

**Sommersemester 2026**

## **Seminar: Human Rights in Crisis: History, Theory, and Practice**

Prof. Dr. Itamar Mann (Associate Professor of Law, The University of Haifa, Faculty of Law)

This seminar follows a historical arc from the post-war foundations of international law to today's overlapping global crises. We begin in 1945 with Nuremberg, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the creation of the refugee regime. The course shows how early architects of international law imagined human rights as tools that could prevent atrocities, organise global solidarity, and restrain state power.

Against this background, we trace the evolution of human rights law through decolonisation and the Cold War. We examine the rise of global migration governance and the developing politics of antisemitism, Holocaust memory, and collective security. These historical shifts offer a frame for understanding how human rights norms gained authority and how they were challenged.

The seminar then turns to concerns that shape the twenty-first century. We study the militarisation of borders, debates on colonial legacies in human rights law, and the climate emergency. The final segment examines the Gaza war as a case study, with attention to arguments about accountability and the destruction of conditions of life.

The course encourages close work with legal materials. These include treaties, UN resolutions, judgments from the ICJ and ICC, refugee status determinations, climate litigation, and files from current human rights practice. Alongside these sources, students read theoretical and critical texts that explore the limits and possibilities of human rights.

A guiding question runs through the seminar. What can human rights law offer in the present condition of polycrisis. Students consider whether existing doctrines can address climate collapse, mass displacement, democratic erosion, and catastrophic violence in wartime. They also ask whether new concepts are needed for these pressures.

By treating human rights as historical formation and practical toolkit, the seminar offers a navigational chart for understanding how international law might remain meaningful in a world defined by crisis.

The seminar includes a stay at Landhaus Rothenberge from June 17-19, 2026. (Travel arrangements to and from Rothenberge are to be made independently).

## **I. Structure of the Seminar**

### **1. Introduction (February 24, 2026, 12–2pm c.t., online)**

- Participants receive an overview of the seminar, its aims, and its working methods.
- We discuss expectations for reading, presentations, and written work.
- Students choose one of the six topical sessions for a short in-class presentation.
- Each of the six topical areas has a separate reading list which students should rely on in their research.
- All students must reading common methodological reading list, as basis for methodological section discussions.
- Participants may use this time to exchange contact details.

### **2. Methodological Meeting I (May 5, 2026, 2 h meeting in the afternoon/ time & place tbd)**

- This meeting introduces shared methodological questions.
- We discuss human rights as a historical formation and as a legal practice.
- We read from a common list that covers doctrinal method, critical theory, and phenomenology.
- We discuss research methods and how to develop your own reading list.
- Students raise questions connected to their chosen topic.

### **3. Working Phase: Abstract (Deadline: May 15, 2026, 2pm)**

- Students prepare a short abstract of about 500 words.
- The abstract includes a proposed title, a short research question, and a plan for sources.
- The abstract is submitted as a PDF by email.
- Students receive short written feedback within one week.

### **4. Methodological Meeting II (May 19, 2026, 2 h meeting in the afternoon/ time & place tbd)**

- This meeting deepens methodological reflection.
- We discuss how lawyers work under crisis conditions and how claims move across regimes.
- We examine methods for interpreting case files, testimonies, and archival material.
- The readings come from the same common list and build on the first meeting.

### **5. Working Phase: Outline and Bibliography (Deadline: June 2, 2026, 2pm)**

- Students expand their abstract into a short research plan.
- The plan includes a revised abstract, an outline, and a preliminary bibliography.
- Students receive short written feedback within one week.

### **6. Workshop on Project Presentations at Rothenberge (June 17–19, 2026, in person)**

- Students present their projects in draft form.
- Each presentation is followed by discussion.
- The workshop supports the final development of research questions.
- Attendance is required for all participants.

### **7. Final submission of seminar papers (July 6, 2026, 12 pm)**

- Submission of the written seminar paper at the chair as well as per e-mail.

## II. Overview: Topics for Research

### 1. Foundations after 1945: Atrocity, Judgment, and the Birth of Human Rights

- Nuremberg as a model for accountability and limits on sovereignty
- The Universal Declaration and early visions of global solidarity
- The 1951 Refugee Convention and the structure of international protection
- Post-war debates on state responsibility and the prevention of future atrocities
- The early institutionalisation of human rights norms

### 2. Decolonisation, the Cold War, and the Contested Expansion of Human Rights

- Anti-colonial movements and the internationalisation of self-determination
- Human rights in Cold War diplomacy and ideological competition
- The emergence of collective security and its legal ambiguities
- The rise of humanitarian intervention as political claim and legal argument
- Competing universalisms in the second half of the twentieth century

### 3. Migration, Borders, and the Transformation of Global Mobility

- The evolution of global migration governance after the 1970s
- The militarisation of border enforcement and deterrence practices
- Human rights litigation at the borders: possibilities and limits
- Mass displacement as a structural feature of contemporary international law
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### 4. Antisemitism, Holocaust Memory, and the Politics of Atrocity Labels

- Competing models of Holocaust memory in international legal argument
- The evolving politics of antisemitism in Europe and beyond
- The use and misuse of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity
- Memory regimes and their influence on contemporary legal debates
- Tensions between historical trauma and present protection needs

### 5. Climate Crisis and “Lifeboat Ethics”: New Pressures on Human Rights

- Climate change as a threat to life, territory, and political community
- Climate litigation and the search for enforceable duties
- “Lifeboat” scenarios in legal and moral reasoning
- Inequality, responsibility, and claims for climate justice
- Survival ethics and the strain on human rights institutions

### 6. Gaza and the Relevance of International Law in Wartime Catastrophe

- Questions of accountability and proportionality in contemporary armed conflict
- The destruction of conditions of life and debates on genocidal acts
- Humanitarian access, siege warfare, and obligations under IHL
- The politics of evidence and competing narratives of intent
- What wartime crises reveal about the capacities of human rights law

### III. Signing up for this Seminar

The seminar will be held in English; a good working knowledge of the English language is therefore required.

**Anmeldung für Schwerpunktbereich-Studierende:** Das Seminar richtet sich an Studierende der Schwerpunktbereiche 4, 6 und 11. Bitte melden Sie sich in der vom Prüfungsamt festgelegten Frist (**19.01.2026**) via WilMa III an. Bitte melden sich *zusätzlich* im Sekretariat des Lehrstuhls (Frau Meier, [jutta.meier@uni-muenster.de](mailto:jutta.meier@uni-muenster.de)), reichen dort den Anmeldebogen, gewünschte Prüfungsform und Nachweise über Ihre bisherigen Studienleistungen ein und erläutern Ihr Interesse an dem Seminar in einem kurzen Motivationsschreiben. Diese Dokumente – in der Reihenfolge Motivationsschreiben, Anmeldebogen, Leistungsnachweise – übersenden Sie bitte zusammengefasst in *einer PDF-Datei* (< 20MB).

**Anmeldung für andere Studierende (Master deutsches Recht, Bachelor Politik und Recht etc., Erasmus-, Nebenfach-, Zertifikatsstudierende):** Melden Sie sich bitte ebenfalls in der vom Prüfungsamt festgelegten Frist über die für Sie vorgesehenen Anmeldesysteme (i.d.R. WilMa I) und ebenfalls *zusätzlich* im Lehrstuhlsekretariat an (s.o., auch zu den Nachweisen). Bachelorstudierende, die ihre Bachelorarbeit als Seminararbeit an der rechtswissenschaftlichen Fakultät schreiben, müssen sich außerdem innerhalb der Frist persönlich beim Prüfungsamt ihrer Fakultät anmelden und den vorausgefüllten Leistungsnachweis vorlegen. Soll das Seminar aus reinem Interesse, nur zu Übungszwecken oder für ein Zusatzzertifikat absolviert werden, reicht die Anmeldung im Lehrstuhlsekretariat (bitte auf dem Anmeldebogen vermerken).

**Teilnehmer:innenauswahl, Vorbesprechung und Themenvergabe:** Die Teilnehmer:innenzahl ist auf 20 begrenzt. Übersteigt die Anzahl der Interessierten diese Zahl, werden Studierende mit relevanten Vorkenntnissen vorrangig berücksichtigt. Danach erfolgt die Vergabe der Plätze in Abhängigkeit von der Examensnähe. Sie werden per E-Mail über Ihre Zulassung benachrichtigt.

Die Vorbesprechung mit Themenvergabe findet mit den bestätigten Teilnehmenden statt.

Fragen beantwortet Ihnen Jutta Meier, [jutta.meier@uni-muenster.de](mailto:jutta.meier@uni-muenster.de) (in German or English).

Seminar Sommersemester 2026  
**„Human Rights in Crisis: History, Theory, and Practice“**

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## ANMELDUNG

Name, Vorname:	
Straße:	
PLZ, Wohnort:	
Uni-E-Mail-Adresse:	
Matrikel-Nr.:	
Handy-Nr.*:	

WiLMA II/III  Studienortswechsler\*in

Sonstige (Bachelor PuR/WuR, ERASMUS, Master, zur Übung), nämlich:

Das ist mein Fachsemester Jura. Mein Schwerpunktbereich ist Nr. .

### Gewünschte Prüfungsform:

Kolloquium  Schriftliche Arbeit  beide Prüfungsformen, separat benotet

Besondere Interessengebiete aus dem Themenbereich des Seminars (Themenwünsche):

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Ja, ich bin damit einverstanden, dass meine E-Mail-Adresse an alle Seminarteilnehmer\*innen weitergegeben wird. (Zustimmung hilfreich, aber nicht erforderlich)

Datum: \_\_\_\_\_ Unterschrift: \_\_\_\_\_

\* Die Angabe ist freiwillig, sie dient der raschen Kontaktaufnahme mit Ihnen bei Problemen, z.B. bei Einreichung.