



The thirteenth GNF Master Class on Law, History, Politics and Society in the Context of Mass Atrocities addressed the question of HOW CAN WE HUMANS STOP [KILLING MILLIONS OF EACH OTHER IN] WARS?

This past July 2026, 25 Fellows and over 30 speakers came together at the Inter University Centre (IUC) in Dubrovnik to tackle this difficult, yet necessary issue, within the context of International Humanitarian law, and the courts of law, politics, public opinion, and art.

SCHOLARS

We learned from several scholars, including those involved in policy, politics, research, and professorship who brought both law and theory to the question of why and how war happens. **Matthew Carlson**, Co-Chief of UN Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, opened the week's substantive sessions with the foundations of international criminal law tracing their roots from antiquity through Nuremberg to the ICTY and ICTR. His teaching demonstrated that international criminal justice is one part law, one part politics, one part diplomacy, a system which is still learning to crawl. **Dr. Robert Muharremi**, Kosovo-Albanian Professor and GNF Course Co-Director, walked us through the Kosovo Specialist Chambers as a case study in selective justice, arguing that in the aftermath of war international courts are as much instruments of powerful states' interests as they are expressions of justice, built to prosecute enemies while shielding allies.

Professor Ali Ansari, from the University of St. Andrews, unpacked the competing nationalisms of the Middle East, and **Sonja Biserko**, Chairperson of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, analysed the Serbian student protests that emerged following the collapse of the Novi Sad railway station canopy in November 2024, where the protests have raised the pressure for accountability, however, functioning democratic institutions and greater EU support still remains necessary. **Dr. Daniel Nilsson's** lecture, from King's College London, examined how apocalyptic political narratives are shaping the politics of major powers, while undermining democratic accountability and the rules-based international order by promoting fatalism and legitimising violence. In contrast, **Peter Glasgow** presented a case for the role of pacifism—the absolute rejection of war and violence—where he found that militarism is normalised and pacifism is marginalised within public culture.

Sir Konrad Schiemann delivered two powerful discussion sessions on the deeper roots of conflict. Drawing on centuries of ecclesiastical and political history, and on his own life, he argued that group identity is inherently double-edged: every “us” defines a “them”, and those seeking power exploit this dynamic into what he called ‘pathological dualism’, dehumanizing an enemy until atrocity becomes possible. In the second session he traced three historical attempts to establish a common humanity, namely: religious conversion, Enlightenment philosophy, and universal individual rights, and concluded that none had succeeded in preventing major conflict, even with the given belief of the sanctity of the individual.

Dr. Thomas D. Grant, from the University of Cambridge, framed the UN as the latest in a long line of great-power settlements—one whose founding assumption that the five permanent Security Council members would stay in consensus—collapsed almost as soon as it was made. He warned that UN bodies risk squandering their authority by issuing advisory opinions and resolutions with no means of enforcement. **Professor Rosa Freedman**, from the University of Reading, gave a detailed account of the UN Human Rights Council, from its genuine achievements alongside its selective blind spots, including its own accountability failures, such as the decades of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN personnel. **Professor Rhona Smith**, from Newcastle University, portrayed the complexities surrounding post-conflict UN rebuilding, as it is not merely about infrastructure, but also accountability, sustainable funding routes, and regulation of external actors to ensure rebuilding serves affected populations. **Professor Philip Alston**, from the NYU School of Law, argued that the political economy of conflict, competition over resources, land, and data, as the most under-addressed drivers of war, whilst identifying privatization, extreme inequality, unregulated AI and autonomous weapons, and climate change as four macro-trends the UN is, by design, ill-equipped to confront.

LAW

We learned from those in the law, including judges and lawyers. **Lord Iain Bonomy** took us from the first recorded international war crimes trial, a tribunal of 28 judges convened in 1474 to try Peter von Hagenbach, through the Hague Conventions and the abortive attempt to prosecute the Kaiser at Versailles, to Nuremberg and the ICTY, which he presided over. **Tereza Vujošević**, a researcher in International Humanitarian Law at Trnava University, presented her work on there being clearer norms which focus on the illegality of using human shields, rather than on the legal status of the shields themselves. We also met with **Judge Kim Prost**, a sitting judge at the International Criminal Court who currently has U.S. sanctions against her. She spoke candidly about the practical and psychological toll of having her life impacted in this way, while doing her job fairly and free of political pressure. This demonstrates the current willingness of world powers to blatantly attack judicial independence, and undercut the international rules-based order. **Kristin Rosella**, executive director of Lex Collective, described her organisation's work bridging investigative journalism and legal accountability to pursue the financial architecture enabling atrocities, including criminal complaints filed with the ICC.

MILITARY

We also met with military officials, including **General Sir Nicholas Parker** and **Jill Sinclair**, Canada's representative to the Ukraine Defence Reform Advisory Board. General Parker led two practical simulations: a dual-use export-control exercise on suspected sanctions evasion and a Model UN-style crisis simulation, both highlighting the complexity of decision-making under pressure. Sinclair reflected on leadership under uncertainty, arguing that the post-1945 security order remains an essential framework for international decision-making. She emphasized the importance of whole-of-society resilience and warned against allowing current geopolitical tensions to weaken underpinning international legitimacy and accountability.

NGOs & VOLUNTEERS

A session on volunteering in Ukraine brought together four different routes into the same work. **Darrell McKey**, a Canadian documentary author and fundraiser, has raised roughly CAD 205,000 through Facebook, funding stretchers, tourniquets, and drone equipment, while running evacuation crews near the front line; he credited his donors' trust to a promise of full financial transparency. **Olga Golovina**, head of communications at the HALO Trust Ukraine, described an organisation that has grown to 1,300 staff across

six oblasts in what is now the most mine-contaminated country in the world, working to clear landmines, cluster bombs, and unexploded ordnance. **Bill Ebbesen**, a Danish mechanical engineer on his 21st trip into Ukraine, spoke about the difficulty of deciding to act at all and the practical challenges of closed airspaces, and the constant fear of civilian attacks. **Bastian Veigel**, a German trauma surgeon who volunteered at stabilisation points and who currently provides front-line donations, pointed to the biggest structural gap in the fact that there is no coordinating body existing above the roughly 40,000 NGOs operating in Ukraine, leaving willing volunteers to find their way in largely through luck and personal networks.

Mariia Semanyshyn, one of this year's GNF Fellows and front-line charity co-founder, described working on civilian evacuations near the front, and the particular grief of reaching villages where people she had arranged to evacuate had already been killed by Russian strikes. She runs the charity Swallows, alongside **Anastasia Kucher**, GNF's own director and journalist, supplying medical equipment to stabilisation points and hospitals alongside their volunteers.

MEDICAL

This discussion with medical experts explored the crucial role of medics and the layered complexity to maintaining healthcare infrastructures, throughout times of conflict. **Dr. Vita Sinclair**, a GNF alumnus, began by outlining the international legal framework which governs attacks on healthcare, while distinguishing between 'direct attacks' (relatively easy to measure, prohibited under international law, but rarely prosecuted) vs 'indirect deaths' (caused by the collapse of the healthcare system and challenging to measure). **Dr. Aula Abbata**, Consultant in Infectious Diseases/General Internal Medicine at Imperial College NHS Healthcare Trust, furthered the discussion by emphasising that conflict is compounded by climate change, economic instability, and the erosion of international norms—which births a 'multi-crises'. This compounding nature of conflict was expounded by **Dr. Kostyantyn Kravets**, who described his work at a stabilisation point in Ukraine, Zaporizhia—where despite facing many challenges, drones have become an invaluable aid to treat unreachable wounded soldiers. What was revealed by these medical experts is that many wartime deaths do not just result from 'direct attacks', but from the broader collapse of an overwhelmed healthcare infrastructure. Thus, protecting healthcare in conflict also requires legal accountability and political action to provide the necessary resources.

JOURNALISM

Renowned journalists discussed the importance of war crimes reporting, particularly in the current case of Ukraine. The Managing Editor at IWPR, **Daniella Peled**, explained that Ukraine is the first country in history to conduct war crimes trials amid active conflict, which creates an unprecedented burden on prosecutors, investigators, police, and journalists. The Editorial Coordinator of the Ukraine Justice Reports Project, **Olga Golovina**, continued to describe the scale of the challenge and the risk of burnout from sustained exposure to traumatic material: approximately 230,000 war crimes have been registered in Ukraine, investigated by only 700–800 investigators. Finally, a Ukrainian journalist who is a part of this project, **Yuliia Kalaban**, described the emotional and practical challenges of covering justice while living through war.

The special correspondent at Sky News, **Alex Crawford**, offered another angle to 'boots on the ground' reporting, as it serves an essential purpose to document atrocities in support of present and future accountability mechanisms. However, she acknowledged the recent exclusion of foreign journalists from Gaza and the targeted killing of Palestinian journalists, as setting a dangerous precedent—conflict coverage experiences a significant gap. This honest conversation about the role of journalism during times of war

found its crucial position as being the ‘first draft of history’—it provides an early warning, the initial evidence, and a human story—however, it comes at the cost of the journalist’s exposure to traumatic and overwhelming material, and in some cases, the tragic cost of the journalist’s life.

ARTS AND SPORTS

The screening of journalist and filmmaker, **Huub Jasper’s** sobering investigative documentary, *Why Srebrenica Had to Fall*, brought together the journalistic pursuit for truth, and the artistic value of emotion, in examining what Western intelligence services knew before the fall of Srebrenica in July 1995. Evidence suggested that Western powers—including the United States, United Kingdom, and France—were aware of the impending attack and chose not to intervene, possibly due to the elimination of the eastern enclaves simplifying the path to a peace agreement. However, Jaspers acknowledged that this film did not have the maximum effect of holding those responsible into account, demonstrating the unfortunate limits to investigative journalism’s potent truth-serum.

Theater director and survivor of the four-year siege of Sarajevo, **Haris Pasovic**, posited that the arts may not stop wars or hold those at the highest level into account, but it crucially preserves the human element that war seeks to destroy. Art can foster empathy, promote uniqueness, and create dialogue, all whilst maintaining one’s individual connection to the universe—a connection which challenges the dehumanizing machinery of capitalism and conflict. Pasovic sees art’s ability to awaken one’s connection with the universe as what ignites activism within the ordinary person. Following this, PEN International writer, **German Rojas**, notes that the pen of the writer is not mightier than the battle sword, however, literature has an indestructible ability to influence. This influence preserves memory, challenges oppression, sustains community and identity during, and after, times of war. Rojas astutely comments that “poetry cannot stop the bombing, but without poetry humanity would become extinct in the next 5 minutes, because its end would be the end of hope, and we can last 72 hours without water, but not 5 minutes without hope”. Art, therefore, cannot stop, prevent, or contain wars, but it wakes the conscience of the individual—making the ordinary person bear witness to the other, and to think twice about their own nature and their beliefs.

A final discussion was had on where sports sits at the paradigm of war and peace. The sports professional, **Lejla Njemčević**, argued that sports creates a neutral zone, where athletes can communicate freely, unburdened by historical grievances or political pressures. However, she acknowledged that sports does not always remain an apolitical institution, due to the political pressure from governments and federations. GNF Alumni **Harry Rogers** and **Kondwani Nyirenda**, continued to probe at this question of whether sports can contribute to peace. They found that the space of sports has a unique ability to combine athletic prowess, entertainment, and community belonging. However, this uniting nature of football can also be what makes sport susceptible to political capture, with an example being the May 1990 riots at Maksimir Stadium in Zagreb—which descended into a violence that many consider to be a symbolic starting point of the Yugoslav wars. Sports, then, is a complex space between peace-building, neutrality, and political influence.

CONCLUSION

This question is not an easy one to answer. Throughout the program, we regarded the collective power of tribunals, treaties, sanctions, humanitarian aid, and art in stopping war at its conception, during its peak, or after it has already shattered the reflection of society. Yet, if each of these tools were to stand alone, it would make the return to stability and world order nearly impossible to accomplish. Each of the 30+ impressive

speakers had a piece of the puzzle to push the envelope forward, however incrementally, to make the next atrocity a little harder to commit and a little easier to answer to. Sir Geoffrey Nice drew a crucial, human distinction between emotional sympathy and logical sympathy, and the same distinction applies to hope. Emotional hope flares and fades. Logical hope is a discipline that chooses to keep working and building, because one day, War will be over, and accountability will finally be served. Thank you, first and foremost to the Speakers, and crucially, to the Fellows who joined us this year. It was a genuine pleasure getting to know each of you and your stories.