



## THE UNITED NATIONS WAR CRIMES COMMISSION ITS LEGACY AND RELEVANCE

18 October 2023  
Conference commemorating  
the 80th anniversary of the UNWCC

Leiden University,  
Wijnhaven Building, Room 346,  
Turfmarkt 99, 2511 DP The Hague

20 October 2023 marks the 80th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations War Crimes Commission, which was the first international organisation created by the Allied governments to collect and assess prima facie evidence of crimes committed during the Second World War and to advise on legal matters related to the prosecution of war criminals. The UNWCC was the first official international agency responsible for developing the legal and operative standards for collecting facts and evidence of crimes committed by the occupying forces as well as coordinating the investigative work of the Allied countries.

With its activities and legal opinions the UNWCC was also a centre of discussion on principles of international criminal law, including definitions of international crimes, relations between national and international proceedings, the statute of the United Nations War Crimes Court, modes of individual liability for international crimes and defence strategies which might be used to avoid responsibility such as immunity of the state's highest representatives. By the end of its work in March 1948, the Commission had examined a total of 8,178 indictments for war crimes and breaches of international law and had compiled 80 lists of suspects with a total of 36,529 names. After the war, UNWCC member states conducted over 2,000 trials of accused war criminals before the courts of the Allied countries.

The work of the UNWCC is not only of historical importance, but also provides much needed reinforcement of legal precedent and state practice to 21st-century efforts to demand accountability for international crimes. The commission dealt already with leadership immunity, universal jurisdiction, sexual crimes against women, deportations of children, destruction of cultural heritage and environmental destruction – crimes which are much debated in contemporary proceedings of the International Criminal Court and other criminal courts.

The aim of the conference, which will take place at Leiden University in The Hague on 18 October 2023, is not only to recall the role and scope of the work of the UNWCC, but also to indicate the relevance of its discussions and case analyses in the context of contemporary proceedings in international and national courts.

**Organizers:** Embassy of the Republic of Poland in The Hague; Grotius Centre for International Legal Studies at Leiden University; Pilecki Institute, Warsaw; SOAS, University of London; University of Warsaw.

## PROGRAMME

### 16.00–16.15 Opening

**Carsten Stahn** (Leiden University)

**Her Excellency Margareta Kassangana** (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Poland to the Kingdom of The Netherlands)

**Krystian Wiciarz** (Pilecki Institute, Warsaw)

**Dan Plesch** (SOAS University of London)

### Part I

#### 16:15–17.30 The UNWCC and its (forgotten) institutional legacy. Do we need the UNWCC's operative model today?

This panel will not only recall basic information regarding the way the UNWCC functioned, but also answer questions as to whether current institutions like the ILC, ICC ASP, ILA have taken over all its functions, and whether there is still a need for coordination of efforts concerning the prosecution of international crimes since the permanent ICC has already been established.

**William Schabas** (Middlesex University London)

**Amina Adanan** (Maynooth University)

**Dominika Uczkiewicz** (Pilecki Institute, Warsaw)

Chaired by: **John Cornell** (Pilecki Institute, Warsaw)

### 17.30–17.45 Coffee Break

### Part II

#### The UNWCC in a modern context. Contemporary challenges including crimes in Ukraine.

#### 17.45–19.00 Crimes against the most vulnerable and cultural heritage

This panel will present the work of the UNWCC concerning prosecution of crimes against women, children (including deportation of children), and different minorities (especially Jewish communities), including the UNWCC's stance on the concept of crimes against humanity, and will compare it with the achievements and challenges of contemporary jurisprudence.

**Oksana Senatorova** (Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, Kharkiv)

**Wolfgang Form** (Free University Berlin)

**Joseph Powderly** (Leiden University)

Chaired by: **Deborah Ruiz Verduzco** (Trust Fund for Victims at the ICC)

#### 19.00–20.15 The rocky road to criminalization and effective prosecution

This panel will present discussions on the criminalization of aggression and related problems with prosecution of the highest representatives of states who have criminal immunity from other states' jurisdictions, as well as problems with the exercise of national jurisdiction (including universal jurisdiction).

**Pierre d'Argent** (University of Louvain)

**Patrycja Grzebyk** (University of Warsaw)

**Dan Plesch** (SOAS University of London)

Chaired by: **Carsten Stahn** (Leiden University)

### 20.15 Reception

