

## WOMEN'S VOICES IN THE INTERNATIONAL JUDICIARY: A PUBLIC LECTURE SERIES

The strengthening of the international judiciary constitutes a major step towards constructing the rule of law at a global level. By setting the 'international' as a possible sphere in which to hold states accountable for their obligations, and also presenting the possibility of bringing to justice high-profile individuals, such international mechanisms represent a significant development in dismantling borders between national and international affairs. In so doing, not only they open up new possibilities to combat impunity, but contribute to the enhanced respect for fundamental rights of human beings.

The initial optimism with which international courts and tribunals were met by several actors has been eroded by challenges to their status and work. International judicial systems have often been the target of criticism both by conservative sectors and by progressive movements, which have criticised their undemocratic character. In the current context of backlash against human rights and re-emergence of powerful populist movements, the task of conceptualising international adjudication systems in more democratic terms has become crucial. So far, however, such attempts have been particularly state-centred. Little attention has been paid to the legitimacy challenge to the international judiciary when it comes to being responsive not only to states, but also to a broader international community shaped by a plurality of actors, including civil society at local and transnational levels. More importantly, the potential of international courts and tribunals to serve as sites of counter-majoritarian safeguard of vulnerable minorities remains largely underexplored.

Moreover, the composition of international adjudicatory bodies barely reflects the diverse peoples that reach out seeking redress. The lack of diversity in the international judiciary, especially gender diversity, raises concerns not just in terms of descriptive representation and symbolic self-identification, but also regarding impartiality, objectivity, and bias. In particular, questions of unconscious bias and systemic privileging of certain ideologies or positions in the process of adjudication need to be seriously addressed with a purpose to foster a sense of shared ownership of the international judiciary system.

In view of this, rethinking the ways international courts and quasi-judicial bodies are composed and operate seems timely. As part of our broader endeavour, we are launching a monthly public lecture series, to run from 2021 until 2022, which aims at bringing directly to a public audience the experiences and perspectives of prominent international women judges, members in quasi-judicial bodies and UN special procedures, as well as prosecutors, arbitrators, and national judges with a direct role in applying international law.

Our goal is to open up a debate with a focus on issues of legitimacy, inclusiveness and gender diversity with a view to engaging the local academic community, participants from 'international Geneva' as well as a broader international audience.

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*This lecture series is dedicated to the memory of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, whose commitment to women's equality, diversity, and justice inspired the concept of these events.*