

Interpretation in International Law

University of Cambridge
August 27, 2013

CALL FOR PAPERS

The relevance of interpretation to the academic study and professional practice of international law is inescapable. Yet interpretation in international law has not traditionally been examined as a distinct field. Given that international law is constituted, in practical terms, by acts of interpretation, there is a need for greater methodological awareness of interpretive theory and practice in international law.

The 'Interpretation in International Law' conference at the University of Cambridge in August 2013 aims to attract submissions focusing on the divergent processes of interpretation that exist in international law, whether these be differentiated linguistically, culturally, politically or socially. Submissions will be encouraged that deal with the interpretation process *per se*, as well as the place of interpretive process within the larger scheme of international law (such as divergent interpretations of concrete provisions, or the impact of interpretation on the sources of international law). The conference welcomes submissions from both philosophical and practical perspectives ensuring exposure of ideas and concepts that may otherwise have been confined to their own sub-fields.

The following speakers will give keynote presentations:

- Sir David Baragwanath (President, Special Tribunal for Lebanon)
- Professor Andrea Bianchi (The Graduate Institute, Geneva)
- Dr Ingo Venzke (University of Amsterdam)

A wide variety of proposals are welcomed. Proposed panels include:

- **Interpretation and Legal Doctrine:** this panel will highlight the doctrinal exposition of particular contested legal standards – for example, “fair and equitable treatment” and “cruel and unusual punishment” – as well as the methodologies behind such expositions in a range of international and regional courts and tribunals.
- **Interpretation and the Sources of International Law:** this panel will focus on how interpretive practice interacts with, and institutes hierarchies amongst, the sources of international law. Where can the line be drawn between “dynamic” and “progressive” interpretive practice and law-making? Submissions dealing with treaty interpretation and the place of interpretation in the formation of custom are encouraged.
- **Interpretation and the Interpreters:** this panel will examine how disparate interpretations of international law are granted the imprimatur by functionally specialized interpretive communities who use international law as a professional

vocabulary (for example, judges, diplomats, legal advisers, arbitrators and regulators). To what extent is the interpretation of international law a competition for “semantic authority” (Ingo Venzke)?

- **Interpretation and the International Legal Order:** this panel will consider the extent to which one’s interpretive posture depends on the vision of the international legal order that one advocates, such as constitutionalism or global administrative law. How are particular values, such as dignity and comity, foregrounded or neglected in the interpretive process? Do interpretive practices have the potential to bridge conceptual divides between public and private international law?
- **Interpretation and Cultural Contingency:** James Crawford has recently stated that international lawyers must possess a “technique of plurilingual interpretation”. This panel will provide a forum for the exposition of culturally distinct interpretive practices, as well as a consideration of the benefits and drawbacks of divergent interpretations stemming from cultural differences.
- **Interpretation and Indeterminacy:** this panel focuses on interpretation in light of the critical challenge to international law. How is interpretive practice affected by the allegation that apolitical rules are impossible and that values used to justify such rules are subjective? Given the fragmentation of international law, is an interpretive *lingua franca* attainable or is interpretive pluralism inevitable?

Abstract submissions must be between 300-500 words in length and should be accompanied by a short resume. Please submit your documents to cambridgeinterpretation@gmail.com. Any queries may be directed to the conference conveners, Daniel Peat (dcp31@cam.ac.uk) and Matthew Windsor (mrw48@cam.ac.uk).

The closing date for submissions is **1 May 2013**. We will notify successful applicants by late May 2013, who must submit their papers by early August 2013. Conference papers should be between 6,000 and 10,000 words. Selected submissions will be considered for publication in an edited volume on the conference theme.