

# PT 355 International Organizations and Human Rights Advocacy

Seminar Leaders: Dr. Danyah Jaber (AQB), Dr. Berit Ebert (BCB), Dr. Kamila Mateeva (AUCA)

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Office Hours: by appointment

## Course times

**Monday, 11:00-13:00 (BCB), 12:00-14:00 (AQB), 15:00-17:00 (AUCA)**

## Course Description

This seminar exposes students to the practical work of human rights actors in the context of securing and advocating for human rights through inter- and supranational organizations. It is divided into two sections. Section A begins by giving students a general overview of the role of key players in creating and implementing human rights. It then delves into the processes, institutions and material factors that influence inter- and supranational behaviors vis-a-vis human rights obligations. Lectures look in-depth at the role of individuals and collectives of peoples in campaigning for human rights and addressing respective violations. This will culminate into the analysis of cases that have been key in shaping the international human rights regime.

Section B familiarizes students with the practical abilities needed to run human rights advocacy campaigns. Through guest lecturers, students will be introduced to insight and expertise on lobbying; campaigning; and research, monitoring, and reporting. Students will also develop human rights-based approaches and strategies to create their own advocacy campaign. At the end of the semester, all students of the seminar will meet in Berlin.

Students will receive a two-day training with Amnesty International in Berlin. They visit organizations such as the representative office of the European Union and meet with experts from Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Berlin office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights and other human rights advocates located in Berlin.

The seminar will be led by Dr. Danyah Jaber (Al-Quds Bard), Dr. Berit Ebert (Bard College Berlin), and Dr. Kamila Mateeva (American University in Central Asia). Many of the lectures and workshops are provided by guest speakers who have direct experience of working in international and supranational organizations as well as grassroots and NGO campaigns. Classes at Al-Quds Bard, the American University of Central Asia, and at Bard College Berlin - will take place at the same time and will be taught together so that students will always work with their peers at the respective partner college. They will be virtually connected via zoom conferencing. The classrooms are equipped for that purpose.

Please note that participation in this seminar is limited at 5 students from AQB, 5 students from AUCA, and 5 students from BCB. This course fulfills the requirements for the GHEA 21 Human Rights Academic Certificate.

## Requirements

### **Academic Integrity**

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

### **Accessibility**

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, ([accommodations@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:accommodations@berlin.bard.edu)) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the Bard College Berlin Accessibility page. Questions about this process can be directed

to James Harker ([j.harker@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:j.harker@berlin.bard.edu)) or Maria Anderson-Long ([m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu)).

### **Attendance**

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

### **Assessment and Assignments**

**CASE PRESENTATION:** Students are required to present one human rights case (UN or EU). This case will draw on the analytical frameworks of normative changes in human rights adherence by international or supranational organizations. Students should identify the key questions of the case, analyze the advocacy strategy and the means used to achieve the

goal as well as the result of the case. Students will then present their chosen cases in week 8 and 9 in class online.

A 4,000-WORD CAMPAIGN PROPOSAL will be the final assessment. For the proposal, students are requested to work in trios (AQB, AUCA, and BCB) both online and in Berlin. An adequate period of time will be devoted to this in-depth work in the context of the Berlin visit at the end of the semester. The campaign proposal will be done in trios, one student from AQB, one student from AUCA, and one student from BCB. **The advocacy plans are due on May 8, 2026. Please upload them on the brightspace platform and also send them via email to both course instructors [b.ebert@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:b.ebert@berlin.bard.edu) and [diaber@staff.alquds.edu](mailto:diaber@staff.alquds.edu). You will present your advocacy campaigns during the week in Berlin.**

Class engagement is based on in-class participation.

#### **Policy on Late Submission of Papers**

Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Essays that are more than 24 hours late will not be accepted. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

#### **Grade Breakdown**

- Case presentation (30%)
- 4,000-word campaign proposal (40%)
- Class engagement week 1–7 (15%)
- Class engagement starting week 8 and Berlin trip (15%)
- Reflecting on the work done (google form) (the reflection will not be graded but is required to pass the seminar)

For students at Bard College Berlin: Final grades for graduating students in Spring 2026, will have to be sent to registrars by Friday, May 8th, 2026. Graduating students in this class will, therefore, hand in their advocacy campaign proposal by May 1, 2026, at noon. Final grades for all other students will be sent to the registrars on May 29, 2026. These students will submit their advocacy campaign proposal by May 8, 2026.

## Schedule

### Section A: Actors and Mechanisms of inter- and supra-national organizations

#### February 9, 2026: Week 1 (AQB) / 3 (BCB) / 5 (AUCA)

##### **The Concept of Human Rights**

This class offers an introduction to contemporary human rights discourses in their broader historical and theoretical contexts. It examines the philosophical background of the categories making up the terms, “human” and “rights” by exploring the political, social, and cultural dimensions made by these terms. Furthermore, key historical steps and conceptual forerunners will be explored. Students will receive a foundational understanding of rights claims as well as the legal ways of advancing, defending, and enforcing rights, and a brief introduction to human rights instruments and institutions. With this class, students will be better able to examine and advocate for specific contemporary challenges/cases. They will receive the theoretical context through which human rights can be assessed and developed.

#### February 16, 2026: Week 2 (AQB) / 4 (BCB) / 6 (AUCA)

##### **International Organizations. The United Nations**

This class offers a comprehensive introduction to international organizations. It begins by acquainting students with the legal features of the “international community”: the subjects and relations of international law, states, and international organizations. Through the specific example of the United Nations, it delves into the role of UN agencies in protecting and assisting human rights with reference to contemporary issues.

##### **Readings:**

- United Nations (1945) Charter of the United Nations and Statue of the International Court of Justice, 1 UNTS XVI. [Familiarize yourself with this document].
- Clapham, A. (2009) “United Nations Charter-Based Protection of Human Rights”, in Krause, C. and Scheinin, M., International Protection of Human Rights: A Textbook, Turku: Abo Akademi University Institute for Human Rights.
- Lewis-Anthony, S. and Scheinin, M. (2004) “Treaty-Based Procedures for Making Human Rights Complaints within the UN System”, in Hannum, H. (ed.), Guide to International Human Rights Practice (4th edition), Ardsley: Transnational Publishers.

#### February 23, 2026: Week 3 (AQB) / 5 (BCB) 7 (AUCA)

##### **Supranational Organizations. The European Union**

When the European Community for Coal and Steel, the forerunner of the European Union (EU) was founded in 1951, human rights played only a marginal role. However, recently a new development set in, advancing the antidiscrimination discourse to include human rights, both on the national as well as on the European level. Although the Treaties of the 1950s made no reference to human rights, the 1986 Single European Act and the 1993 Maastricht Treaty both mention their protection. But it was only in the 2000 Nice Summit that the EU announced its own Charter of Fundamental Rights with a direct reference to trans\* people, in Article 21, and made the Charter legally binding with the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009. How are human rights treated in this context? In the supranational construction of the EU, what are their legal effects?

##### **Readings:**

- The Schuman Declaration. (1950). [https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/1945-59/schuman-declaration-may-1950\\_en](https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/1945-59/schuman-declaration-may-1950_en)

- Pernice, I. (2008). The Treaty of Lisbon and Fundamental Rights. Walter Hallstein-Institut, Working Paper 07/08.
- Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. (2000).  
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text\\_en.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf)
- Opinion of Advocate General Richard de la Tour. (2025, September 4).  
<https://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=303888&pageIndex=0&doclang=en&mode=req&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=17556456>

### March 2, 2026: Week 4 (AQB) / 6 (BCB) / 8 (AUCA)

#### **PART 1: Environmental Case Study: Taldykol Lake in Kazakhstan**

The recent case involving Taldykol lake generated intense public debate and legal conflict over environmental concerns of the local community. The local administration in Astana, Kazakhstan has decided to drain part of the system of Taldykol lakes (located in downtown Astana), a place rich in biodiversity that hosts hundreds of species of birds, to build residence buildings there. Cases like these illustrate significant problems with implementing international environmental law in Central Asia, where countries demonstrate a lack of true commitment to preserving the natural environment. It shows the problem of ineffectiveness of many international environmental treaties. Many of them have weak sanctions and non-binding provisions. Neither of the treaties has an individual complaint mechanism, therefore, it limits local voices of individuals and community. What does modern international law jurisprudence offer? How can the local community fight against such actions of the government? We are to examine and understand the different options available.

#### Readings:

- Knox, J.H. and Morgera, E. 2022. Human rights and the environment – The interdependence of human rights and a healthy environment in the context of national legislation on natural resources. FAO Legal Papers No. 109. Rome, FAO.  
[https://pure.strath.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/148808853/Knox\\_Morgera\\_FAO\\_2022\\_Human\\_Rights\\_and\\_the\\_environment\\_the\\_interdependence\\_of\\_human\\_rights.pdf](https://pure.strath.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/148808853/Knox_Morgera_FAO_2022_Human_Rights_and_the_environment_the_interdependence_of_human_rights.pdf)
- Bekbasova A, Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting (2024) SOS Taldykol: Why Is It Important for Kazakhstan to Protect Lakes in Astana.  
<https://cabar.asia/en/sos-taldykol-why-is-it-important-for-kazakhstan-to-protect-lakes-in-astana>
- Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, Ramsar 1971  
[https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/current\\_convention\\_text\\_e.pdf](https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/current_convention_text_e.pdf)

#### **PART 2: EU Case Study: Human Rights, Civil Disobedience, and the Example of Poland – The Connection between the Law and Politics**

This class involves a close reading of Hannah Arendt's *Civil Disobedience*. Arendt considered agency key in the prevention of totalitarianism. Civil disobedience, in her view was lawful dissent that would initiate change and prevent unjust governments from the rise and, hence, must be institutionalized. With that starting point, the question of the protection civil disobedience as a foundation for the protection of human rights in the EU can be analyzed using the example of attacks on the rule-of-law and gender equality in Poland in the years 2015-2023? Could the EU prevent the Polish attacks and what were the parameters that prevented its success?

**Readings:**

- Arendt, H. (1972). Civil Disobedience. In H. Arendt, *Crises of the republic: lying in politics, civil disobedience, on violence, thoughts on politics and revolution*, (pp.69–102). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Court of Justice of the European Union (2023). *Judgment of the Court (Grand Chamber) of 5 June 2023. European Commission v Republic of Poland*. C-204/01. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:62021CJ0204>

**March 9, 2026: Week 5 (AQB) / 7 (BCB) / 9 (AUCA)**

**UN Case Study: Advocacy during complicity of international law violations**

Powerful nations, particularly the United States of America in its role as a permanent member of the Security Council, have provided clearance for Israel to continue its blatant violations of international law in Gaza. This has led to the questioning of international law's ability to hold states accountable and, in specific, the UN's integrity. What can we do when the international order is not being respected? How can we prevent clear and blatant violations of international law from reoccurring? This class explores different advocacy measures the international community can take to ensure accountability and enforcement of international law.

**Readings**

- Elbasri, A. (2024). The United Nations Early Warning Mechanism for the Prevention of Genocide and its Obstruction in the Case of Palestine - تعطيل آلية إنذار الأمم المتحدة لمنع - الإبادة الجماعية في حالة فلسطين. *Al-Muntaqa: New Perspectives on Arab Studies*, 7(1), 30–59.
- Ramaphosa, C. et al. (2025) “Israel’s Actions Strike at the Foundations of International Law”, *Foreign Policy*, at [https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/02/25/israel-war-crimes-trump-international-criminal-court/?link\\_id=9&can\\_id=784dc2404489c373ee65cbb7a65b4052&source=email-israels-actions-strike-at-the-foundations-of-international-law&email\\_referrer=email\\_2641375&email\\_subject=why-we-launched-the-hague-group](https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/02/25/israel-war-crimes-trump-international-criminal-court/?link_id=9&can_id=784dc2404489c373ee65cbb7a65b4052&source=email-israels-actions-strike-at-the-foundations-of-international-law&email_referrer=email_2641375&email_subject=why-we-launched-the-hague-group).
- The Hague Group (2025) “Inaugural Joint Statement”, *The Hague Group*, at <https://act.progressive.international/english/>.

**March 16, 2026: Week 6 (AQB) / 8 (BCB) / 10 (AUCA)**

**Case Presentations (PART 1)**

Students will be asked to explore a case study of interest to them that they can campaign for to be reviewed by an international or supranational organization. In this session, students will present their cases: circa 10 minutes per students, 4-7 power point slides per presentation. We would like 7 students present this week, and another 7 student in the subsequent week.

**March 23, 2026: Week 7 (AQB) / 9 (BCB) / 11 (AUCA)**

**Case Presentations (PART 2)**

In this session, student presentation will continue.

**April 6, 2026: Week 8 (AQB) / 10 (BCB) / 12 (AUCA)**

**NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK BCB)**

**April 13, 2026: Week 9 (AQB) / 11 (BCB) / 12 (AUCA)**

**NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK AQB)**

## SECTION B: SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

### April 20, 2026: Week 10 (AQB) / 12 (BCB) / 14 (AUCA)

#### General idea of skills and strategies for advocacy campaigns

This lecture examines skills and strategies within the field of law and society, focusing on how strategic litigation operates as just one among several tools for driving social change. Rather than centering solely on the role of litigators, it considers a broader range of perspectives—including those of complainants, campaigns of activists, funders, public officials, and media actors. The lecture emphasizes a multifaceted understanding of legal action as part of wider social movements.

#### Readings:

- Open Society Foundation, Strategic Litigation Impacts: Insights from Global Experience (2018)  
<https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/strategic-litigation-impacts-insights-20181023.pdf>
- Kris van der Pas, K. (2021) “Conceptualising strategic litigation”, *Oñati Socio-Legal Series*, 11(6(S), pp. S116-S145.

### Monday, May 4 – Friday, May 8, 2026: Student Trip to Berlin

The one-week visit to Berlin will bring the students from Al-Quds Bard and Bard Berlin together for a week of practical work, visits of Berlin based human rights organizations, conversations with faculty and students from Bard Berlin as well as other universities and visits to key museums in Berlin. Students will learn how other disciplines and institutions approach the important question of what it means to live a human life. During the time in Berlin, students will have the time to work on their advocacy plans together in trios.

Guest speakers include:

- Qais Alamdar, Founder, Intel Focus: The Importance of Spotting and Preventing Disinformation
- Manual Schwab, American University in Cairo

### Important Dates

First days of classes

- BCB: Monday, January 26, 2026 (This course starts in BCB week 3)
- AQB: Saturday, January 31, 2026 (This course starts in AQB week 1)
- AUCA: Monday, January 12, 2026 (This course starts in AUCA week 5)

### Spring breaks

- BCB: Monday, March 30, 2026 - Monday, April 6, 2026
- AQB: Saturday, April 11, 2026 - Wednesday, April 15, 2026
- AUCA: Monday, March 9, 2026 - Sunday, March 15, 2026

### Completion weeks

- BCB: Monday, May 11 - Friday, May 15, 2026
- AQB: Wednesday, May 13, 2025
- AUCA: Thursday, April 30, 2026