



MARANGOPOULOS  
FOUNDATION  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (MFHR)  
ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΜΑΡΑΓΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ  
ΓΙΑ ΤΑ ΔΙΚΑΙΩΜΑΤΑ  
ΤΟΥ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΥ (ΙΜΔΑ)

## **From Unravelling Commitments to Reinforcing Universality:**

*Reaffirming International Human Rights Law amid Withdrawal and Backsliding*

**Tuesday 26 May 2026**

**“Alkis Argyriades” Amphitheatre of the NKUA**

The Marangopoulos Foundation for Human Rights (MFHR) is organising a one-day international conference in a hybrid format. The conference aims to critically examine the current state of international human rights law in a period marked by increasing political contestation, backlash against human rights norms, and a growing retreat from multilateralism.

It will address recent instances of withdrawal and disengagement from human rights treaties as well as the mounting pressure that international bodies currently face. Building on these discussions, and drawing inspiration from recent developments that demonstrate renewed forms of inter-state cooperation and collective enforcement, the conference will explore pathways towards restoring confidence in the international human rights system and strengthening its capacity to respond to contemporary challenges.

### **Programme**

**11:00 – 11:30**

- Registrations

**11:30 – 12:00**

- Welcoming address by **Professor Linos-Alexander Sicilianos**, President of the MFHR

**12:00 – 14:00**

#### **Panel 1: From Commitment to Withdrawal — and Back to Engagement**

This panel examines the institutional framework of international human rights protection in light of recent instances of state withdrawal from human rights treaties and international bodies. It will explore contemporary developments, including debates surrounding a potential withdrawal of Latvia from the Istanbul Convention. Be they isolated instances or part of a broader tendency, these developments invite closer scrutiny of the rationales advanced to justify withdrawal and disengagement, and of their broader consequences for multilateralism and for the integrity, coherence, and authority of international human rights frameworks.

Against this background, the panel will critically assess the implications of withdrawal and institutional disengagement for the coherence, authority, and long-term viability of

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Consultative status with the UN [ECOSOC (special), DPI], UNESCO (official relations) and the Council of Europe

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international human rights law, with particular attention to the conditions under which international legal commitments can be preserved, revitalised, and effectively reaffirmed in an increasingly contested international environment.

Moderator:

- **Dr. Maria-Andriani Kostopoulou**, Governing Board Member of the MFHR

Speakers:

- **Edmunds Cepurītis**, Chair of the European Affairs Committee in the Parliament of Latvia (Saeima), Vice Chair of the Latvian delegation to PACE, Council of Europe
- **Peggy Ducoulombier**, Professor at the University of Strasbourg
- **Kanstantsin Dzehtsiarou**, Professor in Human Rights Law, Associate Dean for Global Engagement of the School of Law and Social Justice, University of Liverpool, UK
- **Panos Merkouris**, Professor of Public International Law, University of Groningen

~ 14:00 – 15:00: Light lunch offered by the MFHR ~

15:00 – 17:00

**Panel 2: International Human Rights Bodies under Pressure**

This panel examines how political contestation over human rights and sovereignty claims affects the functioning, interpretative authority, and institutional standing of international human rights bodies.

It focuses on contexts in which states, while remaining formally committed to international human rights frameworks, exert political and legal pressure that risk constraining the scope and authority of international courts and monitoring bodies, and reshaping their role within multilateral human rights frameworks.

In this regard, the panel will explore practices such as calls to reinterpret Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights in the context of migration, including proposals to deploy evolutive interpretation in ways that would narrow, rather than expand, the level of protection afforded.



It will also address the increasingly expansive invocation of restriction and limitation clauses for purposes extending beyond those for which they were originally designed. It will thus examine how international human rights bodies have responded to such pressures, including the European Court of Human Rights' evolving jurisprudence under Article 18 of the Convention, and assess the implications of these dynamics for the authority, coherence, and resilience of multilateral human rights adjudication.

*Moderator:*

- **Photini Pazartzis**, Professor at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, former Chair of the UN Human Rights Committee

*Keynote speech delivered by:*

- **Judge Ivana Jelić**, Vice-President of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), Section 1 President

*Speakers:*

- **Maria – Daniella Marouda**, Associate Professor at Panteion University, former Chair of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
- **Natasa Mavronicola**, Professor of Human Rights Law at the University of Birmingham
- **Dr. Aikaterini (Katerina) Tsampi**, Assistant Professor of Public International Law, University of Groningen

**17:00 – 19:00**

**Panel 3: Looking Forward: Reinforcing Universality**

Drawing on the preceding discussions on withdrawal and internal contestation within international human rights frameworks, this panel considers a range of forward-looking approaches to addressing current challenges, reaffirming the universality of international human rights law, and assessing the extent to which renewed confidence in international human rights institutions remains justified by their continued relevance for the protection of individuals and groups facing serious human rights abuses.

The panel focuses on legal and institutional tools capable of mitigating the effects of disengagement and contestation, and of reinforcing accountability within a multilateral legal order. Particular attention will be paid to constructive developments in



international litigation that seek to address serious and systemic human rights violations.

In this regard, the panel will highlight the growing use of public-interest litigation and collective enforcement proceedings by non-injured States before the International Court of Justice, including cases such as *The Gambia v. Myanmar*, *South Africa v. Israel*, and *Canada and the Netherlands v. Syria*, as well as initiatives to hold Afghanistan accountable for violations of the rights of women and girls under CEDAW -an effort that may ultimately give rise to proceedings before the ICJ. Lastly, the panel will reflect on the ICJ's seminal advisory opinion on climate change.

Through these examples, the panel explores the potential of collective enforcement, strategic litigation, and renewed inter-state cooperation as tools for resisting backsliding, strengthening accountability, and reinforcing the authority and credibility of the international human rights system.

Moderator:

- **Linos-Alexander Sicilianos**, President of the MFHR, Professor at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, f. President of the ECtHR

Speakers:

- **Pierre d'Argent**, Professor at the University of Louvain, Member of the *Institut de droit international*, Special Counsel Foley Hoag LLP
- **Makane Moïse Mbengue**, Professor at the University of Geneva, member of the Curatorium of the Hague Academy of International Law, Member of the *Institut de droit international*
- **Jean-Marc Thouvenin**, Professor at the University Paris Nanterre, Secretary-General of The Hague Academy of International Law, Member of the *Institut de droit international*
- **Hélène Tigroudja**, Professor of International Law at Aix-Marseille University (France), Visting Professor of Public International Law at CIL (National University of Singapore, Vice-Chair of the UN Human Rights Committee

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## Concluding Remarks