

INTRODUCTION

The theme for the 2023 Annual Meeting—“The Reach and Limits of International Law to Solve Today’s Challenges”—was intended to capture the “perpetual crisis” that international law appears to face in today’s increasingly complex world. We encouraged our panels to look critically at the ability of international law to meaningfully address the profound issues currently impacting our global society, and to acknowledge the sometimes limited value international law can provide in times of crisis. The Meeting was organized in the midst of the Ukraine invasion and on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we believed it was important as an international law community to use the power of the Annual Meeting to squarely confront these crises.

What emerged, however, as our panels took shape, was the palpable sense that international law’s reach is ever-expanding, even as its limits must be recognized and addressed. The Annual Meeting panels explored some of international law’s recent crowning achievements, such as the United Nations’ recognition of a “right to a healthy environment” and the emphasis in international criminal justice law on individual criminal responsibility for sexual and gender-based violence. It also explored how international law can and already is affecting new challenges, such as vaccine inequity, abortion law and politics, and the growing need to regulate “space debris.”

Our first “late-breaking panel” focused on international law as a tool against democratic backsliding, motivated in part by the highly criticized response of Turkey to the February 2023 earthquake that preceded the Annual Meeting and the political crises occurring across Latin America that portend the slow erosion of democratic values. The second late-breaking panel focused on the International Criminal Court’s March 2023 arrest warrant against Vladimir Putin, which was addressed to war crimes relating to children. The discussion of these timely challenges demonstrated the role international law can play in providing meaningful checks on real-time events.

Attendance was back to pre-pandemic levels for the first time since 2020, and the energy and excitement among the attendees was tangible. Many of the panels were standing room only; receptions flowed outside and in, and the level of intellectual and social discourse was high. We walked away from the Annual Meeting with the overwhelming sense that international law has and will continue to play a critical role in our global world, and that this is possible not only because of its enduring relevance, but also because of the amazingly dedicated community that works tirelessly to promote and foster its implementation.

We are honored and grateful to have served as your Co-Chairs and thank the Society for the opportunity.

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2023 ASIL Annual Meeting Co-Chairs