

CALL FOR PAPERS

DOCTORAL COLLOQUIUM

CURRENT RESEARCH ON THE HUMAN RIGHT TO SCIENCE

University of Fribourg, Switzerland

6 – 7 September 2024, in person

1 Topic

In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which in Article 27 enshrined the right of everyone “to share in scientific advancement and its benefits”. Later on, this right was recognized in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1966, albeit with a slightly different wording. Article 15(1)(b) ICESCR guarantees the right of everyone “to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications”.

Yet, despite its early recognition, this “human right to science” – as it is frequently abbreviated – was long neglected by both States and international organizations and attracted equally little academic attention. This, however, has now changed, not least in reaction to the accelerated pace and universalizing scope of recent knowledge production, its high-impact and high-uncertainties, as well as its growing privatization and marketization.

First attempts to awaken the “sleeping beauty” of international human rights law were undertaken by UNESCO together with a group of academics and non-governmental organizations. One result of their efforts to reinvigorate the right was the 2009 “Venice Statement on the Right to Enjoy the Benefits of Scientific Progress and its Applications”. Its elaborations on the normative content of the human right to science and States’ duties arising thereunder gave impetus to, and vitally shaped, the ensuing decade’s increasing scholarly and practical engagement with the right. This engagement culminated in 2020 with the adoption of “General Comment No. 25 on science and economic, social and cultural rights (article 15(1)(b), (2), (3) and (4) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR). General Comment No. 25 proposes a detailed account of the scope and normative content of the human right to science. It describes States’ duties and responsibilities. It also elaborates on some core issues such as private scientific research and intellectual property rights, the role of the human right to science in relation to risky emerging technologies such as genetic engineering or artificial intelligence, and the imperative of international cooperation. General Comment No. 25 also specifies the ambit of the human right to science as a right “to participate in and enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications”.

However, much like the 2009 Venice Statement, General Comment No. 25 should be understood as an invitation to further engage with, and critically reflect on, the human right to science and its various dimensions rather than as a definite and authoritative statement thereon. Moreover, many open questions remain. These pertain, in particular, to the definition of the interests protected by the human right to science; to the duties and responsibilities to anticipate the harmful effects of scientific developments and technologies; to the nature, scope and content of States’ duties and responsibilities to cooperate internationally; and to the institutionalization of duties and responsibilities under the human right to science more generally both at the international as well as the domestic level.

2 Submission

We invite **advanced PhD (doctoral) students** in the disciplines of international (human rights) law, public and constitutional law, political science, philosophy of science, and political and legal philosophy to submit a proposal for a paper stemming from their current research on any aspect of the human right to participate in and enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications.

An anonymized **abstract** (max. 1000 words) and a short **CV** should be sent to katja.achermann@unifr.ch by **15 November 2023**. Contributions shall be submitted and presented in English. Applicants will be informed about the outcome of the selection process no later than **15 December 2023**.

If selected, **draft papers (8'000 words maximum**, including footnotes, front and end matters) must be submitted by **1 August 2024** for circulation among commentators and the other attendees of the doctoral colloquium for advance reading and commenting.

3 Format

The doctoral colloquium will take place on the afternoon of Friday, 6 September 2024, and the morning of Saturday, 7 September 2024. It will follow a 1.5-day conference on “International cooperation under the human right to science” beginning on Thursday, 5 September 2024, with senior academics, which the doctoral students participating in the colloquium are invited to attend. Some of the academics participating in the conference will serve as commentators during the doctoral colloquium.

At the colloquium, each author will have 15 minutes to present their paper. A senior academic will then comment on the presented paper, giving the author feedback for 15 minutes. 30 minutes are subsequently reserved for an open discussion.

4 Organization

The doctoral colloquium is organized by Prof. Samantha Besson (Collège de France & University of Fribourg) and Dr Katja Achermann (University of Fribourg). It takes place within the framework of the [Swiss National Science Foundation Research Project *Institutionalizing the Human Right to Science*](#) (University of Fribourg, Switzerland; 2022-25).

The **costs of economy travel** to and from Fribourg, as well as **accommodation for three nights** in Fribourg are **fully covered** by the project's funds.

In case of questions, please contact katja.achermann@unifr.ch.