

# Editorial #10: On Equal Access to the International Legal Profession

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The interns' room at Palais Wilson, hosting most of the UN's human rights activities, is a pleasant room with a gorgeous view of Lake Geneva. In contrast, the entry door is plastered with rather cynical quotes calling out the unpaid nature of the work that interns carry out here. Fully readable from the walkway is also the wording of [Article 7 ICESCR](#), which declares fair remuneration a human right. As an aspiring international lawyer from a rich country with multiple funding options (thank you, [DAAD!](#)), the current situation has left me with a feeling of rage and injustice. So, while many of the younger readers of this blog are just returning from their summer internships, I would like to take this opportunity to call out once again how unremunerated work of young graduates exacerbates inequalities in the international legal profession.

Still to date, [international organisations](#) and [international courts and tribunals](#) heavily [rely](#) on the work force of interns – but [mostly do not pay](#) their labour. Consequently, only those who are fortunate enough to have sufficient private or public funds can put their knowledge into practice and shape the institutions with their input. Not surprisingly, this [excludes disproportionately](#) graduates from the Global South since funding is often tied to the applicants' academic institution or country of origin. Thereby, the incoming interns – and given internships' [boosting effect](#), future employees – are overrepresenting privileged backgrounds, exacerbating the existing accessibility gap in the profession. It is not a secret that the professional field of international law has a serious problem of representation: The oral proceedings before the ICJ are [monopolized](#) by male professors from developed countries and Western States are significantly [overrepresented](#) among the UN Secretariat staff. Certainly, the budgetary problems of international institutions are real; yet the decision not to pay interns is a matter of priorities. Barring access to young graduates who lack financial resources is [exacerbating](#) the dispersion of international law and can simply not be justified.

Oh, and dear supervisors, dear colleagues, dear academics relying on free student's research – please don't hide behind your organisation or the tight budget of your project. If it's not in your hands to pay assistants, then make sure that the experience of those who managed to reach your institution is meaningful, educational and empowering. Not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because you are also benefitting from their innovative approaches, their enthusiast ideas and their knowledge of the current scholarly discourse. And soon enough these young graduates will be your colleagues, helping you to tackle your workload. Train the next generation as you were trained – or even better, be the mentor that you wished for! This is even more crucial when it comes to persons who lack access to financial or cultural capital and have – against all odds and likelihood – managed to reach your institution. Respectfully offer advice to people who have not been told it's okay

to ask, make assistants who have supported your research visible, take the time to give productive feedback. And, given the [light breeze of change](#) blowing through [international institutions](#), solidarise with the interns in their struggle!

Now, let me briefly introduce you to the variety of posts that Völkerrechtsblog had on its program in the rather calm month of September. The month started with our [Völkerrechtspodcast](#) (in German), in which our editors talked with Dr. Anne Dienelt about the protection of the environment in armed conflicts. Similarly concerned about the environment, international lawyers around the globe have issued a powerful [pledge](#), calling for climate action by lawyers. In view of the Taliban's seizure of power in Afghanistan, [Lukas Kleinert](#) provided the legal background to the recognition of governments, while [Sissy Katsoni](#) examined the declarations of some European governments intending to limit the entry of prospective asylum-seekers. Focusing on current developments, [Lisa M. Cohen](#) reviewed the classification of offensive cyber capabilities in international humanitarian law and [Johannes Tropper](#) presented the recent CJUE judgment Komstroy. Against the backdrop of the relations between Russia and Ukraine, [Lucia Leontiev and Punsara Amarasinghe](#) reflected on the role of history in shaping the present international legal order. Informed by a recent workshop at the Committee of Legal Advisers on Public International Law of the Council of Europe, [Sabrina Schäfer and Florian Held](#) took a closer look at the much-used instrument non-legally binding arrangements in international law. And last but not least, [Hendrik Simon](#) introduced our new interview series 'International Law and the Political', kicking off with an interview with [Prof. Anne Peters](#).

Our September posts covered a wide range of topics. In October, a bouquet of thought-provoking topics awaits you as usual, and I look forward to your engagement with them. I wish you some stimulating reads and a wonderful month of October!

