Conference of the Association of Human Rights Institutes (AHRI) 2026

Enduring Contributions and Challenges: The 60-Year and 20-Year Legacies of the International Covenants and the Human Rights Council

4-6 November 2026

Geneva, Switzerland

Co-organized by the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights (in collaboration with the Law Department of the Geneva Graduate Institute and the Faculty of Law of the University of Geneva), and the Global Campus of Human Rights

Call for Papers and Proposals for Panels

The 2026 Annual Conference of the Association of Human Rights Institutes (AHRI) coincides with the 60th anniversary of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), both adopted in 1966. The year 2026 also marks the 20th anniversary of the inauguration of the United Nations Human Rights Council. Marking these milestones, the AHRI Annual Conference 2026 will focus on "Enduring Contributions and Challenges: The 60-Year and 20-Year Legacies of the International Covenants and the Human Rights Council".

The Conference will take place in Geneva, Switzerland, from 4 to 6 November 2026 and is co-organized by the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights (Geneva Academy) (in collaboration with the Law Department of the Geneva Graduate Institute (IHEID), and the Law Faculty of the University of Geneva (UNIGE)), and the Global Campus of Human Rights.

The Conference aspires to bring together scholars, practitioners, policymakers, diplomats, researchers, independent human rights specialists, and members of civil society organisations to discuss and critically evaluate the implementation of the two International Covenants and the contributions of their respective Committees (the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), and work done under the Human Rights Council.

The AHRI Conference 2026 will be held as a hybrid event, allowing participants to engage either in person or remotely. At the moment of registration, participants will

have to choose the modality of their participation. Remote attendees will join the different sessions via a virtual meeting platform.

Instructions for submissions:

We invite anyone interested in the Conference theme to **submit proposals for papers or panel discussions** (both as a moderator or a participant) related to the discussion and critical evaluation of the implementation of the two International Covenants and the contributions of their respective Committees and the work of the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms.

In the six decades since the adoption of the two International Covenants, scholarship and practice have contested the idea of treating the two instruments separately and have increasingly embraced their relationship, often captured through the framework of the "three Is" that are the indivisibility, interdependence, and interrelatedness of all human rights.

We fully acknowledge and welcome this understanding. To reflect the integrated nature of rights in theory and practice, each track explicitly invites proposals for panels and papers that engage with the indivisibility, interdependence, and interrelation between civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights. We particularly encourage contributions that critically explore how these bodies of rights intersect, reinforce, and challenge one another across diverse contexts.

All proposals must clearly fall within and explicitly identify one of the following tracks:

- **Track 1: 60 Years of Covenant Rights**
- **Track 2: International, Regional and Local Dimensions of Covenant Rights**
- **Track 3: From Norms to Accountability: The UN Human Rights Council and its Supervisory Mechanisms**
- **Track 4: The Covenants and Council: Beyond 60 and 20**

We welcome proposals for papers and panel discussions engaging human rights scholarship in conversation with all disciplines and methodologies, connecting the institutional perspective and content of the two International Covenants, and the work of the Human Rights Council, with broader questions of a legal, normative and empirical nature.

Conference tracks and sub-themes:

Participants are welcomed to develop and submit proposals for papers or panel discussions particularly on the following sub-themes:

Track 1: 60 Years of Covenant Rights

1. Covenant rights in armed conflict: This sub-theme examines the resilience of civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights in contexts of international and non-international armed conflicts. This sub-theme addresses

how, from a substantive point of view, different actors have obligations to respect civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights during armed conflicts. It also calls for an evolutive perspective on how the respect of these rights during armed conflict has changed and evolved since the Covenants were adopted in 1966.

2. Business actors and Covenant rights: This sub-theme intends to discuss the role of business enterprises and corporate actors in relation to the respect of civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights. On the one hand, this sub-theme discusses the substantive dimension of these rights when applied to business enterprises and corporate actors. On the other hand, this sub-theme explores questions of responsibility and accountability for business actors with respect to violations of civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights. The sub-theme assesses how the relation between business actors and civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights has evolved in the first sixty years of the Covenants.
3. Covenant rights and technological developments: This sub-theme assesses how technological developments have shaped and are currently impacting the implementation of civil and political rights and economic social and cultural rights, both as enablers and disablers. Similarly, the sub-theme aims to trace how technological developments in the first sixty years of the Covenants have progressively been influencing and affecting the respect and implementation of these rights. For present times, this sub-theme focuses on the role that digital platforms, artificial intelligence and social media are playing in enabling or restricting civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights. This sub-theme also reflects on the ethical challenges that technological developments might pose regarding the respect of Covenant rights.
4. Intersectionality and Covenant rights: This sub-theme is envisioned to explore whether Covenant rights are sensitive to inequality and discrimination across gender, age, disability and any other intersecting ground. This sub-theme discusses how, in the past sixty years, the understanding of intersectionality might have influenced the respect of civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights for different groups. This sub-theme reflects on what measures must be taken to ensure a fair and equal protection and respect of civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights. While discussing intersectionality in relation to Covenant rights from a substantive perspective, this sub-theme also calls for considerations on how these rights interact with one another, with other international instruments and treaty bodies (such as the CEDAW, CRC and CRPD Committees) as well as the Human Rights Council procedures.

Track 2: International, Regional and Local Dimensions of Covenant Rights

5. Regional and local implementation of substantive rights: This sub-theme examines if substantive rights are effectively translated at the regional and domestic level. This sub-theme focuses on the substance of civil and political, and economic, social and cultural rights to discuss possible differences in how these rights are interpreted and implemented at the international, regional and

local levels. To what extent are the Covenant rights referred to by regional human rights bodies? Are there cases where the Covenants offer a higher degree of protection compared to regional human rights instruments? This subtheme looks at the substantive rights and how they have developed at different levels in an evolutive manner, assessing the trajectory since 1966 when the two Covenants were adopted. This sub-theme explores the possible divergences and convergences in the interpretation of Covenant rights between their international, regional and local dimensions. By focusing on the regional and local levels, this sub-theme calls for concrete examples reflective of realities on the ground regarding the respect, protection and fulfilment of civil and political and economic, social and cultural rights.

6. International, regional and local institutions: This topic explores the role of regional and local institutions and international human rights mechanisms in advancing the realization of the rights set forth in the two Covenants. This topic assesses whether and how international, regional and local actors complement each other, create overlap or fragmentation in the implementation of the two Covenants. This topic investigates how international, regional and local institutions collaborate to realize the Covenant rights effectively. This topic explores gaps and synergies across different levels of governance, showcasing where coordination should be strengthened to enhance the realization of the Covenants and compliance. This topic also advances reflections on the evolution of the institutional landscape, examining how, in the last sixty years, different actors have emerged at different levels of governance for the implementation of the Covenant rights.
7. Monitoring and measuring implementation and impact: This sub-theme examines how progress in the realization of the two Covenants is monitored, measured and evidenced, at international, regional and local levels. The subtheme builds upon these guiding questions: How effective are state reporting mechanisms and inter-state communication procedures, follow-up procedures, concluding observations and individual communication procedure in terms of fostering compliance and accountability? What role can civil society, regional and local actors play in evidence-based reporting and accountability? How can systematic monitoring and evaluation be better integrated into the working methods of the respective Committee? How can the overall impact and influence of the Covenants on the respect of civil and political and economic, social and cultural rights be assessed? What are the main challenges that remain regarding the implementation of the Covenants? The sub-theme assesses how monitoring practices and mechanisms have evolved in the first sixty years of the Covenants and how technological advancements have shaped measurement and reporting. The sub-theme also calls for reflections on the Optional Protocols, their acceptance rate and the functioning of their respective procedures for individual communications, inquiry procedure and inter-state communications, when applicable.

Track 3: From Norms to Accountability: The UN Human Rights Council and its Supervisory Mechanisms

8. The role of the Human Rights Council in armed conflict: This sub-theme explores the Council's role in preventing armed conflict and ensuring accountability for serious violations of human rights law and grave breaches of international humanitarian law.
9. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR): Between universality and ritualism: The UPR represents the first truly universal peer-review mechanism in international human rights law, subjecting every UN Member State to periodic scrutiny. It has been praised for its universality, regular periodicity and inclusivity. However, scholars and practitioners have also raised concerns about its limitations, including performative compliance, peer-review diplomacy and lack of enforcement mechanisms. Questions that may be considered include the UPR's contribution to measurable improvements in domestic human rights protection; whether the UPR should be better understood as a political dialogue mechanism rather than a legal accountability tool; and the extent to which geopolitical hierarchies shape recommendations and outcomes.
10. Special procedures: independence, authority, and influence**:** The Special Procedures system, comprising Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts, and Working Groups, constitutes one of the most dynamic and visible components of the UN human rights system. Critical reflection is invited on factfinding and reporting; norm development and interpretive clarification; early warning and preventive diplomacy; and public advocacy and agenda-setting. Questions that may be considered include the influence of Special Procedures on domestic legal reform; their contribution to the development of customary international law; and their effectiveness in authoritarian versus democratic contexts. Papers and panels under this sub-theme could also explore the Council's complaints procedure and whether confidentiality and limited transparency have generated greater effectiveness. A comparison can also be drawn between this procedure and treaty body individual communications procedures.
11. Cross-cutting themes and broader reflections**:** This track particularly encourages papers and panels that situate these mechanisms within broader questions about the evolution and future of international human rights governance. The role of the Advisory Committee could also be scrutinised.

Track 4: The Covenants and Council: Beyond 60 and 20

12. The future of the Covenants and Council: This sub-theme calls for forwardlooking reflections on how the two Covenants and Council's work should evolve to remain effective and relevant. This sub-theme evaluates how the Covenants must be interpreted and implemented to face global challenges including climate change, the weakening of multilateral dialogue, the upsurge of populist movements, armed conflicts, fast technological developments, growing inequalities and discrimination. This sub-theme invites considerations on the recurrent discussion on broadening versus deepening rights. Should future efforts prioritise broadening rights recognition under the Covenants or deepen the implementation of core obligations? This sub-theme also reflects on whether a third Covenant on the right to development should be welcomed and

developed to advance the implementation and respect of the two Covenants respectively on civil and political rights on the one hand and economic, social and cultural rights on the other hand.

13. Institutional effectiveness in an age of uncertainty: This sub-theme investigates whether and how the respective monitoring Committees may have to evolve to remain fit for purpose in the current and ever-increasingly complex institutional environment. This sub-theme invites reflections on the Committees' capacity to ensure the respect of civil and political and economic, social and cultural rights. This sub-theme explores also future synergies and avenues for collaboration across actors at different levels (international, regional and local) that might strengthen the respect of civil and political and economic, social and cultural rights. This sub-theme calls for reflections on possible developments and opportunities for cooperation among the two Covenants and other human rights treaty bodies (such as the CEDAW, CRC and CRPD Committees), as well as with UN Special Procedures.
14. The future of monitoring, measuring and compliance: This topic discusses how monitoring and evaluation must respond to different actors, including, business entities, corporate actors, non-state armed groups, among others, in order to strengthen compliance with the Covenants and Council processes such as the UPR. This topic assesses what role civil society, regional and local actors as well as business entities can play in evidence-based reporting and compliancemeasurement. This topic discusses how monitoring, reporting, certifications and compliance mechanisms might need to adapt to face the latest technological advancements such as the increasing use of artificial intelligence. This topic explores the possible role that social media platforms and user-based generated evidence might have in relation to reporting procedures.

Submission procedure:

Proposals for papers and panel discussions should be submitted by 25 April 2026 to the following email: ahri2026@geneva-academy.ch

When submitting proposals for papers or panel discussions (both as moderators and participants), applicants must include the following information:

- Proposed title of paper or proposed panel theme and title of panellists' papers
- Paper proposal ("abstract") (300-500 words, for single papers), or Panel Proposal (600-800 words)
- The Conference track and sub-theme for which the proposal should be considered
- Names and affiliations of the author(s)
- Contact details, including email address and phone number
- A short bio of the author(s), or the panel moderator and panellists (maximum 200 words)
- Modality of participation (in person or remote)

Successful applicants are required to submit a full paper of 5,000-8,000 words (excluding bibliography) no later than 10 September 2026. Applicants are expected to present their papers in person or online during one of the Conference sessions scheduled during the Conference days (4-6 November 2026), with presentations lasting 10-15 minutes.

Important dates:

- The AHRI conference will be held on Wednesday 4, Thursday 5 and Friday 6 November 2026
- Deadline for submission of full papers: 10 September 2026
- Registration for the Conference opens: 1 June 2026
- Notification of proposal selection: 1 June 2026
- **Due date for submission of proposals (papers, panel): 25 April 2026**

Venue:

The AHRI Conference 2026 follows a hybrid format. In-person activities will take place in Geneva. Additional information regarding venues, along with the conference's agenda will be provided on the conference webpage at a later date.

Conference website:

The AHRI Conference 2026 website, which includes information on Conference registration, fees, availability of potential grants, venues, agenda, accommodation, and any additional details, can be found at: https://geneva-academy.ch/call-for-papersenduring-contributions-and-challenges-the-60-year-and-20-year-legacies-of-theinternational-covenants-and-the-human-rights-council/

Registration:

For detailed information about the registration process, please visit the conference webpage on the Geneva Academy's official website. All practical information and updates can be found at: https://geneva-academy.ch/call-for-papers-enduringcontributions-and-challenges-the-60-year-and-20-year-legacies-of-the-internationalcovenants-and-the-human-rights-council/ **Registration fee:**

The registration fee varies depending on the country of residence or affiliation of the participant's institution, whether participation is in-person or online, and whether registration is completed during the early-bird period or by the standard deadline. Reduced rates apply to participants affiliated with institutions based in countries of the Global South.

Participants registering under a reduced rate **must provide supporting documentation**. They are required to email a letter issued by their institution confirming both their institutional affiliation and their country of residence.

A detailed fee schedule, including the applicable country categories and corresponding amounts, is available on the conference website: https://geneva-academy.ch/call-

forpapers-enduring-contributions-and-challenges-the-60-year-and-20-year-legacies-of-theinternational-covenants-and-the-human-rights-council/

Participants are encouraged to consult the website carefully before registering to ensure that they select the appropriate category.

Please note that attendance at the standing dinner cocktail event is **not included** in the general registration fee. Participation in this event requires a separate registration and fee. Participants will be asked during the registration process to indicate whether they wish to attend the standing dinner cocktail.

Scholarships:

A limited number of scholarships will be offered to young scholars (under the age of 30) from the Global South to support their participation in the Conference. These scholarships will cover registration fees for the 2026 AHRI Conference. For those able to travel to Geneva to participate in person, some financial help may also be available to cover accommodation costs for up to three nights.

If you wish to apply, please e-mail your CV (maximum two pages) and motivation letter (maximum one page), explaining why you wish to participate in the Conference, whether online or in person, and how this experience relates to your professional development.

Applications that do not include all the relevant information will not be considered. Indicate the subject **"APPLICATION FOR SCHOLARSHIP, 2026 AHRI CONFERENCE"** to ahri2026@geneva-academy.ch **by 25 April 2026.**

After evaluation of the applications, all applicants will be notified of the results **by 1 June 2026**. Selected applicants will receive detailed instructions on how to complete their registration for the Conference with the awarded scholarship, as well as additional information on accommodation, dinner and other logistical aspects.

For more information, please check: https://geneva-academy.ch/call-for-papersenduring-contributions-and-challenges-the-60-year-and-20-year-legacies-of-theinternational-covenants-and-the-human-rights-council/

Enquiries:

For any matter related to the AHRI Annual Conference 2026:

ahri2026@geneva-academy.ch