



12th Annual Conference of the African Society of International Law

Africa and the Governance of the Global Commons

27-28 October 2023

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

CALL FOR PAPERS

The African Society of International Law (AfsIL) is pleased to invite paper proposals on the theme “*Africa and the Governance of the Global Commons*” for its twelfth annual conference. The conference will take place at the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 27 and 28 October 2023.

The Global Commons comprise the areas and resources that are beyond state sovereignty and are theoretically available for the benefit of all. Their use is considered rivalrous because one group’s use of the Commons could affect another group’s use of the same. The Global Commons have traditionally included the high seas, the atmosphere, outer space, and the polar regions. But now that we are firmly within the Anthropocene – the era in which humans are changing the Earth such that its very integrity is at risk – many include the Earth itself, along with the natural systems on Earth that we all depend on for our existence, among the Global Commons.

International law has adopted a variety of approaches to governing the various Global Commons over time. An early principle, for example, was *mare liberum*, which sought to preserve freedom of access to the high seas for the benefit of all. However, freedom of access for all often translated into a system of “first come, first served” that unfairly favoured certain industrialised nations. African states, together with other developing countries, thus promoted the concept of the “common heritage of mankind” as a more just means of governing Global Commons. On this basis, any exploitation of the seabed beyond national jurisdiction is to be conducted for the common heritage of mankind. But as states and corporations begin to seek permits to mine the seabed for valuable polymetallic nodules, it remains unclear how precisely the International Seabed Authority will implement this important principle.

In other contexts, states have crafted special treaty regimes to regulate the use of the Commons. While moratoria have helped protect whales for example, other fisheries have continued to be over-used by some at the expense of others because of free rider problems or weak links in the implementation of regulations. In the outer space realm, technological advances, the entrance of private actors, and militarization have rendered such treaty regimes out of date and inadequate.

With regard to ozone depletion in the atmosphere, the use of economic instruments such as fees and penalties have incentivized behaviour that protects the environment and benefits all. Nevertheless, questions regarding equity and fairness remain since states have different capacity to absorb these fees.

In the meantime, disputes have arisen or are on the horizon regarding the use of various Global Commons, the scarcity that has resulted from their mismanagement, and accountability for the myriad damage being caused.



The Conference

It is critical that African perspectives, experiences, challenges and innovations regarding the governance and use of the Global Commons are heard, analyzed and understood. Given the fundamental role that the African Union has played and must continue to play in the governance of the Global Commons, AfsIL is delighted to convene this important discussion at the headquarters of the African Union in Addis Ababa.

Thematic areas to be addressed include, but are not limited to:

- **Theme I: International law-making concerning the Global Commons** (including definition of the Global Commons, the capacity of international law to effectively manage the Global Commons, and African contributions to the governance of the Global Commons)
- **Theme II: International cooperation in the governance and use of the Global Commons** (including cooperation among states, common but differentiated responsibilities, involvement of non-state actors, and unequal access)
- **Theme III: International economic systems, trade and the Global Commons** (including relationship between trade and the Global Commons, economic liberalization, sustainable development, recycling and reuse, and the use of market forces and economic incentives in the management of the Commons)
- **Theme IV: International justice concerning the Global Commons** (including existing and foreseeable conflicts, dispute resolution, accountability, and quantification of damage to the Commons)
- **Theme V: Health and Rights concerning the Global Commons** (including human rights, the rights of nature, intergenerational rights, and health as a public good)
- **Theme VI: In-depth analyses concerning specific Global Commons** (including the high seas, the deep seabed, the atmosphere and climate, outer space, biodiversity, global water systems, the polar regions, and the Earth as a whole)

Paper proposals may address more than one of the topics identified. Paper proposals addressing other topics related to the conference theme of “Africa and the Governance of the Global Commons” may also be submitted.

Please submit an abstract of 250-500 words (in English or French), with the title, the author’s name, a biography or CV, and contact details, to contact@afsilsadi.org by 1 May 2023.

Venue and Expenses

The Conference will take place **in person** at the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa.

Please be aware that AfsIL is unable to cover the travel and accommodation expenses of any participants.

No fee will be charged for attending the Conference, but registration on our website will be required by **6 October 2023**. A cocktail reception will take place on 27 October at the Hyatt Hotel Addis-Ababa (**USD25**).

Timeline

- Abstracts due: **1 May 2023**
- Notification of acceptance: **31 May 2023**
- Draft papers due: **30 September 2023**
- Conference registration deadline: **6 October 2023**
- Conference: **27-28 October 2023**
- Final papers for publication: **31 November 2023**

Please email contact@afsilsadi.org with any questions you might have regarding the Conference.