

HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY

FORMS OF ACTION, STRATEGIES, METHODS

Professor: **Eugénie MERIEAU**
Session: **July 2026**
Language of instruction: **English**
Number of hours of class: **36h**



Objective of the Course

This course aims to train students on how to successfully engage in human rights advocacy in various settings (courts, NGOs, United Nations), while being able to critically reflect on key legal and philosophical human rights controversies.



Summary

This course provides an overview of the terrain of international human rights advocacy, including forms of action, strategies, and methods. It also works as a laboratory for reflecting on and testing innovative methods of human rights work. Students will have the opportunity to reflect on core theoretical problems and confront their views on practical case studies by applying their human rights knowledge to practical situations. In particular, this course will help students develop their advocacy skills by introducing them to the methods of strategic litigation, working with the UN, and working with the community – all the while reflecting on critical ethical dilemmas.



Organisation of the course

Each session is dedicated to one particular human rights theme and articulated around 1- an introductory lecture and discussion based on pre-assigned readings 2- a real-situation practical exercise where students will have to collectively draft and present statements, press releases, complaints or urgent appeals.

As much as possible, external Paris-based human rights advocates will also be invited to present their advocacy work to the class and engage in a discussion on their chosen

methods and strategies. The course is divided into four overarching themes: 'Core Human Rights Treaties and Mechanisms', 'Civil and Political Rights', 'Socio-economic Rights', and 'The Future of Human Rights'. Possible themes may include (TBA depending on the availability of external human rights advocates): hate speech, blasphemy, memorial laws, domestic violence, pornography, universal basic income, animal testing, etc.

Theme 1: Main Human Rights Treaties and Mechanisms, Universal Periodic Review, Advocacy

Theme 2: Right to life, freedom from torture, freedom from persecution

Theme 3: Freedom of expression, freedom of assembly

Theme 4: Right to an adequate standard of living, right to housing

Theme 5: Reproductive rights, women's rights, and LGBT rights

Theme 6: Right to development

Theme 7: Right to a healthy environment, animal rights, rights of nature

Theme 8: International humanitarian law, war tribunals

Theme 9: International criminal law, the International Criminal Court

Theme 10: Critiques of Human Rights, Politics of Human Rights Law, Strategies for the Future



Bibliography

Readings

1. The United Nations and Human Rights by Sarah Joseph and Joanna Kyriakakis
2. Do International Human Rights Treaties Improve Respect for Human Rights by Eric Neumayer
3. International Relations Theories and Human Rights by Wolfgang Wagner
4. Human Rights: Six Historical Controversies by Micheline Ishay
5. The International State of Emergency by Kim Lane Scheppele
6. The Promise and Limits of the International Law of Torture by Oona Hathaway
7. The True Extent of Global Poverty Questioning the MDG Narrative by Jason Hickel
8. Pornography as Defamation and Discrimination by Catharine McKinnon
9. Proposal for a Law of Ecocide by Polly Higgins
10. From Human Rights to Sentient Rights by Alasdair Cochrane
11. Power and Principle: From Nuremberg to the Hague by Christopher Rudolph
12. Why Prosecute? Critics of Punishment for Mass Atrocity by Mark J. Osiel
13. The Colonial Origins of International Law by Anthony Anghie
14. The International Human Rights Movement Part of the Problem by David Kennedy
15. The Politics of International Law by Martti Koskenniemi

Other Resources:

OHCHR: Human Rights Factsheet (1- 38)

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/publicationsresources/pages/factsheets.aspx>

OHCHR: Human Rights: A Basic Handbook for UN staff (127 p.)

<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/HRhandbooken.pdf>



Requirements for validation

- Final Exam (50%)
- In-Class Group Work and Presentations (25%)
- Participation (25%)



Professor's Biography



Eugénie Mérieau is an Associate Professor of Public Law at the Panthéon-Sorbonne University (Paris 1 – Panthéon-Sorbonne) and a member of the Sorbonne Institute for Legal and Philosophical Research (CNRS – UMR 8103).

Prior to joining the Panthéon-Sorbonne, she has held various academic appointments at Harvard University, the National University of Singapore, the University of Göttingen, Thammasat

University and Sciences-Po.

As a human rights practitioner, she has worked as a consultant for various agencies of the United Nations and the European Commission, as well as local and international NGOs, most notably with the International Commission of Jurists.