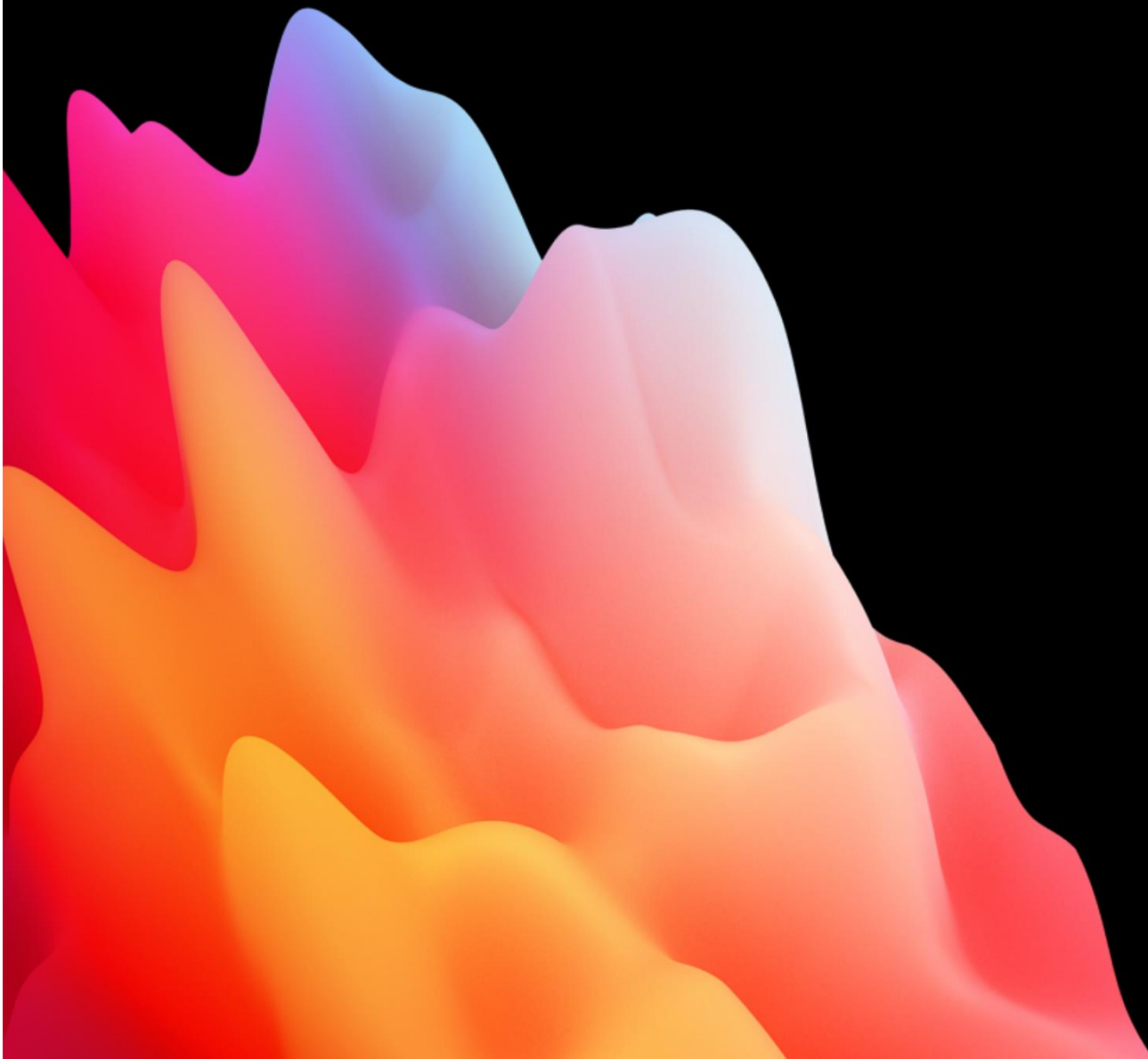




The European Law Students' Association



Supporting Materials on International Days

March 2023

<Annual Human
Rights Campaign>



International Women's Day, 8th of March

On March 8th, the International Women's Day is celebrated to raise awareness, drive gender equality and celebrate women's achievements. Although International Women's Day was not officially recognized by the UN until 1977, it originates from the activities of labour movements at the turn of the twentieth century in North America and across Europe.¹

Even though there have been some positive changes, there is still much to be done concerning gender equality. Women experience both direct and indirect discrimination, which affects, for example, their earnings and education and can prevent them from rising to influential positions. For example, at present only slightly over one third of representatives in local governments are women, and at the current rate of progress it would take around 40 years for women to achieve parity with men in terms of representation in national parliaments. Furthermore, significant numbers of women experience violence in their lives: one in three women worldwide have experienced or will experience physical or sexual violence at some point in their lives, usually perpetrated by their partners.²

This year, the theme of the International Women's Day is "DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality" to achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls in the digital era. 37 % of women do not use the internet, which means that 259 million fewer women have access to the Internet than men, despite that they account for nearly half the world's population. The lack of inclusion comes at a remarkable cost. Women's exclusion from the digital world has shaved 1 trillion dollars from the gross domestic product of low- and middle-income countries in the last decade.³

¹ See e.g. [UN Global Issues - Gender Equality](#).

² [UN Sustainable Development Goals - Gender Equality](#) and [UN Women - Infographic Human Rights](#).

³ [UN Women - the International Women's Day 2023](#).

1. The Law

Women's Rights are the subject of specialised conventions--such as the CEDAW--but also routinely are included in general human rights instruments. A non-exhaustive list is below.

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women⁴
- Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence⁵
- Article 14 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms⁶ stipulates that the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in the Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any grounds such as, inter alia, sex.
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights⁷ refers to sex in Articles 2, 3 and 26, while the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights⁸ introduces gender equality in Articles 3 and 7(a)(i).
- Equivalent provisions can be found in other regional human rights systems e.g. Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women⁹ or the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa.¹⁰

2. Trends and Current Challenges

This year's theme for International Women's Day (IWD 2023) is "*DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality*"¹¹, where the impact of the digital gender gap on widening economic and social inequalities will be explored and debated. The event will also spotlight the importance of protecting the rights of women and girls in digital spaces and addressing online and ICT-facilitated gender-based violence.

A gender-responsive approach will result in more creative solutions and has increasing potential for innovation, and, at the same time, will allow us to fight existing patterns of gender inequality. On the other hand, the lack of inclusion will not only result in massive monetary cost, but will also contribute to the problem of online violence, which a study of 51 countries revealed 38 per cent of women had personally experienced.

Beyond this, the theme invites reflection on the ways in which digital technologies can help to address other long-standing areas of inequality and gender-based violence, such as the particular

⁴ [CEDAW](#).

⁵ [Istanbul Convention](#).

⁶ [Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#).

⁷ [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#).

⁸ [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#).

⁹ [Convention of Belém do Pará](#).

¹⁰ [Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa \("Maputo Protocol"\)](#).

¹¹ [International Women's Day 2023: "DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality" | UN Women – Headquarters](#).

threats that women face in wartime by virtue of their gender. These include extreme human rights abuses such as the use of rape as a weapon of war – classified as a war crime and, if conducted with the requisite special intent, potentially an act of genocide.¹² Even outside of these most serious cases, however, conflict can and too often does give rise to other abuses: wars often cause spikes in gender-based violence¹³; in societies which practice FGM it may lead to the practice being conducted earlier or on wider scales; and women may be at particular risk as a result of bearing caring responsibilities.

3. Potential Topics for Events and Advocacy

- Women’s rights during crises¹⁴
- Gender equality in the digital era
- Gender-based violence
- Rape as a war crime
- Access to Justice
- Femicide¹⁵

4. Further Reading

- [UN Women - the International Women's Day 2023](#)
- [UN Sustainable Development Goals - Gender Equality](#)
- [UN Women - Infographic Human Rights](#)
- [UN Global Issues - Gender Equality](#)

¹² [Rape as a war crime](#)

¹³ [FGM in emergency and humanitarian contexts](#)

¹⁴ See [Women’s human rights and gender-related concerns in situations of conflict and instability](#)

¹⁵ [Essential facts about femicide](#)

International Day of Women Judges, 10th of March

Since 2021, on March 10th, the International Day of Women Judges¹⁶ is celebrated to raise awareness for the necessary progress towards parity in the judiciary. It recognises the contributions of women judges worldwide whilst simultaneously reaffirming that the active participation of women at all levels of decision-making is essential to the achievement of equality and democracy.

With gender equality and the empowerment of all women as one of the Sustainable Development Goals, the representation of women in the judiciary is significant for various reasons, but the following are worth highlight:

- Ensure the representation of women in decision making positions
- Enhance the legitimacy of the courts
- Built public trust in the judiciary
- Convey the message that the courts are open, transparent and accessible for everyone
- Ensure justice is not only done, but seen to be done

1. Trends and Challenges

The low representation of women in the judiciary is often the result of gender stereotypes. Although significant progress has been made when it comes to equality in the judiciary and women have been able to overcome biases, a noticeable imbalance is still present in African and Arab judicial systems.

According to data from UN Women, three countries in the Arab region prohibit women from being judges outright, while in three others less than one percent of the judiciary is female.¹⁷

The underrepresentation of women in the judiciary not only affects the rule of law, but also has social ramifications. Numerous studies have shown that a diverse judiciary makes better decisions, and courts and justice systems are more likely to be trusted by populations if they are broadly reflective of social groups.

¹⁶ [International Day of Women Judges | United Nations.](#)

¹⁷ [Women and the Judiciary \(unodc.org\).](#)

2. Potential Topics for Events and Advocacy

- Importance of women representation in the judiciary
- Judicial systems as a mirror of society: How can the lack of representation affect the rule of law?

3. Further Reading

- [Progress of the World's Women: In Pursuit of Justice \(unodc.org\)](#)
- [Judicial Integrity \(unodc.org\)](#)
- [Gender-Related Integrity Issues \(unodc.org\)](#)

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 21st of March

On 24 March 1960, in the South African city of Shaperville, police killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration against the apartheid “pass laws”. That day was proclaimed as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination by the UN General Assembly resolution 2142 adopted in 1966. Furthermore, in 1979, the General Assembly decided that a week of solidarity with the peoples struggling against racism and racial discrimination, beginning on 21 March, would be organised annually.¹⁸

Racial discrimination means any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.¹⁹

It must be pointed out that racism, xenophobia and intolerance are problems prevalent in all societies. Racial discrimination has its roots in world history and still remains a barrier to the full realisation of human rights in the modern world. Despite some progress, discrimination based on e.g. race, colour national or ethnic origin continue to cause conflict and even loss of life.

1. The law

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights²⁰ (especially Articles 1-2 regarding equality).
- European Convention on Human Rights²¹ article (especially Article 14 regarding prohibition of discrimination).
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination²² (UN General Assembly resolution 2106).

¹⁸ [The UN website for the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.](#)

¹⁹ [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.](#)

²⁰ [Universal Declaration of Human Rights.](#)

²¹ [Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.](#)

²² [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.](#)

- Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice (the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization at its 20th session).²³
- Durban declaration and programme of action.²⁴

Notably, the UN has pointed out that although laws (international and domestic) exist which forbid discrimination on the basis of race, in many cases these have not been adequately implemented, so implementation is still a very important and current process even if some positive developments have already occurred.²⁵

International bodies such as the UN and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) under the UN play a key role in monitoring these conventions. Furthermore, international cooperation is a key principle in achieving the goal of the total elimination of racism and racial discrimination but the basic responsibility for truly effectively combating racial discrimination lies with states. State bodies are primarily responsible for the effective implementation of all commitments regarding elimination of racism. In addition, the efforts made by civil society in lobbying and sharing information play an important role in achieving these goals.²⁶

2. Current Trends and Challenges

Racist extremism

In many parts of the world, there have been trends of various racist extremist movements based on nationalist and racial superiority ideologies. The modern platforms for hate speech and racial discrimination, such as online forums and social media, create echo chambers for groups with the same extremist views. Marginalisation, social exclusion and economic disparities are closely associated with racial discrimination.

Crimes motivated by racist and xenophobic attitudes weaken the rule of law and democracy and thus combating them in our societies is extremely important. There has been a significant rise in the number of violent incidents underpinned by racial and ideological motivations.²⁷ Efforts in human rights education and sharing information on different cultures play a very important role in the elimination of racial discrimination and on the other hand, effective monitoring of compliance with the international conventions.

Vulnerable groups and racism

Individuals belonging to vulnerable groups, such as migrants, refugees and persons belonging to different minorities, are the main victims of violence by extremist political parties and groups that have a racist agenda. Furthermore, a gender perspective should be integrated into relevant policies of action against racial discrimination since racism manifests itself in a differentiated manner for

²³ [Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice.](#)

²⁴ [Durban Declaration.](#)

²⁵ [Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 24 December 2021 76/226.](#)

²⁶ See [Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 20 December 2012 67/155.](#)

²⁷ [UN Office of Drugs and Crime: XRIRB.](#)

women and girls.²⁸ Intersectional analysis can help highlight areas in which different exclusions reinforce one another.

Remembering the history of discrimination and the associated historical injustices

The former colonial powers are encouraged to redress the historical injustices of slavery, including the transatlantic slave trade. Acknowledging the historical injustices and the untold suffering caused by colonialism and apartheid continues to be very important as people of e.g. African and Asian descent and indigenous peoples often continue to be victims of racial discrimination.²⁹

3. Potential Topics for Events and Advocacy

- Racist extremist ideology and hate speech
- Combating of racist extremist ideology
- The importance of education in the fight against discrimination
- Racial discrimination and gender
- History of colonisation and the roots of modern racial discrimination

4. Further reading

- [The UN website for the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#)
- [The UN website - Fight racism](#)
- [CERD website](#)
- [The Long Road to Durban: The United Nations Role in Fighting Racism and Racial Discrimination](#)
- [OHCHR: Racism, Xenophobia and Intolerance](#)

²⁸ [Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 20 December 2012 67/155.](#)

²⁹ [Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December 2019 74/137.](#)

International Day for the Right to Truth concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims, 24th of March

On 24 March each year, the International Day for the Right to Truth Regarding Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims is observed. The day commemorates the victims of gross and systematic human rights violations and all those who have lost their lives in the struggle for human rights.

The right to truth is often invoked in the context of gross human rights violations and serious violations of humanitarian law. Relatives of victims of summary executions, enforced disappearances, missing persons, abducted children, and torture demand to know what actually happened. The right to truth requires the complete truth about events, specific circumstances, persons involved, and the circumstances and reasons for human rights violations. Practices to implement and enforce it include truth commissions and programs to protect witnesses and participants.

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the Day of Remembrance on 21 December 2010, in memory of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero of El Salvador. The archbishop stood for adherence to the principles of protecting life, promoting human dignity and opposing all forms of violence, and openly criticized human rights abuses against the most vulnerable populations in El Salvador. He was assassinated on 24 March 1980. The Truth Commission for El Salvador documented in its 1993 report that the assassination was carried out by forces close to the government, so-called “death squads.”

1. The law

- The right to truth is not explicitly found in human rights treaties. It was recognized in 2013 with the adoption of UN General Assembly Resolution [A/RES/68/165](#).
- Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council [‘Right to the truth’](#)

- Article 32 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts,³⁰ recognizes the right of families to know the fate of their relatives.
- Article 33 of Additional Protocol I provides that the parties to an armed conflict shall search for the persons who have been reported missing by an adverse party as soon as circumstances permit.
- The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance³¹ stipulates in article 24 (2) that ‘each victim has the right to know the truth regarding the circumstances of the enforced disappearance, the progress and results of the investigation and the fate of the disappeared person’.

2. Current Trends and Challenges

The right to truth is multidimensional in its nature. Critical questions arise concerning its premise, interpretation, and scope. Important, too, are its limits:³² should the right to truth be absolute and unlimited, or are there social limits which should apply? If the right is *too* absolute, does that open the door to abuses, for example when majority groups seek to criminalise ‘untrue’ versions of events? Or is, indeed, the right to truth itself the best defence against these dangers?

Crucial though these questions are, the biggest challenge facing the right to truth is likely always to be determining what the truth is. Investigations, particularly into mass atrocities, are always beset by technical difficulties and political controversy.³³ In many cases, it is only possible to investigate months, years, or decades after crimes occur, and in the intervening years evidence may have been lost, destroyed, or manipulated; while witnesses may have died or moved away, their recollections may have faded or they simply are not ready to tell their stories yet. Few or no investigations will have all the evidence that investigators may wish for available to them. While it may be possible to determine the truth of what happened, gaps in the historical record can leave key questions unanswered, or significant controversies unresolved.

There are also difficulties in terms of the practical work of truth commissions.³⁴ Truth investigations are not only dependent on support, but also powers and mandate. In particular, fragile communities, e.g. in transitional environments after conflict or regime change, pose challenges in regard to procedure and require a case-by-case approach. Challenges in post-conflict settings³⁵ can range from security concerns for all parties involved (investigators or potential witnesses, for example) to funding availability. More general issues arise from e.g. the temporal, thematic and functional scope of the mandates; the appointment of commissioners and the implementation of the recommendations brought forward by these commissions.³⁶

³⁰ [Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions.](#)

³¹ [International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.](#)

³² [A Critical Reflection on the Right to the Truth about Gross Human Rights Violations](#), p. 25.

³³ Ibid, pp. 15-16.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 17.

³⁵ [Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence](#), p. 8.

³⁶ Ibid, pp. 8-9.

It's also worth mentioning that it can be hard to distinguish victim from perpetrator, and these terms are not necessarily mutually exclusive.³⁷ Especially in the context of armed groups, the interpretation of victimhood is faceted. The concept of 'complex victims' has been suggested to capture these relationships, such as members of armed groups who are themselves killed as suspected informers, for example.³⁸ The right to truth is not negated in these cases: the basic premise remains that atrocities are investigated. Although, questions of complex victimhood and their background don't factor into the opening of the investigations themselves, issues often arise when considering memorialization practices.³⁹

3. Potential Topics for Events and Advocacy

- Transnational justice
- Victim's rights
- Enforced disappearances
- The work of truth-seeking bodies
- Role of truth in the aftermath of mass atrocities
- Mass crimes impunity
- Enforcement of the right to truth

4. Further Reading

- [Promotion and Protection of Human Rights: Study on the right to the truth](#)
- [A Critical Reflection on the Right to the Truth about Gross Human Rights Violations](#)
- [United Nations Right to the Truth](#)

³⁷ [A Critical Reflection on the Right to the Truth about Gross Human Rights Violations](#), p. 22.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.



Let us know what you think!

Do you have comments, suggestions, or ideas? We'd love to hear from you!

We hope you find these resources useful in helping to plan rewarding, meaningful, and enjoyable sessions for your group. If you have any suggestions for how we can improve these background materials, or if there are particular topics/international days you would like to see included in a future edition, let us know!

Please send any feedback, ideas, or suggestions to director.humanrights@elsa.org