



BIRMINGHAM CITY
University



IN CONVERSATION WITH THE EXPERTS: THE FUTURE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The Centre for Human Rights
College of Law, Social and Criminal Justice
Birmingham City University

Monday 27 January 2025

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WELCOME TO THE CONFERENCE BY PROFESSOR JON YORKE AND DR ALICE STOREY

A warm welcome to *In Conversation with the Experts: The Future of the United Nations* from the conference organisers.

This Conference is created through, and reflects the core strategies of, the BCU Centre for Human Rights (CHR). The academic and student members of the CHR formulate and implement engaging programs to help safeguard human rights around the world, and we achieve this through our four workstreams: (1) Consultancy, (2) Clinic; (3) Research; and (4) Education. We have created a successful work-package focusing on the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). We are a leading consultant on the UN Universal Periodic Review and we inform the work of the UN Special Procedures, and provide advisory services to victims of human rights violations on how to engage the UN safeguarding mechanisms.

Through the wider application of our four workstreams we are eager to engage with the UN Secretary General's vision for *Our Common Agenda* (2023) which aims to accelerate the *2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs). These goals are to be realised in the lives of everyone around the world. The *Pact*

for the Future (2024) demonstrates the world leader's commitments for an inter-governmentally negotiated and action-oriented agreement for achieving:

- Sustaining development and financing for development
- International peace and security
- Science, technology and innovation and global cooperation
- Youth and future generations
- Transforming global governance

Emphasising the need for intrinsic thematic consideration the *Pact* includes the annexes of a *Global Digital Compact* and a *Declaration on Future Generations*.

We are aware of the setbacks to the progress of the SDGs, the need to create further effectiveness of the UPR, and provide wider support for the work of the Special Rapporteurs and Independent Experts. There needs to be a continued meaningful engagement with Member States and Permanent Missions in New York at the General Assembly and the Security Council, and in Geneva at the Human Rights Council. The role of civil society, universities, experts and public intellectuals, businesses and corporate entities, digital, technology and AI

developers, necessitates a considered and meaningful protection of our world for our future generations. We therefore all need to play our part in helping ensure the success of the *Pact for the Future*.

It is not a time to allow the growing dangers of the global spread of deception and misrepresentation to thwart the work for holistically sustaining our world. Those old foes of war, famine, pestilence, and death have a recently emboldened assailant called misinformation. There are consequences humanity will have to shoulder if we do not heed the warnings. Perhaps it is a time for a new global humility? The *Charter of the United Nations* (1945), Preamble states that the peoples of the world should be determined 'to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small,' and in maintaining peace, human rights, and sustaining our world, Article 1, affirms that the UN is '[t]o be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends.'

This strategy has now been updated in the *Pact for the Future* and we are honoured

to host leading experts for this conference to discuss the current and future challenges for the UN and the world.

We look forward to our dialogue and the sharing of ideas through which we can all make our best effort to meet the challenges of our fast-changing world. The emerging risks to our planet and our humanity required bold new solutions. These can only be recognised, understood, and implemented, if we all participate in this global conversation for our future. The creation of the knowledge for the success of the *Pact for the Future* will emerge from dialogue, transparency, and holistic understanding of facts.

We warmly welcome you to our contribution to this discussion held here at Birmingham City University and we will ensure that our cogent outcomes will be used to inform our future submissions to the United Nations.

Please stay in touch and do inform us of your future work in helping sustain our planet and protecting our environment for the co-enjoyment of the earth for all living species.

Thank you and welcome.



PROFESSOR JON YORKE

Professor of Human Rights and Director of the Centre for Human Rights at Birmingham City University

Professor Jon Yorke is a Professor of Human Rights and he created the Centre for Human Rights at Birmingham City University in 2014. He has advised the United Nations, the European Union, and the Council of Europe, numerous governments, permanent missions, national human rights institutions, and civil society organisations. He regularly contributes to the Universal Periodic Review, he has filed *amicus curie* briefs in legal proceedings in national and international courts, and submitted complaints on behalf of victims of various human rights violations to the UN Special Rapporteurs and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. His scholarship focuses upon general human rights, with a specialism on the death penalty and the work of the OHCHR.



DR ALICE STOREY

Senior Lecturer in Law at Birmingham City University and Academic Lead of the UPR Project at BCU

Dr Alice Storey is a Senior Lecturer in Law and Associate Director of the Centre for Human Rights at Birmingham City University, where she leads the UPR Project at BCU. Alice's research predominantly focuses on the UN's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism and how States and civil society organisations engage with international human rights. Alice is one of three co-founders of the **UPR Academic Network**, which brings together an international network of scholars working on the UPR.

WELCOME TO BIRMINGHAM CITY UNIVERSITY FROM THE PRO VICE CHANCELLOR OF RESEARCH

Last year the university launched our *Strategy 2030 and Beyond* through which we established three focal pillars:

1. Develop talent for tomorrow
2. Create knowledge for good
3. Power prosperity.

Our institutional ideology is reflected in us being 'Rooted in Birmingham' and what we achieve here through our teaching, innovation, and practice, equips our staff and students to 'Reach Beyond.'

We are a university which focuses upon meeting the needs of our community through providing learning opportunities and professional training to help our students meet the challenges facing them today and where life will lead them tomorrow.

The Centre for Human Rights is an exemplar in this regard. We are proud of the work that the CHR has achieved in raising awareness of the United Nations in our region, creating staff and student opportunities for engaging with the UN, and providing over 1,500 of our students with simulated experiences for solving local and global problems.

The UPR Project at BCU has achieved great success. The project lead is Centre Associate Director Dr Alice Storey, and since its creation in 2019, Dr Storey, Professor Yorke, along with Dr Amna Nazir, have led the submission of 45 Stakeholder Reports in 43 different UN member state's UPR. These have involved more than 50 BCU law students in the co-creation of these reports. This is a phenomenal achievement in which they have acted to help safeguard a host of human rights in each of the world's political regions. Their work has been recognised as good practice in both

the Human Rights Council and by UN Special Procedures.

Therefore, we are proud to host this conference on a very important initiative of the United Nations. We are well aware of some of the challenges the world faces but we are also aware that we are still to find some of the answers on how to deal with these challenges.

At Birmingham City University we aspire to be an academic institution which provides educative forums to discover how to meet such challenges. It is clear that the UN's *Pact for the Future* is a necessary inter-governmental agreement to help create a sustainable and peaceful world.

It is also clear that universities, and conferences like this one, are crucially important for us to generate the necessary knowledge to help us all have a sustainable future.

We are honoured to host you today for this discussion on such an important issue. I welcome the world leading experts that will be contributing to our two panel discussions, and for delivering our Keynote Address, our esteemed gratitude to Her Excellency, Dr Fatou Bensouda, High Commissioner of Gambia to the United Kingdom.

A wholehearted welcome to you all. I wish you all good luck in your contributions.

Thank you.

Professor Maxine Lintern
*Pro Vice Chancellor of Research,
Birmingham City University*

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

In Conversation with the Experts: The Future of the United Nations

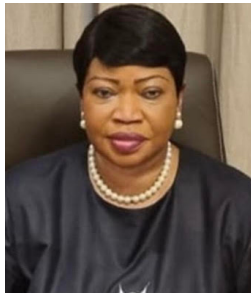
Talk and break times:

- 12 – 12.30pm | Lunch for Conference Attendees
- 12.30 – 12.35pm | Welcome to the Conference: Professor Jon Yorke and Dr Alice Storey
- 12.35 – 12.45pm | Welcome to Birmingham City University: Professor Maxine Lintern
- 12.45 – 1.45pm | Conference Keynote Address ‘The Future of the United Nations’
 - Her Excellency Dr Fatou Bensouda, *The Gambia High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Former Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) 2012-2021*
 - Chair: Mr Lamin Daffeh, *Lecturer in Law, Birmingham City University*
- 1.50 – 3.15pm | Panel 1 | The United Nations and Member State Permanent Missions
 - Mr Gianni Magazzeni, *Former Chief of the UPR Branch, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)*
 - Ms Barbara Fontana, *Counsellor, Head of the Human Rights Team, Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations in Geneva, detached to the Office of the President of the Human Rights Council throughout 2025*
 - Chair: Dr Alice Storey, *Senior Lecturer in Law, Birmingham City University*
- 3.15 – 3.45pm | BREAK
- 3.45 – 5.30pm | Panel 2 | Civil Society Organisations
 - Ms Nicoletta Zappile, *Deputy Director, UPR Info, Geneva, Switzerland*
 - Ms Francesca Restifo, *UN Representative and Senior Human Rights Advisor, International Bar Association*
 - Mr Imri Schattner-Ornan, *Former Consultant, Médecins Sans Frontières / Doctors Without Borders, Senior Lecturer, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine*
 - Chair: Dr Rebecca Smyth, *Lecturer in Law, Birmingham City University*
- 5.30 – 6pm | Launch of the Inaugural BCU United Nations Society
 - Statement by Her Excellency Dr Fatou Bensouda and Counsellor Sainey Barrow
 - Statement by the BCU UNS President Stuart Crutchlow and Vice-President Mira Obaro
- 6pm | Conference Close: Professor Jon Yorke

THE EXPERTS

- Dr Fatou Bensouda
- Mr Gianni Magazzeni
- Ms Barbara Fontana
- Nicoletta Zappile
- Mr Imri Schattner-Ornan
- Francesca Restifo





DR FATOU BENSOU DA

The Future of the United Nations

Her Excellency Dr Fatou Bensouda, *The Gambia High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Former Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) 2012-2021*

Chair: Mr Lamin Daffeh, Lecturer in Law, Birmingham City University

Dr Fatou Bensouda served as Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court - (The ICC), 2012-2021, having assumed office in 2012. In 2011, she was elected by consensus by the Assembly of States Parties to serve in this capacity. Dr Bensouda was nominated and supported as the sole African candidate for election to the post by the African Union. She is the first woman to serve as the Prosecutor of the ICC. Her nine year mandate as ICC Prosecutor ended on 15 June 2021.

Under her leadership, Dr Bensouda has greatly reinforced the capacity of her Office through a number of strategic and managerial initiatives and expanded her Office's activities to cover 14 investigations, and countless active preliminary examinations in conflicts around the world. Through her work, she has strived to advance accountability for atrocity crimes, highlighting in particular the importance of addressing traditionally underreported crimes such as sexual and gender-based crimes, mass atrocities against and affecting children, as well as the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage within the Rome Statute framework.

In 2018, Dr Bensouda received the Bled Strategic Forum's Distinguished Partner Award for the continuous commitment on her part, and on the part of the ICC, to international peace and justice. In the same year, she was invited and

joined the eminent roster of *International Gender Champions*. Prior to the end of her mandate, Dr Bensouda was awarded *l'ordre national du Lion du Sénégal* by the President of Senegal for her dedicated service in the advancement of international criminal justice, and her native country, The Gambia, announced that she will be awarded the country's highest civilian honour for her principled service as ICC Prosecutor. At the end of her mandate in 2021, Dr Bensouda was awarded The Outstanding Achievement Award by The International Law Association American Branch (ABILA), and The Sapienza Human Rights Award from Sapienza university Rome, Italy. She had been chosen to receive the 2022 Prominent Woman in International Law by The American Society of International Law.

Dr Bensouda (and the Office she led as ICC Prosecutor) had been nominated for the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of their accomplishments and work in advancing international criminal justice, without fear or favour.

Dr Bensouda currently serves as The Gambian High Commissioner to the Court of St James's and Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Kingdoms of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the Republics of Austria, Ireland, Finland and the Vatican City.



MR GIANNI MAGAZZENI

Former Chief of the UPR Branch, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Gianni Magazzeni has held different responsibilities in the OHCHR, including Chief of the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review Branch (2017 - 2023); Chief of the Americas, Europe, and Central Asia Branch (2010 - 2017), and Chief of the National Institutions and Regional Mechanisms Section (2010 - 2007) within the Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division. Gianni Magazzeni served as Chief of the Human Rights Component of the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (2006 - 2007). He was

Special Assistant to the first High Commissioner for Human Rights (1994-1997) and to Heads of the human rights program since 1987. He joined the United Nations in the Department of Disarmament Affairs, in New York, in 1984. A graduate of Yale University (MA in International Relations), he had a Fellowship at the University of Bern, Switzerland, and a BA from the University of Pisa and Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna, Italy.

Gianni Magazzeni's talk at the conference will focus on the human rights aspects of the Pact for the Future and the UN's Universal Periodic Review (UPR).



MS BARBARA FONTANA

Counsellor, Head of the Human Rights Team, Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations in Geneva, detached to the Office of the President of the Human Rights Council throughout 2025

Barbara Fontana holds a Bachelor and Master's in International Relations from the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva and has specialised in international law. She has been working for the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland since 2001 and at the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations in Geneva since 2009. She describes herself as a Human Rights Council operative. Other

than the Human Rights Council as an institution and its place within the United Nations human rights system, Ms. Fontana focuses on human rights issues such as fundamental freedoms, in particular peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, transitional justice, human rights defenders, as well as the Middle East and North Africa region.

Barbara Fontana's talk will focus on human rights diplomacy at the Human Rights Council, with examples from the question of the death penalty and the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protests resolutions.



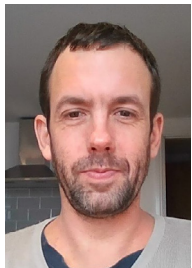
NICOLETTA ZAPPILE

Deputy Director, UPR Info, Geneva, Switzerland

Nicoletta joined UPR Info in July 2018 as a Programme Manager, where she leads efforts to engage a wide range of stakeholders, including human rights defenders, NGOs, and national human rights institutions (NHRIs), in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process to advance human rights. She oversees capacity-building activities and fosters partnerships with international organizations and universities. Before joining UPR Info, Nicoletta served as

an Officer at the International Commission of Jurists and began her career at a Geneva-based media start-up specializing in international affairs. She holds a Master's in International Relations from the University of Florence and an LL.M. in International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights from the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights.

Nicoletta Zappile's talk will focus on the opportunities and challenges of the UN's Universal Periodic Review.



MR IMRI SCHATTNER-ORNAN

Former Consultant, Médecins Sans Frontières / Doctors Without Borders, Senior Lecturer in Humanitarian Practice at Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine

Imri is a humanitarian practitioner and an academic working on humanitarian practices. Since 2008, he has worked in various international non-governmental organisations, including the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). Most of his humanitarian career was as a Project/Field Coordinator, directly managing relief operations in the field. He has worked in Liberia, Ethiopia, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria. Most of his work included managing health related operations including hospitals and primary health centres, health services in refugee camps,

response to medical emergencies include refugees' influx, and working with marginalised communities on issues such as Gender-Based Violence. He has also participated in the response to the West Africa Ebola outbreak.

Since 2016, Imri has transitioned to an academic position and is currently a Senior Lecturer in Humanitarian Practice in the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM), where he leads the MSc in Humanitarian Studies and a joint MSF - LSTM - University of Manchester Post-graduate programme on Humanitarian Practice (LEAP). Imri's research topics include humanitarian practice and humanitarian ethics, working in complex and authoritarian contexts and the use of games in humanitarian education.



FRANCESCA RESTIFO

Senior Human Rights Lawyer and the UN Representative of the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)

Francesca Restifo has extensive work experience with regional and international UN and NGO human rights systems. She worked with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR Regional Legal Unit for the Americas) in the field as Senior Legal Expert, in Central America, where she worked on analysis and implementation of national and regional legal frameworks concerning rights of refugees and asylum-seekers. Later, at UNHCR's Headquarters in Geneva, as advisor in the Division of International Protection. Francesca has expertise in advocacy with the UN Human Rights Council and the UN Human Rights System in general. She was the Deputy Executive Director and International Advocacy Director in a Geneva-based International Human Rights NGO where she led a team of lawyers and advocates. Francesca also joined the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT).

From 2003 until 2007 Francesca worked at the European Parliament (EP) in Brussels, as Legal and Policy Advisor for the EP Committees on Civil Liberties and Sub-Committee on Human Rights as Legal Adviser.

During her professional experience Francesca travelled extensively in Africa and Latin-America to work directly with local human rights defenders, grassroots activists, affected communities, refugees, women and children, victims and survivors and bring their voices at the UN.

Francesca has a Master Degree in Law at the University "La Sapienza" (Rome, Italy) specialised in International law. She owns a specialization in Human Rights, International and European Law obtained at Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KU Leuven, Belgium), and a LLM in Law and Economics at the Universities of Vienna (Austria) and Rotterdam (Netherlands). Francesca authored a number of articles, handbooks and publications on human rights and international law, as well as a number of UN reports and submissions. Francesca speaks fluently English, French, Spanish and Italian.

Francesca Restifo's talk will focus on the role of legal professionals in upholding the rule of law, promoting and protecting human rights and help transforming global governance.

LAUNCH OF THE INAUGURAL BCU UNITED NATIONS SOCIETY

**Statement on the occasion of the launch
of the BCU United Nations Society,
by the President and Vice President.**

We would like to express how honoured we both are to be the inaugural President and Vice President to create this society. This is a landmark moment for BCU student engagement with the UN, both here in Birmingham, and in our wider communities. We are fully aware that we have been provided an amazing opportunity to inspire our generation, and future BCU students, and we hope they go forward to continue the legacy we aim to leave once we graduate.

We will give our best to ensure that the BCU United Nations Society will reflect the United Nations core principles to maintain international peace and security and promote human rights worldwide. We want to ensure that our members are part of this global narrative on peace and human rights. We will strive to teach our members and increase the understanding of the important work happening within the UN and around the world. In time, we would like to see members of the society engage in diplomatic debates and a simulated Model United Nations, which is part of the module curriculum here at BCU. This will enhance our student's abilities to help to uphold peaceful international relations between different global governments and organisations.

Our Society will host events which we hope will encourage and inspire the next generation of BCU students to embark on a journey to learn about human rights and

become empowered to help safeguard the most vulnerable people in society. This inspiration will fuel our drive to promote the UN's core treaties and the Sustainable Development Goals. We are therefore greatly honoured to announce the launch of our Society in the presence of experts on the UN.

We would like to thank Professor Jon Yorke and Dr Alice Storey for creating this incredible opportunity for all of us here at the Society and the School of Law, and for their continued commitment to our studies of the United Nations and how it performs its role to try to bring peace and prosperity to the world.

Thank you.

**Mr Stuart Crutchlow, President
Ms Mira Obaro, Vice-President**

THE COMMITTEE OF THE BCU UNITED NATIONS SOCIETY 2025

- | **President** - Mr Stuart Crutchlow
Vice-President - Ms Mira Obaro
- | **Treasurer** - Mr Farhat Nawaz
and Ms Chanda Miyoba
- | **Secretary** - Ms Parris Jellow,
Ms Sanjana Dehar, and Ms Jade Cheema
- | **Social media** - Ms Catherine Awolaye,
Ms Fatima Kamara, Ms Jess Hughes,
and Mr Moheemad Suhail Kash
- | **Website/Blog** -
Ms Keerthana Sharon Moses
- | **Event coordinator** - Ms Isatou Mass,
Ms Yasmine Raqaa, Ms Samira Ahmed
and Ms Angel Ene



PARTICIPANT NOTES:

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