of international justice.

This year, nine students will complete the program at prestigious courts, tribunals, and international organizations. At many of these institutions, we are unique in having established an internship pipeline for current law students.

The impact of the program extends well beyond the semester abroad: returning students enrich international law courses in Los Angeles by sharing their insights and experiences. In this way, we are steadily cultivating a cohort of graduates who see careers in international institutions not as distant aspirations, but as real and attainable paths.



Students Pelin Ensari, Kori Dalton, Alexandra Quintana, Amber Grimmer, Emily Robbins, and John Dover.



Students and Prof. Mackintosh at the UN Human Rights Council.

"If you decide to work in international law, the experience you gain and the connections you make will be invaluable. For everyone else, this program is an incredible opportunity to broaden your perspective on law and advocacy, and will help you stand out in any other area of law!"

HOLLY VELASQUEZ DUFFY

UCLA Law J.D. Student, Class of 2026



Student Aniq Chunara in the ICJ Courtroom in The Hague.

The background is an abstract composition of teal and orange textures. The teal occupies the upper left and central portions, while the orange is concentrated in the lower right. The textures are layered and painterly, with visible brushstrokes and gradients. The word "EVENTS" is centered in the upper half of the image.

EVENTS

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

A rigorous conversation on ecocide, human rights, and environmental justice

This day-long, hybrid conference in London convened scholars, diplomats, activists, and lawmakers from around the world to examine the emerging international crime of ecocide and its links to human rights and environmental justice.

The event was co-organized by our Europe office and hosted by the Institute for Commonwealth Studies, University of London. It provided a platform for rigorous legal debate and diverse global perspectives, with particular emphasis on voices from the Global South.



High Commissioner of Zambia, H. E. Macenje Mazoka.



Damien Short, Monica Lennon, and Samia Dumbuya.



UCLA Law in The Hague students during the Conference.

Across three panels, *Corporations and Colonialism, Accountability and Repair*, and *Human Rights and Environmental Stewardship*, speakers examined ecocide as a systemic outcome of extractive economies shaped by unequal power structures.

Discussions covered intent and sentencing in ecocide law, the importance of historical and cultural context for environmental justice for Indigenous communities, and contrasting perspectives on anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. Prize-winning poet Karen McCarthy Woolf closed the conference with poetry commissioned by Greenpeace.



Organisers Kingsley Abbott, Kate Mackintosh, and Damien Short with Baroness Rosie Boycott.

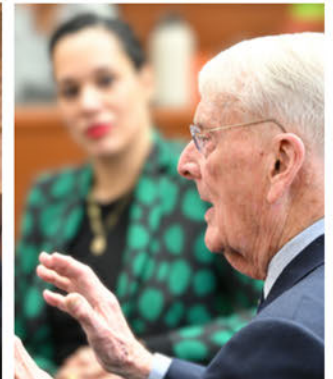
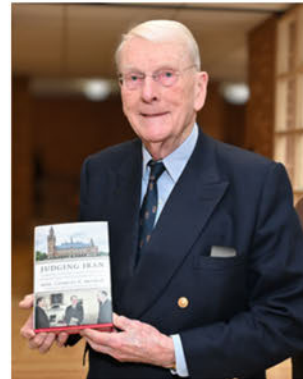
LOS ANGELES EVENTS



Professor Philippe Sands joined us this Spring to share his (then forthcoming) book *38 Londres Street: On Impunity, Pinochet in England, and a Nazi in Patagonia*. He covered central themes the law must consider if lasting justice is to carry the day, what they mean practically for lawyers, and how case law and global politics are shifting international law's original intent.



Human Rights in Action Clinic students shared their J-Term experiences during their report-back event this Spring. They dove into the legal frameworks impacting Indigenous and agrarian Honduran communities; they also discussed their experience working with the clinic, community engagement with Honduran community partners, and movement lawyering.



Faculty Director Spain Bradley launched the Judging International Justice annual lecture series this year, highlighting the role of international judicial thought in the promotion of human rights and strengthening the connections between practitioners and scholars. Our first annual event featured the Honorable Judge Charles N. Brower, who shared candid insights from his six-decade career.



Professor Frédéric Mégret's talk this Spring, "What's the Point of International Human Rights Law?" offered a longitudinal perspective on international human rights law and included a suite of global considerations, mapping the way that the law and the rules-based international legal order are interfacing with this moment in history.



This Fall's event, Human Rights in El Salvador: Deportation and Detention, featured lawyers and a UCLA Law student handling cases related to arbitrary detention there. One attorney discussed representing Salvadorans arbitrarily detained as part of the gang enforcement measures in the country, while another discussed representing clients deported to El Salvador from the United States.



This Fall, Visiting Faculty Katie Gallagher offered career advice on movement lawyering for human rights victims. A Senior Staff Attorney at the Center for Constitutional Rights, she recently won a \$42 million judgment for Iraqi detainees tortured at Abu Ghraib. "You have to trust your instincts about what kind of work makes you feel fulfilled," she said.



We were excited to welcome back the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative to UCLA campus this Spring for a joint event: the 2025 Human Rights and Humanitarian Forum. At a time of intensifying global challenges, the Forum brought together diverse voices, aiming to seed lasting partnerships and inspire innovative solutions for human rights and humanitarian causes.

Among a heavy-hitting lineup, some featured speakers are pictured to the left, including Professor Safiya Noble, Nobel Laureate Leymah Gbowee, UCLA Law student Ayisha Siddiq, Dr. Eric Esrailian, Dr. Alina Dorian, Comfort Ero, Interim Executive Director Cathy Sweetser, Faculty Director and Professor of Law Anna Spain Bradley, UCLA Chancellor Julio Frenk (pictured with Associate to the Chancellor Dr. Felicia Knaul), Chelsea Clinton, Aurora Initiative CEO Armine Afeyan, and UCLA Law Dean Michael Waterstone.

RESEARCH & SCHOLARSHIP



SCHOLARSHIP

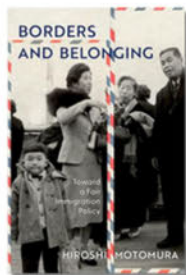
HIROSHI MOTOMURA

*Borders and Belonging:
Toward a Fair Immigration Policy*

Affiliated faculty member Professor Hiroshi Motomura, the Susan Westerberg Prager Distinguished Professor of Law and Faculty Co-Director of the Center for Immigration Law and Policy at UCLA School of Law, presented his book *Borders and Belonging: Toward a Fair Immigration Policy* at a seminar co-organized with the International Institute for Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague.

His book examines the different ways advocates in the United States and Europe make claims about the rights of immigrants, noting that Europeans tend to make human rights or “humanity” claims and Americans tend to make civil rights or “belonging” claims. He proposes a framework for thinking about immigration that balances the claims of humanity and national belonging, an approach that challenges conventional boundaries in both policy and discourse.

During the event dedicated to Prof. Motomura’s latest book (right), Legal Associate Amanda Brown shared her responses to the work based on her experience in Europe (below).



SCOTT CUMMINGS

“When Lawyers Attack the Rule of Law”

On the day Washington D.C. law firm Paul Weiss reached its deal with the Trump administration, Affiliated Faculty Member Professor Scott Cummings spoke to a packed room at the University of Amsterdam about the pivotal role lawyers have played – and continue to play – in the erosion of democratic institutions. The talk was based on his article, “When Lawyers Attack the Rule of Law.”

From spreading false claims of crises that undermine public trust, to replacing mainstream lawyers with radical loyalist lawyers, and blurring the lines between law and media, these strategies create openings for autocratic rule.

While Prof. Cummings’ article lays out the blueprint being used to dismantle democratic institutions, a process unfolding in real time across the globe with the United States at the epicenter, he also crucially offers a plan to halt and reverse democratic backsliding.



Prof. Cummings presenting at the University of Amsterdam.

SCHOLARSHIP

MÁXIMO LANGER

Universal Jurisdiction

In his new article in the Leiden Journal of International Law, “Living with impunity versus living in fear: Universal jurisdiction defendants, due process, and the use of democracies by autocracies to prosecute their opponents,” Professor Máximo Langer introduces a new analytical category of universal jurisdiction defendants: defendants who have moved abroad but whose home state is willing and able to prosecute them.

Turning universal jurisdiction on its head, Prof. Langer discusses how it can be used by autocracies to punish political opponents abroad and discusses safeguards that democratic institutions should have in place to prevent abuses. Prof. Langer draws upon his universal jurisdiction case database which The Promise Institute helped to fund.

Alien Tort Statute

In another new article “Immigration, Justice Remittances, and US Courts”, this time in *International Studies Quarterly*, Prof. Langer examines the implications of the Alien Tort Statute, which allows foreign nationals to seek civil remedies for international law violations which occurred on foreign territory.

The article argues that these civil remedies are justice remittances from the United States to the foreign countries where the violations occurred finding compelling evidence that immigrants are agents of justice who demand justice remittances from United States courts.

RICHARD STEINBERG

ICC Forum

Part course, part journalistic endeavor, the ICCForum (ICCForum.com) continues to generate global discussion of important issues facing the International Criminal Court (ICC), and to offer analyses of those issues by the world’s leading jurists, scholars, and policy analysts. Since it’s founding in 2010, debates on the Forum have been viewed by nearly a million visitors from over 200 countries.

The Forum’s most recent edition considers in what ways – and to what extent – the ICC is a political institution. In 2026, the Forum will pose questions on whether the crime of “ecocide” should be added to the Rome Statute and on what the relationship might be between the ICC and the proposed Crimes Against Humanity Treaty.

This year, Prof. Steinberg edited a third volume of the ICCForum’s most important analyses. The book, *The International Criminal Court: Legal, Policy, and Political Challenges*, addresses several issues of contemporary importance to the ICC, such as the extent to which the ICC might prosecute crimes perpetrated via cyberwarfare and the extent to which it is appropriate (or effective) for the United States to attempt to influence the actions of the ICC by means of sanctions. It also explores how cyber-evidence repositories, as well as digital- and open-source evidence, might facilitate the ICC’s work.

ECOCIDE & HUMAN RIGHTS

“Converging Standards? Ecocide Laws & Proposals in Comparative Perspective”

Legal Associate Xuchen Zhang and Kate Mackintosh published an article in the *Global Justice Journal* examining ten ecocide laws adopted or proposed since the 2021 release of the Independent Expert Panel’s definition. They find a clear convergence around that proposal but also important divergences. They consider whether a common definition of ecocide will ultimately emerge organically through domestic lawmaking or be established from the top down, for example through an amendment to the Rome Statute.

Ecocide Law Bibliography

Research Assistants Ava Schuster and John Dover updated our annotated bibliography on international criminal law and environmental protection at ecocidelaw.com. This comprehensive resource hub, first developed by UCLA Law students in 2020, provides a regularly updated collection of academic and legal material relating to ecocide law, including definition(s), history, research articles, existing laws and related topics.

Book Chapter: Ecocide and Human Rights

Senior Affiliated Fellow Lisa Oldring and Kate Mackintosh authored a book chapter, “The Crime of Ecocide Through Human Rights: Towards Environmental Protection and Justice”, in Burgers et al. (eds.), *Ecocide: Criminalising harm against the Environment* (T.M.C. Asser Press/Springer Verlag, forthcoming, December 2025). The chapter argues that a human rights approach to the crime reveals the disparate impacts of environmental destruction on vulnerable and

marginalized individuals and groups, and that prosecutions which reflect the reality of these lived experiences hold greater potential to contribute to environmental and climate justice.

Article: “Ecocide is the Missing Crime”

In a recent article published in *Icarus Complex Magazine*, Mackintosh states that when ecosystems collapse, so do the conditions for human dignity. Environmental destruction harms the most marginalized first; making ecocide a crime is not only an environmental necessity but a human rights imperative.

Journal Special Issue:

Ecocide, Human Rights and Environmental Justice

The Promise Institute (Europe) is co-editing a special issue of the *International Journal of Human Rights*, on “*Ecocide, Human Rights, and Environmental Justice*”. Building on a workshop held at UCLA in 2022, the journal brings together scholarship from around the world, exploring case studies from Jamaica, Canada, and Myanmar, the role of corporations and colonialism, and how notions of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism relate to human rights and environmental justice.

News Article: How wars ravage the environment – and what international law is doing about it

In *The Conversation UK*, Kate Mackintosh and senior academic at Queen Mary University of London Benjamin Neimark examine how war contributes to the climate crisis and how international law is beginning to respond. They highlight the long-term environmental and climate consequences of armed conflict.

PUBLICATIONS, POLICY &
PRO BONO WORK



GARÍFUNA TERRITORIAL REPARATION

A Report from the Field

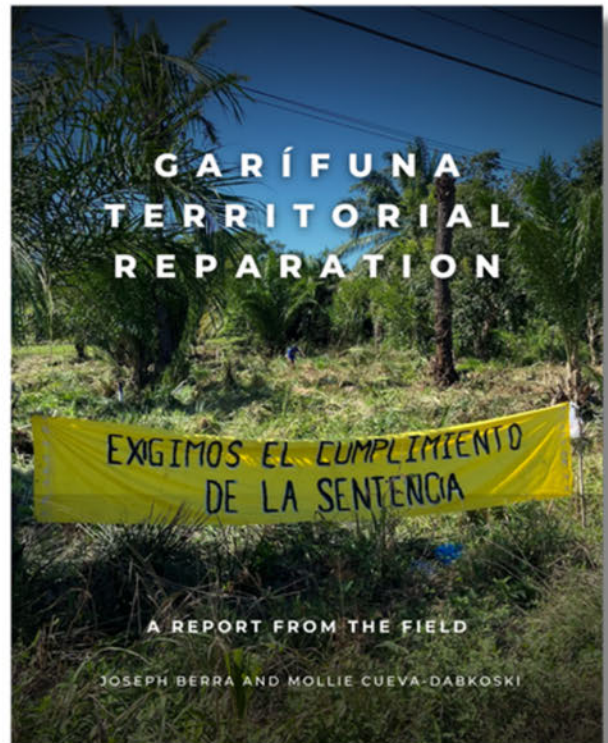
In honor of Honduras' African Heritage Month and in anticipation of the April 2025 commemoration of the 1797 arrival of the Garífuna people to the coast of what is now Honduras, we released "Garífuna Territorial Reparation: A Report from the Field."

Nearly 10 years after the Inter-American Court of Human Rights' decision in *Garífuna Community of Triunfo de la Cruz and its Members v. Honduras*, the Honduran state has failed to implement key provisions of the Court's order with regard to territorial reparation. This includes demarcation and delivering clear title to 1,022 hectares recognized as Garífuna traditional territory and the collective property of Triunfo de la Cruz.

The state's failure has resulted in further dispossession of Garífuna territory by third parties eager to take advantage of the land for tourism and residential development. This has led to increased social conflict and violence suffered by community members which the Court has characterized as an ongoing violation by the state of the community's human rights.

Co-authored by Human Rights in the Americas Director Joseph Berra and Mollie Cueva-Dabkoski (UCLA Law '25), the report draws from original fieldwork by the Human Rights in Action Clinic in coordination with the Organización Fraternal Negra de Honduras (OFRANEH) and the land defenders of Triunfo de la Cruz.

The Report highlights Garífuna self-determination and agency in reoccupying the territory adjudicated in their favor. It ends by charting the path forward towards territorial reparation, holding accountable both the state and the Court for monitoring and compliance with the Court's ruling.



Report available in English and Spanish on our website.

"What stands out most is that our ancestral rights and customary law take precedence. Powerful economic groups treat us like we don't exist, but our customary law is not extinguished, and we will not allow their invasion of our territory."

ALFREDO LÓPEZ

*Comité de Defensa de la Tierra y el Territorio (CODETT)
Garífuna community of Triunfo de la Cruz*

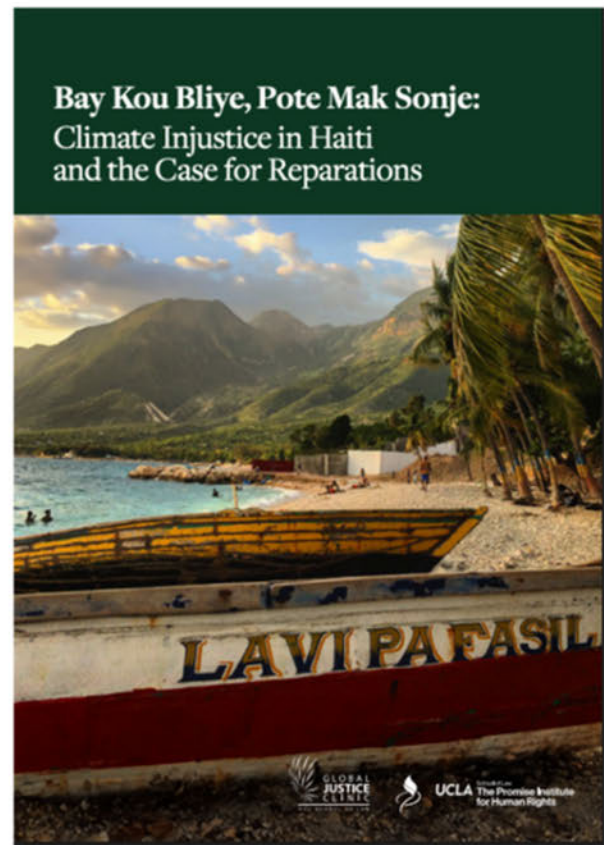
BAY KOU BLIYE,
POTE MAK SONJE

CLIMATE INJUSTICE IN HAITI AND THE CASE FOR REPARATIONS

The report *Bay Kou Bliye, Pote Mak Sonje: Climate Injustice in Haiti and the Case for Reparations* was produced by The Promise Institute's Former Racial Justice Policy Counsel and Director of our International Human Rights Clinic S. Priya Morley, together with the Global Justice Clinic at NYU School of Law and in collaboration with Haitian social movement organizations.

Haiti is one of the countries most harmed by the global climate crisis. The country's climate vulnerability is not just a product of its geography—it is also the result of centuries of racial injustice, originating in colonialism, slavery, and Haiti's "independence ransom" to France. There is little available research presenting the impacts of the climate crisis on Haitian people, analyzing the connections between racial and climate justice, or presenting demands for climate justice, including—critically—for reparations.

This report outlines the impacts of the climate crisis in Haiti, their colonial construction, and the legal and moral arguments for reparations to advance both climate and racial justice. It also touches on grassroots efforts in Haiti for climate resilience and to advance land rights, environmental justice, and community self-determination.



The report's cover image shows a small fishing boat on a beach with the words "Lavi Pa Fasil" painted on its side. In Haitian Kreyol this translates to "Life is Not Easy."

"This report is a crucial step in advocating for climate justice in Haiti and will undoubtedly spark more collaborations, research, and advocacy in pursuit of this goal."

E. TENDAYI ACHIUME

Professor of Law at Stanford School of Law
Former UN Special Rapporteur on Racism

ECOCIDE LAW ADVISORY

Ecocide Law Advisory is a partnership between The Promise Institute (Europe) and Climate Counsel, providing expert legal advice and training on the drafting and implementation of ecocide laws.

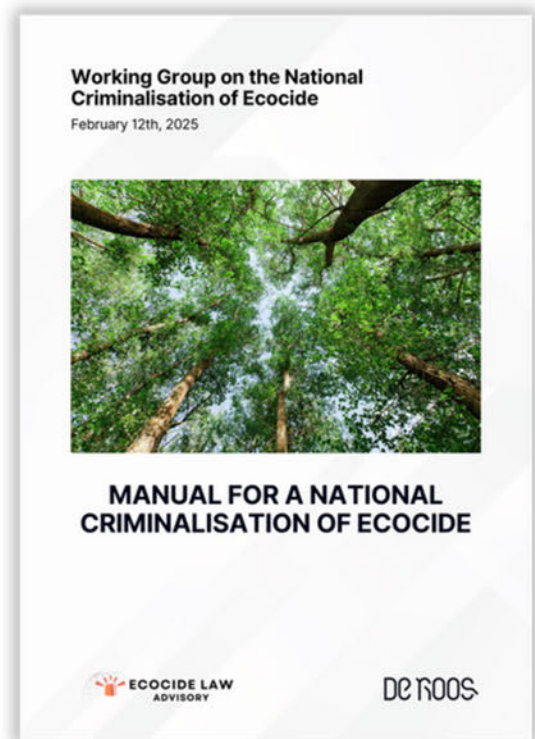
The Advisory supports lawmakers and institutions working to strengthen environmental protection through criminal law. It has advised governments in Belgium, Brazil, Iceland, the Netherlands, Scotland, Ukraine, and the UK, as well as Members of the European Parliament during the revision of the EU Environmental Crimes Directive (2024/1203).

Our work includes guidance and training for: Parliamentarians developing ecocide legislation, law enforcement officers investigating alleged acts of ecocide, civil society organizations monitoring implementation, corporate actors ensuring compliance, and state and non-state actors supporting the Rome Statute amendment process.

We also contribute to research and reflection on ecocide law through Ecocidelaw.com, a global knowledge hub featuring an annotated bibliography maintained by UCLA Law students and research assistants.



A packed room at the Ecocide Law Advisory launch and presentation of the manual in The Hague.



Cover of the Manual.

MANUAL ON THE NATIONAL CRIMINALIZATION OF ECOCIDE

In collaboration with the Working Group on National Criminalisation of Ecocide, chaired by former Dutch MP Lammert van Raan, Ecocide Law Advisory developed the Manual on the National Criminalisation of Ecocide.

The manual is a practical guide to help EU Member States implement the EU Environmental Crimes Directive, which entered into force in May 2024. It offers clear, practical solutions for the effective criminalisation of serious environmental harm and is available in English, French, and Italian. A concise two-page factsheet provides an accessible overview.

LEGAL INTERVENTIONS



COURT APPEARANCES

ICJ ADVISORY OPINION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

This July, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) delivered its historic Advisory Opinion on climate change, marking a major step in clarifying the legal framework for addressing the climate crisis. Faculty Director Anna Spain-Bradley described the decision as a “historic day for international law, for climate change, and for humanity.”

In the Advisory Opinion, the Court confirmed that States have binding duties under international law to protect the climate, and said failure to honor these duties can give rise to responsibility and claims for reparation.

In the December 2024 pleadings, Kate Mackintosh represented the State of Palestine, while Visiting Faculty Christina Hioureas represented Gambia, Liechtenstein, Namibia, and Sierra Leone. UCLA Law students were involved in research and preparation of the legal arguments.



The ICJ (shown above) unanimously affirmed the existence of a legal right to a “clean, healthy and sustainable environment.”

TESTIMONY IN HONDURAN COURT

Human Rights in the Americas Project Director Joseph Berra gave expert testimony on the right to consultation in Honduras this June. The ex-mayor of San Francisco de Ojuera, Santa Barbara, Honduras stood accused of violating the Indigenous Lenca community's right to consultation prior to authorizing construction of the Agua Zarca dam in Rio Blanco. Indigenous peoples have a right to consultation and free, prior and Informed consent before extraction of resources in their territories under the international human rights framework. This case is another effort in the search for justice and reparations after the 2016 assassination of Indigenous leader and staunch environmental protector Berta Cáceres in her home in Honduras.



Candles, images of Berta Cáceres, and other items in an offering for justice outside the Honduran courthouse during the trial.

AMICUS INTERVENTIONS

IACtHR ADVISORY OPINION ON CLIMATE

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights issued a landmark Advisory Opinion on the Climate Emergency and Human Rights (OC 32-25) this July.

We were gratified to see the Court align with key arguments developed in the amicus brief submitted by our team, which included faculty and students. Main points included applying a racial justice lens to the Court's standards and guidance to States, special focus on Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, and an intersectional approach to its analysis. We argued for affirmation of Indigenous knowledge systems as necessary elements to address the climate crisis, and for the affirmation of Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples' rights to territory and resources, and their informed consent prior to the extraction of resources in their territories.

Ultimately, the Court made groundbreaking progress in the development of the international law and human rights framework on climate and the environment on key issues. It represents a major step forward in understanding the human rights implications of the climate emergency and establishing State obligations and standards under international human rights law to respond to the global ecological crisis.



In addition to their Advisory Opinion, the Inter-American Court issued special infographics explaining States' obligations, a sample of which are shown here.

CARBON MARKETS AT THE AFRICAN COURT OF HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS

Legal Associate Amanda Brown and Research Assistant Ayodele Babalola led work co-authoring an amicus brief for the forthcoming Advisory Opinion on climate change from the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights'. The brief was submitted jointly with Climate Counsel, SOMO, and the Sudan Human Rights Hub. It focuses on the international legal obligations of States to protect human rights in the context of the carbon market industry.

Carbon offset projects led by companies in the Global North have been rolling out across the African Union without adequate safeguards including evicting Indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands.

These projects have been violating various individual and collective rights while extracting most of the benefits out of Africa, in what has been dubbed "carbon colonialism."

The brief highlights States' legal obligations to uphold human rights in this context, calling for climate action that is just, equitable, and sustainable, rather than one that reproduces patterns of exploitation in the name of climate change mitigation.



Among other partners, Amanda Brown and Ayodele Babalola worked with Resilient 40, a pan-African youth climate justice organization. Shown here is Michael Kakande, Chairperson of Resilient 40 (left) and Mr. Frederick Simon Binamungu, a member of the organization. Image taken from the Resilient 40 website.

CRIMINALIZING ECOCIDE AT THE AFRICAN COURT

The Promise Institute (Europe) team co-authored another joint amicus focused on the obligation to criminalize ecocide under international human rights law for the same proceedings, with a group of African lawyers and Stop Ecocide International.

The climate crisis represents an unprecedented threat to human rights in Africa, where communities that have contributed least to greenhouse gas emissions bear the brunt of devastating impacts including droughts, floods, food insecurity, displacement, and loss of life.

The brief draws on the African Charter for Human

and Peoples' Rights, as well as on customary international law. It argues that African states are obliged to use all reasonable means to prevent foreseeable harm to the human rights of people in their jurisdiction, as well as to offer effective remedies to those whose rights have been violated. The criminalization of ecocide, understood as severe ecological destruction, fulfills these legal obligations, and may be required when ecocide threatens to violate the right to life.

Introducing ecocide as an international crime builds on the foundation established by the Malabo Protocol and an emerging African legal and political consensus around the protection of the environment, including the climate system.



Located in Arusha, Tanzania, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights complements and reinforces the functions of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

ALUMNI & FELLOWS



POST-GRADUATE FELLOWSHIPS

Post-graduate fellowships offer keystone support to graduating law students, crystallizing careers and setting alumni down the path of decades of impact protecting human rights.



Vanessa Vanegas-Mueller LL.M. '25 on graduation morning...



and celebrating her birthday during her fellowship.

Vanessa's post-graduate fellowship sees her working with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. There she is monitoring North America and the Caribbean for state compliance with human rights obligations. She is focusing particularly on U.S. compliance, with an emphasis on democratic institutions, citizen security, and access to justice. Her work is helping lay the groundwork for stronger, more resilient democratic institutions.

"Thanks to The Promise Institute's fellowship program, I can be on the frontlines ... using my legal training to address the democratic and human rights challenges directly. Your support makes this possible, and I sincerely thank everyone who has supported this fellowship."

VANESSA VANEGAS-MUELLER



Mollie Cueva - Dabkoski's post-graduate fellowship supports her work in Quito with the Ecuadorian Coordinator of Organizations for the Defense of Nature and the Environment. She is focusing on the rights of nature through both strategic litigation and policy advocacy.

Benjamin Gerstein's post-graduate fellowship supports his work at the University of Sarajevo's Institute for the Research of Crimes Against Humanity and International Law. He is researching the way crimes of genocide denial are currently being prosecuted and law's influence on how genocide is collectively remembered.



At our Graduation Celebration Breakfast, two of this year's Post-Graduate Fellows, Benjamin Gerstein J.D. '25 and Mollie Cueva-Dabkoski J.D. '25, chuckled while working to disentangle Mollie's graduation cords before posing for photos with family.

POST-GRADUATE FELLOWSHIPS



Steffi Colao J.D. '23

Post-Graduate Fellow Steffi Colao split her fellowship between a domestic and an international human rights organization: ANAR, a California-based Afghan immigrant justice project, and ECCHR, based in

Berlin. She shared “Combining these two experiences, looking at two different borders through two different legal angles, really brought together my studies and helped me connect strategies into what’s hopefully a longer collaboration between these two legal activist spaces. This fellowship provided funding for critical human rights work – most of my time was working directly for clients, and with so many international funding sources disappearing, this field feels increasingly precarious at a time where border and migration violence is escalating.”

“As an externally-funded fellow at ANAR, I was able to greatly increase their capacity to take on essential removal defense and detained casework. We would not otherwise have had the ability to take on most of the clients I worked with, so the funding really made a difference to an emerging organization.”

STEFFI COLAO '23



This photo captures an interview with Lina Cordoba-Moreno, LL.M. '23 (right) during an event, El Fogón del Ubuntu, in Bogotá. The occasion was part of the official activities of the National Center for Historical Memory during Colombia's Memory Week.

A previous Post-Graduate Fellowship recipient, Lina said “My work in Colombia focuses particularly on rural and peripheral regions disproportionately affected by the armed conflict ... creating platforms where survivors and ethnic communities can speak for themselves and influence the decisions that shape their futures. This means not only documenting their experiences but also ensuring that their perspectives inform public policy, research, and advocacy ... I have been able to bring the realities of communities in Colombia into global human rights discussions (while) ... equipping me to directly support the work of grassroots organizations.”

Lina noted that the fellowship was transformative in her career, allowing her to strengthen her academic training while staying deeply connected to the field – ensuring that human rights debates remain connected to those most affected.

POST-GRADUATE FELLOWSHIPS

After graduation, Xuchen Zhang was funded by The Promise Institute's Post-Graduate Fellowship to work at the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) in Berlin on its International Crimes and Accountability (ICA) team. There her main focus was drafting an Article 15 communication to the International Criminal Court regarding European responsibility for crimes against migrants in Libya.

Since then, Xuchen has become an independent legal consultant and worked with several non-governmental organizations engaging with UN mechanisms and multiple governments on mass atrocities in various Asian countries. She is also a Legal Associate at The Promise Institute (Europe) where she has co-authored briefs to different international treaty bodies and UN special procedures on the application of international law to environmental damage in different contexts, and coordinated UCLA Law pro bono work on the criminalization of ecocide. Xuchen is on the roster of experts at Ecocide Law Advisory.



Xuchen Zhang J.D. '21 was able to work at the ECCHR with the backing of her Post-Graduate Fellowship.



Amanda Brown J.D. '20 while in Iceland.

Amanda Brown received The Promise Institute Prize and a one-year post-graduate fellowship which funded her work at both the Global Legal Action Network (GLAN) and the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR).

She then continued working as a legal consultant with various NGOs, focusing on border violence, enforced disappearances, search and rescue, and the criminalization of migration. She went on to earn an LL.M. in International and European Legal Studies in Athens, Greece, and is now completing a Ph.D. in Law at SOAS University of London, focusing on Mediterranean migration, discrimination at sea, and the application of Critical Race Theory to the Law of the Sea.

Amanda is currently a Legal Associate at The Promise Institute (Europe), where she leads our work on carbon markets, advocating for human rights accountability in the context of climate change. Among other projects, she has also been supervising our UCLA Law pro bono students on a report with the UN Special Rapporteur on water, analyzing water as a weapon in various conflicts.

LOOKING FORWARD

2026

At The Promise Institute for Human Rights at UCLA, we're uniting people around our shared mission to advance human rights and empower the next generations of lawyers, leaders, and advocates.

We are grateful to all of our students, faculty, and supporters and look forward to continuing in this work, together.



LOS ANGELES

FOLLOW US



@promiseinstUCLA

EXPLORE OUR SITE

promiseinstitute.law.ucla.edu

WRITE US

promiseinstitute@law.ucla.edu

385 Charles E. Young Drive, East
Los Angeles, California 90095

EUROPE

FOLLOW US



@uclapromiseeurope

EXPLORE OUR SITE

[law.ucla.edu/academics/centers/
promise-institute-europe](http://law.ucla.edu/academics/centers/promise-institute-europe)

WRITE US

uclapromiseeurope@law.ucla.edu

Nieuwe Achtergracht 164
1018 WV Amsterdam
The Netherlands