

LAWS1023:
PUBLIC INTERNATIONAL LAW

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Contents

1	Development, Nature and Scope of Public International Law	1
2	Sources of Public International Law	2
2.1	Treaties	3
2.2	International Custom	4
2.2.1	Elements of Custom	4
2.2.2	Regional Customary International Law	8
2.2.3	Persistent Objection	8
2.3	General Principles of Law	9
2.4	Judicial Decisions and the Teaching of Publicists	11
2.4.1	United Nations General Assembly Resolutions	12
2.4.2	UN Security Council	14
2.5	Soft Law	14
3	The Law of Treaties	16
3.1	Defining Treaties	16
3.2	Entry into a Treaty	19
3.3	Registration and Application of Treaties	21
3.4	Reservations to Treaties	23
3.4.1	Permissibility	23
3.4.2	Acceptance and Objection	24
3.4.3	Legal Effect	25
3.5	Interpretation of Treaties	26
3.5.1	Key Rules of Treaty Interpretation	27
3.6	Invalidity of Treaties	29
3.6.1	Void	29
3.6.2	Invalid	30
3.7	Termination, Withdrawal and Suspension	31
3.7.1	Express or Implied Agreement	32
3.7.2	Denunciation/Withdrawal	32
3.7.3	Material Breach	33
3.7.4	Impossibility	34
3.7.5	Fundamental Change of Circumstances	34
3.8	VCLT and Custom	36
4	International Law and Australian Law	45
4.1	Role of International Law in Domestic Law	45
4.2	Monism and Dualism	46

4.3	Customary International Law in Australian Law	47
4.3.1	Criminal Law and Customary International Law	50
4.4	Treaties in Australian Law	52
4.5	Treaty Making Process	53
4.6	Implementing Treaties	54
4.6.1	Constitutional Considerations	54
4.6.2	Legislative Concerns	55
4.7	Statutory Interpretation and International Law	56
4.7.1	Polites Principle	57
A	Scaffolds	61
A.1	Development, Nature and Scope of Public International Law	61
A.2	Sources of Public International Law	61
A.3	The Law of Treaties	65
A.4	International Law and Australian Law	72
B	Tutorial Problems	77
B.3	Treaties	77
B.4	International Law and Australian Law	82
	Glossary	87

Topic 1

Development, Nature and Scope of Public International Law

Topic 2

Sources of Public International Law

- In contrast to domestic systems of law, the sources of public international law are often more challenging to ascertain, as there is a wide variety of material sources, and limited machinery for formal law-making (e.g., there's no global legislature, no global court with universal compulsory jurisdiction, and a lack of precedent)
- The source doctrine in international law is state-centric, and hinges on states consenting to be bound by the sources of international law
- The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is the primary judicial organ of the United Nations, with the *Statute of the International Court of Justice* forming an integral part of the *Charter of the United Nations*

Charter of the United Nations Art 92

The International Court of Justice shall be the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. It shall function in accordance with the annexed Statute, which is based upon the Statute of the Permanent Court of International Justice and forms an integral part of the present Charter.

- The accepted sources of public international law are set out in Article 38(1) of the *Statute of the International Court of Justice*

Statute of the International Court of Justice Art 38

1. The Court, whose function is to decide in accordance with international law such disputes as are submitted to it, shall apply:
 - a. international conventions, whether general or particular, establishing rules expressly recognized by the contesting states;
 - b. international custom, as evidence of a general practice accepted as law;
 - c. the general principles of law recognized by civilized nations;
 - d. subject to the provisions of Article 59, judicial decisions and the teachings of the most highly qualified publicists of the various nations, as subsidiary means for the determination of rules of law.
2. This provision shall not prejudice the power of the Court to decide a case *ex aequo et*

bono, if the parties agree thereto.

- There is an emphasis on state consent to be bound to the jurisdiction of the ICJ
- There is no clear hierarchy governing which facet or source is to be applied first (e.g., treaties do not always trump international conventions)
 - However, the sources in [art 38\(1\)\(d\)](#) (judicial decisions and the writings of publicists) are ‘subsidiary’ rather than direct sources
- States always remain the primary actors in the application of international law
- [Art 38\(1\)](#) is ‘generally regarded as a complete statement of the sources of international law’ in Australia, following [Ure v Commonwealth \(2016\) 329 ALR 452](#)

Ure v Commonwealth (2016) 329 ALR 452

This case involved two highly remote islands (Elizabeth Reef and Middleton Reef) in the southwest Pacific Ocean, around 80 nautical miles north of Lord Howe Island. In 1970, Mr Ure erected a sign on the bridge of a ship wrecked on Middleton Reef above the high-tide mark, and claimed title to the islands.

10 years later, his son brought proceedings against the Commonwealth (Mr Ure had died), the question for determination on the assumed facts (including the assumed fact that, in 1970, the islands were unoccupied and constituted *terra nullius* in respect of which no state had claimed sovereignty) was whether, under public international law, there existed a rule that an individual may acquire proprietary title in unoccupied land not claimed by any sovereign state.

The Federal Court examined the sources of the aforementioned rule. At paragraph [15], it was held that “Australian courts have accepted that Art[icle] 38(1) [of the *Statute of the International Court of Justice* 1945] sets out the sources of international law: *Polyukhovich v. The Commonwealth* (1991) 172 CLR 501 at 559 per Brennan J” The Court held that a rule of customary international law requires proof of both (following [North Sea Continental Shelf Cases \(FRG v Denmark; FRG v The Netherlands\)](#) at [29] - [31]):

- “Extensive and virtually uniform” state practice
- *Opinio juris* (a belief by states that state practice is rendered obligatory on it)

Whilst the plaintiff attempted to show evidence of state practice supporting their rule, this was rejected by the Court, which held that the rule was not a general principle of law recognised in municipal legal systems within the meaning of Art 38(1)(c). The plaintiff’s appeal was dismissed.

2.1 Treaties

- Under Art 38(1)(a) of the *Statute of the International Court of Justice*, ‘conventions’ (embodying all binding international agreements) are a source of public international law (e.g., treaties, protocols, statutes, charters, covenants, etc.)

- The law of treaties is governed in the 1969 *Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties* (VLCT) (see Topic 3 on page 16), and now constitutes the most voluminous source of PIL (due to a rapid increase in the number of treaties in the 20th and 21st centuries)
- Treaties can be either bilateral (between two states) or multilateral (between more than two states)
- Some treaties may be a mere source of obligation (often known as ‘treaty contracts’), whilst others form a more generalised source of law (‘law-making treaties’, especially those that contribute to the generation of customary law, such as the *Charter of the United Nations*)
 - Some treaties, such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, can adopt a constitutional tone

2.2 International Custom

- Under Art 38(1)(b) of the *Statute of the International Court of Justice*, international custom can be evidence of a general practice accepted as law, and comprises two components:
 - An objective element (‘general practice’)
 - A subjective or psychological element (‘accepted as law’), known as *opinio juris sive necessitatis* (the belief that the practice is obligatory)
 - * This is often shortened to *opinio juris*
- Customary international law binds all states, even if they have not participated in its creation (with the very narrow exception of the ‘persistent objector’)
- Certain customary norms are *jus cogens*, which are peremptory norms from which no derogation is permitted

2.2.1 Elements of Custom

- Evidence of state practice
 - This constitutes any material which demonstrates the activities and views of states and state officials (e.g., legislation, statements of officials, court decisions, voting records in international forums, etc.)
- Requirements for practice to generate custom, which include
 - Consistency of the practice over time
 - The practice being widespread
 - The practice being representative of multiple states (including the states most likely being affected)
 - Having developed over a lengthy period (but customary norms may still emerge rapidly if there is an overwhelming practice of it)
 - The practice does not need to be entirely uniform

- Practice must be accompanied by *opinio juris*
 - *Opinio juris* refers to the belief that the state practice is obligatory
 - This is notionally as important as state practice, and the two are often weighed on a sliding scale:
 - * If there is extensive state practice, then *opinio juris* tends to be less important (which gives rise to a rebuttable presumption that there is sufficient *opinio juris*)
 - * If there is limited state practice, then *opinio juris* may be more important
- Treaties may codify custom in order to reduce ambiguity

North Sea Continental Shelf Cases (Germany v Denmark; Germany v Netherlands) [1969] ICJ Rep 3

ICJ Summary: These cases concerned the delimitation of the continental shelf of the North Sea as between Denmark and the Federal Republic of Germany, and as between the Netherlands and the Federal Republic, and were submitted to the Court by Special Agreement. The Parties asked the Court to state the principles and rules of international law applicable, and undertook thereafter to carry out the delimitations on that basis. By an Order of 26 April 1968 the Court, having found Denmark and the Netherlands to be in the same interest, joined the proceedings in the two cases. In its Judgment, delivered on 20 February 1969, the Court found that the boundary lines in question were to be drawn by agreement between the Parties and in accordance with equitable principles in such a way as to leave to each Party those areas of the continental shelf which constituted the natural prolongation of its land territory under the sea, and it indicated certain factors to be taken into consideration for that purpose. The Court rejected the contention that the delimitations in question had to be carried out in accordance with the principle of equidistance as defined in the 1958 Geneva Convention on the Continental Shelf. The Court took account of the fact that the Federal Republic had not ratified that Convention, and held that the equidistance principle was not inherent in the basic concept of continental shelf rights, and that this principle was not a rule of customary international law.

In this case, the ICJ held that treaty norms could become custom (but not in this instance), and that treaty provisions may become customary norm/customary international law (however, this was also not made out in this instance). Additionally, a short time frame is not a bar to establishing custom, but the practice needs to be extensive and virtually uniform (this was not the case here).

Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua [1986] ICJ Rep 14

ICJ Summary: On 9 April 1984 Nicaragua filed an Application instituting proceedings against the United States of America, together with a Request for the indication of provisional measures concerning a dispute relating to responsibility for military and paramilitary activities in and against Nicaragua. On 10 May 1984 the Court made an Order indicating provisional measures. One of these measures required the United States immediately to cease and refrain from any action restricting access to Nicaraguan ports, and, in particular, the laying of mines. The Court also indicated that the right to

sovereignty and to political independence possessed by Nicaragua, like any other State, should be fully respected and should not be jeopardized by activities contrary to the principle prohibiting the threat or use of force and to the principle of non-intervention in matters within the domestic jurisdiction of a State. The Court also decided in the aforementioned Order that the proceedings would first be addressed to the questions of the jurisdiction of the Court and of the admissibility of the Nicaraguan Application. Just before the closure of the written proceedings in this phase, El Salvador filed a declaration of intervention in the case under Article 63 of the Statute, requesting permission to claim that the Court lacked jurisdiction to entertain Nicaragua's Application. In its Order dated 4 October 1984, the Court decided that El Salvador's declaration of intervention was inadmissible inasmuch as it related to the jurisdictional phase of the proceedings.

After hearing argument from both Parties in the course of public hearings held from 8 to 18 October 1984, on 26 November 1984 the Court delivered a Judgment stating that it possessed jurisdiction to deal with the case and that Nicaragua's Application was admissible. In particular, it held that the Nicaraguan declaration of 1929 was valid and that Nicaragua was therefore entitled to invoke the United States declaration of 1946 as a basis of the Court's jurisdiction (Article 36, paragraphs 2 and 5, of the Statute). The subsequent proceedings took place in the absence of the United States, which announced on 18 January 1985 that it "intends not to participate in any further proceedings in connection with this case". From 12 to 20 September 1985, the Court heard oral argument by Nicaragua and the testimony of the five witnesses it had called. On 27 June 1986, the Court delivered its Judgment on the merits. The findings included a rejection of the justification of collective self-defence advanced by the United States concerning the military or paramilitary activities in or against Nicaragua, and a statement that the United States had violated the obligations imposed by customary international law not to intervene in the affairs of another State, not to use force against another State, not to infringe the sovereignty of another State, and not to interrupt peaceful maritime commerce. The Court also found that the United States had violated certain obligations arising from a bilateral Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation of 1956, and that it had committed acts such to deprive that treaty of its object and purpose.

It decided that the United States was under a duty immediately to cease and to refrain from all acts constituting breaches of its legal obligations, and that it must make reparation for all injury caused to Nicaragua by the breaches of obligations under customary international law and the 1956 Treaty, the amount of that reparation to be fixed in subsequent proceedings if the Parties were unable to reach agreement. The Court subsequently fixed, by an Order, time-limits for the filing of written pleadings by the Parties on the matter of the form and amount of reparation, and the Memorial of Nicaragua was filed on 29 March 1988, while the United States maintained its refusal to take part in the case. In September 1991, Nicaragua informed the Court, *inter alia*, that it did not wish to continue the proceedings. The United States told the Court that it welcomed the discontinuance and, by an Order of the President dated 26 September 1991, the case was removed from the Court's List.

In this case, the ICJ affirmed that to give rise to a custom, state practice does not need to be "perfect, in the sense that States should have refrained, with complete consistency,

from the use of force or from intervention in each other's internal affairs". Here, the norms relied upon by Nicaragua were part of customary international law, which had a separate applicability to the *Charter of the United Nations*. Additionally, if a treaty gives rise to custom, the custom exists independently of the treaty. Moreover, if it has been pointed out that there has been a number of instances of states contravening a treaty, the courts have held that there does not need to be consistently correct conduct from the states to affirm the custom, and that some variation in practice is acceptable, especially when these variations are treated as breaches of the rule rather than emergence of a new rule (thereby affirming the existing rule).

[186] The Court does not consider that, for a rule to be established as customary, the corresponding practice must be in absolutely rigorous conformity with the rule. In order to deduce the existence of customary rules, the Court deems it sufficient that the conduct of States should, in general, be consistent with such rules, and that instances of State conduct inconsistent with a given rule should generally have been treated as breaches of that rule, not as indications of the recognition of a new rule. If a State acts in a way *prima facie* incompatible with a recognized rule, but defends its conduct by appealing to exceptions or justifications contained within the rule itself, then whether or not the State's conduct is in fact justifiable on that basis, the significance of that attitude is to confirm rather than to weaken the rule.

Nicaragua v Colombia [2023] ICJ Rep 413

The Court addressed Nicaragua's request to define the maritime boundary in areas beyond the 2012 Judgment's limits, focusing on two key legal questions posed in its October 4, 2022 Order. The primary question was whether, under customary international law, a State's entitlement to an extended continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles could extend within 200 nautical miles of another State's baselines. The Court concluded that it could not, based on the interrelationship between the exclusive economic zone and continental shelf regimes under customary law, as reflected in UNCLOS, and widespread State practice showing *opinio juris* against such overlap. Consequently, the Court rejected Nicaragua's submissions for delimiting overlapping continental shelf areas with Colombia's mainland and islands (San Andrés, Providencia, Serranilla, Bajo Nuevo, and Serrana), finding no overlapping entitlements to delimit, thus rendering the second question on criteria for outer limits unnecessary to address. The decision, supported by a majority of thirteen to four votes on key points, reaffirmed Colombia's maritime entitlements within 200 nautical miles and upheld the 2012 Judgment's findings, dismissing Nicaragua's claims without needing further proceedings.

Even though Colombia is not a party to the *UN Convention on the Law of the Sea*, the ICJ held it still provided key evidence of custom, even though Colombia wasn't a party to it. The practices under it were "indicative of *opinio juris*", even if such practice may have been motivated in part by considerations other than a sense of legal obligation".

2.2.2 Regional Customary International Law

Asylum Case (Colombia v Peru) [1950] ICJ Rep 226

Colombia granted de la Torre (who was the head of an unsuccessful revolutionary group in Peru) political asylum in the Colombian Embassy in Lima, Peru. Colombia invoked 'American international law' to allow it to grant political asylum (referring to the Americas as a continent, not the United States); this supposed custom was that a unilateral decision to hold something was politically motivated was sufficient. The ICJ held that there was insufficient evidence of such regional customary norm, as such a practice had too much contradiction and fluctuation to be a regional standard. The ICJ concluded that regional standards need a higher standard of stability and continuity to apply as international law.

R (app. Al-Saadoon v Sec. of Defence) [2010] 1 All ER 271

In this case, there was a serious risk that the plaintiff would face death at the hands of the Iraqi system if they were deported. The question at hand was whether an obligation of non-refoulement (non-return) to countries where the death penalty available as a rule of regional customary international law in Europe? There is a concept of regional customary international law that bound the UK and other states in the Council of Europe that prevented a European state from transferring a person to a third state where the death penalty was a possibility. The English Court of Appeal found that this had not been established in this instance by the materials cited (including the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights). The Court accepted that there could be such a rule of regional customary international law, but on the evidence presented, this rule had not been established, and the relevant elements invoked by the claimants did not establish this rule of regional custom.

2.2.3 Persistent Objection

- This is a fairly narrow doctrine under customary international law
- States which consistently object to the emergence of a rule of custom from its earliest point of gestation will not be bound by this custom should the rule emerge; otherwise, they will be bound to it
- A state cannot be a persistent objector to a *jus cogens* principle, following the International Law Commission's 2019 report, at Conclusion 14 of Chapter V

International Law Commission 2019 Report Chapter V Conclusion 14

Rules of customary international law conflicting with a peremptory norm of general international law (*jus cogens*)

1. A rule of customary international law does not come into existence if it conflicts with a peremptory norm of general international law (*jus cogens*). This is without prejudice to the possible modification of a peremptory norm of general international law (*jus cogens*) by a subsequent norm of general international law having the same character.

2. A rule of customary international law not of a peremptory character ceases to exist if and to the extent that it conflicts with a new peremptory norm of general international law (*jus cogens*).
3. The persistent objector rule does not apply to peremptory norms of general international law (*jus cogens*).

Anglo Norwegian Fisheries Case (UK v Norway) [1951] ICJ Rep 116

To determine its coastal baselines, Norway drew a system of straight baselines. The UK objected to Norway's straight baselines, as Norway had suddenly closed the waters that were open to British fishing vessels (the regular practice was to not have a system of straight baselines). The question before the ICJ was whether there was a rule of custom prohibiting baselines more than 10 nautical miles in length. The ICJ held that there was no such rule, but even if it did exist, Norway was a persistent objector (and so even if it did exist, it wouldn't apply to Norway). Accordingly, the UK lost.

2.3 General Principles of Law

- Under Art 38(1)(c) of the *Statute of the International Court of Justice*, general principles of law recognised by civilised nations form a source of public international law
- The objective of including the general principles of law is to avoid the *non liquet* (the situation where 'it is not clear')
- This includes general principles of both international law and municipal law
- Examples of this include *res judicata* (the principle of finality, holding that once a case is decided, it is final and cannot be relitigated), the principle that a breach of an obligation is accompanied by an obligation to make reparations, and the principles of acquiescence and estoppel

Bay of Bengal (Bangladesh/Myanmar) [2012] ITLOS 12

This judgement by the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea addressed the delineation of maritime zones (territorial sea, exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and continental shelf) between the two states. The Tribunal, affirming its jurisdiction under the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS), rejected Bangladesh's claim that the 1974 and 2008 Agreed Minutes constituted a binding agreement for the territorial sea, finding them non-binding due to their conditional nature and lack of formal approval, resulting in there being no estoppel. It delimited the territorial sea using equidistance adjusted for St. Martin's Island, and for the EEZ and continental shelf within 200 nautical miles (nm), it applied a provisional equidistance line adjusted for Bangladesh's concave coast to avoid a cut-off effect. The Tribunal also asserted jurisdiction over the continental shelf beyond 200 nm, delimiting it based on geological entitlement and equity, resulting in a single maritime boundary, though creating a "grey area" where Bangladesh's continental shelf overlapped Myanmar's EEZ, which it left unresolved for

future negotiation.

Regarding Article 38(1)(c), the ITLOS Judgment implicitly engaged such principles, particularly equity, in its delimitation process. While the Judgment primarily applied UNCLOS provisions (Articles 15, 74, 83, and 76), the Tribunal's adjustment of the equidistance line to achieve an "equitable solution", notably to mitigate the cut-off effect of Bangladesh's concave coast, reflects the general principle of equity, a concept widely accepted across legal systems and frequently invoked in maritime delimitation (e.g., *North Sea Continental Shelf* cases). The dissenting opinion of Judge Lucky explicitly references Article 38 in the context of Articles 74 and 83, advocating the angle-bisector method over equidistance to ensure fairness, underscoring equity *infra legem* as a method to interpret and apply the law justly. Thus, the Judgment's reliance on equity to balance the parties' rights demonstrates how general principles under Article 38(1)(c) supplement treaty law in achieving a fair outcome specific to this case.

- [124] The Tribunal observes that, in international law, a situation of estoppel exists when a State, by its conduct, has created the appearance of a particular situation and another State, relying on such conduct in good faith, has acted or abstained from an action to its detriment. The effect of the notion of estoppel is that a State is precluded, by its conduct, from asserting that it did not agree to, or recognize, a certain situation.
- [125] In the view of the Tribunal, the evidence submitted by Bangladesh to demonstrate that the Parties have administered their waters in accordance with the limits set forth in the 1974 Agreed Minutes is not conclusive. There is no indication that Myanmar's conduct caused Bangladesh to change its position to its detriment or suffer some prejudice in reliance on such conduct. For these reasons, the Tribunal finds that Bangladesh's claim of estoppel cannot be upheld.

Chagos Marine Protected Area Arbitration (Mauritius v United Kingdom) (2015) XXXI RIAA 359

The arbitral tribunal, constituted under Annex VII of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), addressed a dispute between Mauritius and the United Kingdom (UK) concerning the UK's establishment of a Marine Protected Area (MPA) around the Chagos Archipelago on 1 April 2010. Mauritius argued that the UK, as the administering power of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), lacked the authority to unilaterally declare the MPA, violating UNCLOS and international law by disregarding Mauritius' rights, including fishing rights and the UK's undertakings to return the Archipelago and share resource benefits when no longer needed for defense purposes. The Tribunal found it lacked jurisdiction over Mauritius' sovereignty claims (First and Second Submissions) and a related dispute (Third Submission), but unanimously asserted jurisdiction over the Fourth Submission, concluding that the UK breached Articles 2(3), 56(2), and 194(4) of UNCLOS due to insufficient consultation and failure to balance Mauritius' rights, rendering the MPA's declaration incompatible with the Convention. The Tribunal emphasised procedural inadequacies rather than the MPA's environmental merits, urging further negotiations, and ordered costs to be borne equally by the parties.

Here, the Tribunal's interpretation of UNCLOS provisions, such as Article 2(3), relied on general principles like good faith and due regard, which are widely accepted across legal systems and reflect fundamental norms ensuring equitable conduct between states. These principles, derived from domestic legal traditions and adapted to the international context, served to evaluate the UK's obligations to consult and balance Mauritius' rights, demonstrating their role as a gap-filling mechanism where treaty or customary rules are ambiguous or silent. The Tribunal's reference to good faith in Article 2(3) and the balancing requirement in Article 56(2) underscores how general principles, as per Article 38(1)(c), provide a flexible yet authoritative basis for resolving disputes, reinforcing the coherence and fairness of international legal obligations beyond specific treaty terms.

[438] Further to this jurisprudence, estoppel may be invoked where (a) a State has made clear and consistent representations, by word, conduct, or silence; (b) such representations were made through an agent authorized to speak for the State with respect to the matter in question; (c) the State invoking estoppel was induced by such representations to act to its detriment, to suffer a prejudice, or to convey a benefit upon the representing State; and (d) such reliance was legitimate, as the representation was one on which that State was entitled to rely.

2.4 Judicial Decisions and the Teaching of Publicists

- Under Art 38(1)(d) of the *Statute of the International Court of Justice*, judicial decisions taken at both a domestic and an international level, and the teaching of publicists can be considered as sources of public international law
- However, these are 'subsidiary means' for the determination of rules of law, and are treated as having lesser significance than other sources
- Publicists generally constitute academics who are distinguished in the field, and probably have been dead for a long period of time
- Decisions taken by the ICJ do not constitute binding precedent in future decisions, and remain merely persuasive, following Art 59 of the *Statute of the International Court of Justice*
- It has been held that these other sources are "resorted to by judicial tribunals not for the speculations of their authors concerning what the law ought to be, but for trustworthy evidence of what the law really is", per *The Paquete Habana* 175 US 677 (1900)

Statute of the International Court of Justice Art 59

The decision of the Court has no binding force except between the parties and in respect of that particular case.

The Paquete Habana 175 US 677 (1900) (United State Supreme Court)

The U.S. Supreme Court reviewed the capture of two Spanish fishing vessels, the *Paquete Habana* and the *Lola*, by U.S. naval forces during the Spanish-American War. Both vessels, owned by Spanish subjects in Havana and crewed by Cuban fishermen, were engaged in

coast fishing off Cuba and Yucatan, carrying live fish caught by their crews. Captured in April 1898 near Havana by U.S. blockading ships, they were unarmed, unaware of the war or blockade, and made no attempt to resist or aid the enemy. The District Court for the Southern District of Florida condemned them as prizes of war on May 30, 1898, selling them for \$490 and \$800, respectively, asserting no legal exemption existed without a treaty or proclamation. The Supreme Court reversed this, finding their capture unlawful under international law, which exempts coast fishing vessels pursuing a peaceful trade from war prizes, and ordered restitution with compensatory damages.

This decision illustrates how customary international law integrates with other legal sources when treaties or domestic acts are absent. It ruled that the exemption of coast fishing vessels is an established rule of customary international law, derived from the consistent practice and *opinio juris* of civilised nations, evidenced by historical treaties (e.g., 1521 Charles V-Francis I treaty), state practice (e.g., U.S. in the Mexican War), and jurists' writings. Absent a controlling treaty, executive order, or statute (none of which existed here), the Court relied on this custom, distinguishing it from the non-binding UNGA resolutions in the 1996 ICJ Nuclear Weapons case, which lacked sufficient state practice to form custom. The decision aligns with treaty-based exemptions, but asserts judicial authority to enforce customary norms directly. This case therefore underscores custom's enforceability in U.S. courts, complementing treaties and executive discretion in wartime.

Pg. 175 | International law is part of our law, and must be ascertained and administered by the courts of justice of appropriate jurisdiction as often as questions of right depending upon it are duly presented for their determination. For this purpose, where there is no treaty and no controlling executive or legislative act or judicial decision, resort must be had to the customs and usages of civilized nations, and, as evidence of these, to the works of jurists and commentators who by years of labor, research, and experience have made themselves peculiarly well acquainted with the subjects of which they treat. Such works are resorted to by judicial tribunals not for the speculations of their authors concerning what the law ought to be, but for trustworthy evidence of what the law really is.

2.4.1 United Nations General Assembly Resolutions

- The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) is the plenary body of the UN, generating a large amount of documents, of which the most important are the UNGA Resolutions, since:
 - All UN members have a seat and can thus contribute to the formation of these resolutions
 - The UNGA has many different capacities, and can adopt different decisions (however, these are recommendatory, and not legally binding)
 - The UNGA has generally influenced PIL as it is a great forum for state practice and *opinio juris*
- Decisions of the UNGA are not binding, except in the key areas of admission of member states, suspension of member states, and matters related to the UN budget (if these were

not binding, the UN would not be able to function)

- These resolutions provide evidence on the state of customary international law, as it is a great forum to evidence what states are doing
- The UNGA can also be far more responsive than the traditional case-by-case process of implementing customary international law, and ultimately serves to advance the norms of international law
- UNGA resolutions can influence international law in three main ways:
 1. Interpreting the *Charter of the United Nations*
 2. Affirming recognised customary norms (this is done by a resolution of the UNGA)
 3. Influencing the creation of new customary norms (e.g., a resolution can be the spark that creates a new customary norm)
- Furthermore, it has been held in *Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons* [1996] ICJ Rep 254 that UNGA resolutions may “sometimes have normative value” (at [70]), and can provide “evidence important for the establishing the existence of a rule or the emergence of a *opinio juris*” (at [70])
- Such evidence can include:
 - The voting records of the UNGA
 - Transcripts of what was said on the floor of the UNGA
 - Margins of the votes undertaken in the UNGA

Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons [1996] ICJ Rep 254

The Court was asked whether the threat or use of nuclear weapons was permitted under international law. They found no specific authorisation or comprehensive prohibition of nuclear weapons in customary or conventional international law. It ruled that any such threat or use must comply with the UN Charter, prohibiting unlawful force (Article 2(4)) and regulating self-defense (Article 51), and international humanitarian law (IHL), which requires distinguishing between combatants and civilians and avoiding unnecessary suffering. While the Court concluded that nuclear weapons’ indiscriminate effects would “generally” violate IHL, it could not definitively rule on their legality in extreme self-defense scenarios threatening a state’s survival. It unanimously affirmed an obligation under Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to pursue nuclear disarmament in good faith.

The ICJ clarified the role of UNGA resolutions in international law, particularly in the context of nuclear weapons. **Resolutions are not legally binding on their own but may have normative value as evidence of customary law if supported by state practice and *opinio juris* ([70]-[73]).** The Court found that these resolutions, despite large majorities, did not establish a customary prohibition due to opposition from nuclear states, abstentions, and the lack of consistent practice, reflecting a divide between emerging *opinio juris* and the deterrence policy adhered to by some states. They signal deep concern and a desire for

a ban, but alone, they fall short of creating a legal rule.

The ICJ's analysis underscores that **UNGA resolutions complement, rather than independently create, binding norms**. Their significance depends on content, adoption conditions, and state acceptance, but in this case, they did not overcome the absence of universal consensus ([70] - [71]). In contrast, the NPT's Article VI imposes a clear legal duty on its 182 parties to negotiate disarmament, reinforced by UNGA resolutions but distinct in its binding force ([99] - [103]). Thus, while UNGA resolutions highlight an evolving legal consciousness and support treaty obligations, they were insufficient in 1996 to resolve the legality of nuclear weapons definitively, illustrating the Court's cautious approach to law-making based solely on such instruments.

[70] | The Court notes that General Assembly resolutions, even if they are not binding, may sometimes have normative value. They can, in certain circumstances, provide evidence important for establishing the existence of a rule or the emergence of an *opinio juris*. To establish whether this is true of a given General Assembly resolution, it is necessary to look at its content and the conditions of its adoption; it is also necessary to see whether an *opinio juris* exists as to its normative character. Or a series of resolutions may show the gradual evolution of the *opinio juris* required for the establishment of a new rule.

2.4.2 UN Security Council

- The UN Security Council can adopt a direct role in international law making (e.g., following the September 11 attacks, Resolution 1373 was deemed a form of 'international legislation')
- However, the UN Security Council has limited law-making capacity, and can adopt certain binding resolutions, but these may have expedited impacts
 - Under art 25 of the *Charter of the United Nations*, these resolutions are only binding on members of the UN

Charter of the United Nations Art 25

The Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council in accordance with the present Charter.

2.5 Soft Law

- Soft law refers to rules that are binding but vague, and/or 'rules' that are clear but not binding
- They serve as a convenient encompassment of a variety of non-legally binding instruments used in contemporary international relation
- Whilst soft law instruments are not in and of themselves legally binding, they can articulate standards or norms that will, over time, become concrete and be transformed into international law

- They can also be used to interpret other sources of international law (e.g., treaty or custom)
- An example is the precautionary principle, which is central to international environmental law:
 - These constitute cost-effective measures to protect the environment, with their implementation to not be delayed whilst there is uncertainty to their efficacy (i.e., protect the environment now rather than wait for complete certainty)
 - This was articulated in 1992 in the United Nations General Assembly, and can now be found in different areas of international law (an example of soft law becoming hard law over time)

Topic 3

The Law of Treaties

3.1 Defining Treaties

- A treaty refers to a binding agreement between states (or international organisations) that is governed by international law
- They perform various functions, including:
 - Transferring territory (like conveyance)
 - Bargaining (like contracts)
 - Setting out general international law (like legislation)
 - Creating international organisation (like articles of association)
 - Establishing new legal orders (like constitutions)
- The primary treaty on treaties (but not the only one) is the *1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties* (VCLT), which was based on the work of the International Law Commission¹, and is mostly declaratory of customary international law
 - The VCLT was signed in 1969, but entered into force in 1980, and so only applies to treaties concluded after 1980; however, many of its provisions can apply to treaties concluded before 1980 as a matter of general international law
 - Most provisions within the VCLT are customary, which can be helpful in resolving disputes as not all states are party to the VCLT, but its core rules nonetheless apply to them as a matter of custom
- VCLT Art 2(1)(a) defines what a treaty is (an international agreement between States, in either a singular instrument or in multiple instruments, and in any form whatsoever, as long as it is written)

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 2

Use of Terms

1. For the purposes of the present Convention:

¹A body within the United Nations tasked with the codification and progressive development of public international law

- (a) “treaty” means an international agreement concluded between States in written form and governed by international law, whether embodied in a single instrument or in two or more related instruments and whatever its particular designation;
 - (b) “ratification”, “acceptance”, “approval” and “accession” mean in each case the international act so named whereby a State establishes on the international plane its consent to be bound by a treaty;
 - (c) “full powers” means a document emanating from the competent authority of a State designating a person or persons to represent the State for negotiating, adopting or authenticating the text of a treaty, for expressing the consent of the State to be bound by a treaty, or for accomplishing any other act with respect to a treaty;
 - (d) “reservation” means a unilateral statement, however phrased or named, made by a State, when signing, ratifying, accepting, approving or acceding to a treaty, whereby it purports to exclude or to modify the legal effect of certain provisions of the treaty in their application to that State;
 - (e) “negotiating State” means a State which took part in the drawing up and adoption of the text of the treaty;
 - (f) “contracting State” means a State which has consented to be bound by the treaty, whether or not the treaty has entered into force;
 - (g) “party” means a State which has consented to be bound by the treaty and for which the treaty is in force;
 - (h) “third State” means a State not a party to the treaty;
 - (i) “international organization” means an intergovernmental organization.
2. The provisions of paragraph 1 regarding the use of terms in the present Convention are without prejudice to the use of those terms or to the meanings which may be given to them in the internal law of any State.

- Under Art 3 of the VCLT, the definition given in Art 2(1)(a) does not affect agreements between states and other subjects of international law, or between those other subjects (i.e., it only affects agreements between states)
 - However, equivalent norms of custom, or another treaty, may apply to the treaties not covered within the scope of the VCLT
- The VCLT additionally does not apply to non-written treaties on the text of Art 3
 - However, it does not foreclose the possibility of an oral agreement/treaty, and as much of the VCLT is custom, the rules set out in it will still apply to oral agreements/treaties, but which of those rules falls into that scope is vague

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 3

International agreements not within the scope of the present Convention

The fact that the present Convention does not apply to international agreements concluded between States and other subjects of international law or between such other subjects of international law, or to international agreements not in written form, shall not affect:

- (a) the legal force of such agreements;
- (b) the application to them of any of the rules set forth in the present Convention to which they would be subject under international law independently of the Convention;
- (c) the application of the Convention to the relations of States as between themselves under international agreements to which other subjects of international law are also parties.

Legal Status of Eastern Greenland (Denmark v Norway) (1933) PCIJ Series A/B, No 53

In this case, the Permanent Court of International Justice held that Norway was bound by an oral undertaking given to Denmark that it would not oppose its claim to sovereignty over Greenland. The Court held that “as a result of the undertaking [by the Norwegian Foreign Minister], Norway is under an obligation to refrain from contesting Danish sovereignty over Greenland as a whole, and *a fortiori* to refrain from occupying a part of Greenland”.

- Treaties are very flexible, and may be embodied in one or several instruments (e.g., an exchange of notes (which is more than one instrument) can constitute a treaty), and there are no requirements as to the form of the treaty
 - The key consideration is the objective intention of the parties (which can be discern from the text of the treaty)

Maritime Delimitation and Territorial Questions (Qatar v Bahrain) (1994) ICJ Rep 112

In this case, the International Court of Justice held that an exchange of letters between the Emir of Qatar and the Ruler of Bahrain constituted a treaty, and that the exchange of letters was a valid means of concluding a treaty.

“The Minutes are not the simple record of a meeting ... They enumerate the commitments to which the Parties have consented ... They constitute an international agreement”.

- Unilateral declarations made by a party may have binding effect

Nuclear Test Cases (Australia v France) (1974) ICJ Rep 253

In this case, the International Court of Justice held that a unilateral declaration by France that it would not conduct nuclear tests in the atmosphere was binding on France, and that the declaration was a unilateral act having legal effect.

“An undertaking ... if given publicly with an intent to be bound, even though not made

within the context of international negotiations, is binding”.

- [43] When it is the intention of the State making the declaration that it should become bound according to its terms, that intention confers on the declaration the character of a legal undertaking, the State being thenceforth legally required to follow a course of conduct consistent with the declaration. An undertaking of this kind, if given publicly, and with an intent to be bound, even though not made within the context of international negotiations, is binding.

- There is no requirement that a treaty needs to involve ‘consideration’ (i.e., a promise, price, detriment or forbearance given as a value for a promise); this results in the potential for treaties to be one-sided

3.2 Entry into a Treaty

- Only states, international organisations and other international entities with capacity to enter into treaties (i.e., international persons) may be parties to a treaty
- Under Art 7 of the VCLT, Heads of State, Heads of Government and Ministers of Foreign Affairs have the capacity to conclude treaties without producing “full powers”
 - “Full powers” refers to a document or a set of documents evidencing authority for the bearing/undersigned individual to act on behalf of the state and thereby enter into treaties
 - Since a state does not have any physical existence, it has to act through a representative (which can be one of the above individuals, or another individual who has produced full powers)

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 6

Capacity of States to conclude treaties

Every State possesses capacity to conclude treaties.

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 7

Full Powers

1. A person is considered as representing a State for the purpose of adopting or authenticating the text of a treaty or for the purpose of expressing the consent of the State to be bound by a treaty if:
 - (a) he produces appropriate full powers; or
 - (b) it appears from the practice of the States concerned or from other circumstances that their intention was to consider that person as representing the State for such purposes and to dispense with full powers.

2. In virtue of their functions and without having to produce full powers, the following are considered as representing their State:
 - (a) Heads of State, Heads of Government and Ministers for Foreign Affairs, for the purpose of performing all acts relating to the conclusion of a treaty;
 - (b) heads of diplomatic missions, for the purpose of adopting the text of a treaty between the accrediting State and the State to which they are accredited;
 - (c) representatives accredited by States to an international conference or to an international organization or one of its organs, for the purpose of adopting the text of a treaty in that conference, organization or organ.

- Entry into a treaty is a two-step process, entailing:
 1. Signature (which is when a state expresses a willingness to continue the treaty-making process, **but is not bound by the treaty at this point**)
 2. Ratification (which indicates that the state consents to be bound by the treaty once it has been ratified)
 3. Accession (this only arises when a state becomes party to a treaty already negotiated and signed by other states, and has the same legal effect as ratification)
- There is a period of time between signature and ratification, which allows states to implement the provisions of the treaty into their domestic law, and for the state to prepare for the treaty to be given effect
- Signature is not sufficient for a state to be bound; they must have either ratified or acceded to the treaty
- A treaty enters into force when the relevant provisions in the treaty addressing this point have been satisfied
 - If the treaty is silent on this point, it will enter into force when all the parties have consented to be bound by the treaty, following Art 24(2) of the *1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties*
 - * However, a treaty will almost always include a provision on when it will enter into force
 - A treaty enters into force for a specific party when it has consented to be bound, and when the treaty has entered into force generally

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 24

Entry into force

1. A treaty enters into force in such manner and upon such date as it may provide or as the negotiating States may agree.
2. Failing any such provision or agreement, a treaty enters into force as soon as consent to be bound by the treaty has been established for all the negotiating States.
3. When the consent of a State to be bound by a treaty is established on a date after

the treaty has come into force, the treaty enters into force for that State on that date, unless the treaty otherwise provides.

4. The provisions of a treaty regulating the authentication of its text, the establishment of the consent of States to be bound by the treaty, the manner or date of its entry into force, reservations, the functions of the depositary and other matters arising necessarily before the entry into force of the treaty apply from the time of the adoption of its text.

3.3 Registration and Application of Treaties

- In order to be recognised as binding instruments before UN organisations, they must be registered with the UN, following Art 102 of the *Charter of the United Nations*
 - This is a position reinforced in Art 80 of the *1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties*
 - This is not a requirement for the treaty to be binding, but is a requirement for the treaty to be recognised by the UN
- The principle of *pacta sunt servanda*, following *1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties* Art 26, requires that “every treaty in force is binding upon the parties to it, and must be performed by them in good faith”
- Under Art 27 of the VCLT, a party may not invoke the provisions of its internal law (i.e., domestic law) as justification for its failure to perform a treaty
 - This is subject to Art 46 of the *1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties*, which allows a party to invoke its internal law as a justification for its failure to perform a treaty if the other party was aware of that law, and the law is not contrary to the treaty

Charter of the United Nations Article 102

1. Every treaty and every international agreement entered into by any Member of the United Nations after the present Charter comes into force shall as soon as possible be registered with the Secretariat and published by it.
2. No party to any such treaty or international agreement which has not been registered in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 1 of this Article may invoke that treaty or agreement before any organ of the United Nations.

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 80

Registration and publication of treaties

1. Treaties shall, after their entry into force, be transmitted to the Secretariat of the United Nations for registration or filing and recording, as the case may be, and for publication.

2. The designation of a depositary shall constitute authorization for it to perform the acts specified in the preceding paragraph.

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 26

“Pacta sunt servanda”

Every treaty in force is binding upon the parties to it and must be performed by them in good faith.

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 27

Internal law and observance of treaties

A party may not invoke the provisions of its internal law as justification for its failure to perform a treaty. This rule is without prejudice to article 46.

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 46

Provisions of internal law regarding competence to conclude treaties

1. A State may not invoke the fact that its consent to be bound by a treaty has been expressed in violation of a provision of its internal law regarding competence to conclude treaties as invalidating its consent unless that violation was manifest and concerned a rule of its internal law of fundamental importance.
 2. A violation is manifest if it would be objectively evident to any State conducting itself in the matter in accordance with normal practice and in good faith.
- Under Art 18 of the *1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties*, a state is obliged to refrain from acts that would defeat the object and purpose of a treaty (e.g., if a treaty requires objects to be returned, then Art 18 prohibits the state from destroying those objects during the transfer process)
 - When states have signed a treaty that has not yet been ratified, they must not undermine the spirit of the treaty in this intermediary phase
 - Under Art 34 of the *1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties*, treaties do not impose obligations or create rights for third states in the absence of their consent (*pacta tertiis nec nocent nec prosunt*)

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 18

Obligation not to defeat the object and purpose of a treaty prior to its entry into force

A State is obliged to refrain from acts which would defeat the object and purpose of a treaty when:

- (a) it has signed the treaty or has exchanged instruments constituting the treaty subject

to ratification, acceptance or approval, until it shall have made its intention clear not to become a party to the treaty; or

- (b) it has expressed its consent to be bound by the treaty, pending the entry into force of the treaty and provided that such entry into force is not unduly delayed.

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 34

General rule regarding third States

A treaty does not create either obligations or rights for a third State without its consent.

3.4 Reservations to Treaties

- If a state agrees to the general principles of a treaty, but does not agree with a specific provision or a set of provisions, they can enact a reservation when signing the treaty
- This has the effect of the reserving state and the states with whom the reservation was made being bound to the extent which they agreed to, and the reserved provisions not applying between those states (but still applying between the other states)
- A reservation is defined in Art 2(1)(d) of the *1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties* (on Page 16)
- Reservations can be made by a state at any stage of the treaty-making procedure
- Reservations are different from an 'interpretative declaration', which is a statement made by a state to clarify its understanding of a treaty, but does not affect the legal effect of the treaty
 - States can use interpretative declarations to clarify their understanding of a treaty, but they cannot use them to change the legal effect of the treaty
- The rules of reservation prescribed under the VCLT apply only to multilateral treaties (as a reservation to a bilateral treaty is effectively a counter-offer)

3.4.1 Permissibility

- The default position taken under Art 19 of the VCLT is that reservations are permissible, unless they are explicitly prohibited by the treaty or the reservation is incompatible with the object and purpose of the treaty

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 19

Formulation of reservations

A State may, when signing, ratifying, accepting, approving or acceding to a treaty, formulate a reservation unless:

- (a) the reservation is prohibited by the treaty;

- (b) the treaty provides that only specified reservations, which do not include the reservation in question, may be made; or
- (c) in cases not failing under subparagraphs (a) and (b), the reservation is incompatible with the object and purpose of the treaty.

- Under the *ILC Guide to Practice on Reservations*, the test for incompatibility of a reservation is whether “a reservation is incompatible with the object and purpose of the treaty if it affects an essential element of the treaty that is necessary to its general tenor, in such a way that the reservation impairs the *raison d’être* [the most important reason] of the treaty”
- If a reservation is impermissible, the traditional view is that the impermissible reservation vitiates the consent of the state to the treaty as a whole, and results in the state not being a party to the treaty, following *Reservations to Genocide Convention* [1951] ICJ Rep 15
- The emerging view, especially for human rights treaties, is that the offending reservation is null and void, and may be severed, with the state bound by the treaty without the protection of the reservation (unless consent to be bound is conditional on the reservation)
 - This will cut out/sever the reservation, and will bind a state without the protection of their reservation

3.4.2 Acceptance and Objection

- If a treaty expressly allows for reservations, then no acceptance of a reservation is required by the other parties
- Acceptance by all parties will be required if a treaty has a small number of parties, and the application of the treaty in its entirety is an essential condition of signing
- In all other cases:
 - Acceptance by the other contracting state(s) of the reservation results in the reserving state being bound by the treaty (with the reservation incorporated); and
 - Objection to a reservation does not prevent entry into force of a treaty between the objecting state and the reserving state, unless the objecting state says otherwise

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 20

Acceptance of and objection to reservations

1. A reservation expressly authorized by a treaty does not require any subsequent acceptance by the other contracting States unless the treaty so provides.
2. When it appears from the limited number of the negotiating States and the object and purpose of a treaty that the application of the treaty in its entirety between all the parties is an essential condition of the consent of each one to be bound by the treaty, a reservation requires acceptance by all the parties.
3. When a treaty is a constituent instrument of an international organization and

unless it otherwise provides, a reservation requires the acceptance of the competent organ of that organization.

4. In cases not falling under the preceding paragraphs and unless the treaty otherwise provides:
 - (a) acceptance by another contracting State of a reservation constitutes the reserving State a party to the treaty in relation to that other State if or when the treaty is in force for those States;
 - (b) an objection by another contracting State to a reservation does not preclude the entry into force of the treaty as between the objecting and reserving States unless a contrary intention is definitely expressed by the objecting State;
 - (c) an act expressing a State's consent to be bound by the treaty and containing a reservation is effective as soon as at least one other contracting State has accepted the reservation.
5. For the purposes of paragraphs 2 and 4 and unless the treaty otherwise provides, a reservation is considered to have been accepted by a State if it shall have raised no objection to the reservation by the end of a period of twelve months after it was notified of the reservation or by the date on which it expressed its consent to be bound by the treaty, whichever is later.

3.4.3 Legal Effect

- Three scenarios can arise when a permissible reservation is made:
 1. If state A accepts state R's reservation, then the treaty is modified between A and R (but only between A and R) to the extent of the reservation (VCLT Art 21(1) and (2)) (Page 25)
 - Other parties will not be bound by this reservation; it acts like a side agreement with R along the lines of the reservation
 2. If state B objects to state R's reservation and says the treaty is not to apply, then there is no treaty between them at all (VCLT Art 20(4)(b)) (Page 24)
 3. If state C objects to state R's reservation but does not say that treaty is not to apply, then treaty applies but 'the provisions to which the reservation relates do not apply ... to the extent of the reservation' (VCLT Art 21(3)) (Page 25)

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 21

Legal effects of reservations and of objections to reservations

1. A reservation established with regard to another party in accordance with articles 19, 20 and 23:
 - (a) modifies for the reserving State in its relations with that other party the provisions of the treaty to which the reservation relates to the extent of the reservation; and

- (b) modifies those provisions to the same extent for that other party in its relations with the reserving State.
- 2. The reservation does not modify the provisions of the treaty for the other parties to the treaty *inter se*.
- 3. When a State objecting to a reservation has not opposed the entry into force of the treaty between itself and the reserving State, the provisions to which the reservation relates do not apply as between the two States to the extent of the reservation.

Republic of India v CCDM Holdings, LLC [2025] FCAFC 2

This case involved India having entered a reservation to a Convention, with a question arising as to whether the reservation applied only in Indian proceedings, or whether it also applied to proceedings in Australia. Whilst it is rare for a reservation issue to come up in a domestic court, the Full Federal Court explained and applied the provisions of the VCLT on reservations in an enforcement of judgements case concerning foreign state immunity; the Court also referred to the *ILC Guide to Practice on Reservations to Treaties* in its reasoning at [63] to [70]. At [63], the Court emphasised the reciprocal effect of reservations, holding that “the effect of a reservation is that between the reserving and accepting state...the reservation modifies the provision of the treaty to the extent of the reservation for each party reciprocally (see Art 21(1)(a) and (b) of the Vienna Convention)”. This case reinforces the idea of reciprocity whereby if a reservation is made, it applies to both states (i.e., it removes the particular provision for both states, not just one state).

3.5 Interpretation of Treaties

- There are several conceptual approaches to treaty interpretation:
 - Formalist/Textual (formal adherence to the terms of the treaty)
 - Restrictive (deference to state sovereignty)
 - Teleological (to give effect to the object and purpose of the treaty)
 - Effectiveness (to ensure the treaty regime remains as effective as possible)
 - Originalist (to focus on the original purpose of the treaty)
- The Australian courts will apply the VCLT when interpreting a treaty that has been incorporated into Australian law
 - In the example of *DHI22 v Qatar Airways [2024] FCA 348*, the Court found that a claim in relation to invasive medical examinations was not addressed by the Montreal Convention (as these were not an ‘accident’ within the meaning of the Convention)
 - This case dealt with the liability of carriers for accidents that occur on board an aircraft

- To ensure national uniformity in treaty interpretation for treaties incorporated into legislation, the courts do not apply the rules of statutory interpretation but instead apply the VCLT

3.5.1 Key Rules of Treaty Interpretation

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 31

General rule of interpretation

1. A treaty shall be interpreted in good faith in accordance with the ordinary meaning to be given to the terms of the treaty in their context and in the light of its object and purpose.
2. The context for the purpose of the interpretation of a treaty shall comprise, in addition to the text, including its preamble and annexes:
 - (a) any agreement relating to the treaty which was made between all the parties in connection with the conclusion of the treaty;
 - (b) any instrument which was made by one or more parties in connection with the conclusion of the treaty and accepted by the other parties as an instrument related to the treaty.
3. There shall be taken into account, together with the context:
 - (a) any subsequent agreement between the parties regarding the interpretation of the treaty or the application of its provisions;
 - (b) any subsequent practice in the application of the treaty which establishes the agreement of the parties regarding its interpretation;
 - (c) any relevant rules of international law applicable in the relations between the parties.
4. A special meaning shall be given to a term if it is established that the parties so intended.

- Good faith
 - The requirement of good faith is enshrined in Art 31(1) of the VCLT (Page 27)
- Subsequent agreement/practice and applicable international law
 - Under VCLT Art 31(3) (Page 27), any subsequent agreement or practice between the parties is to be taken into account when interpreting a treaty
 - The resolutions of internal organisations can be taken into account as subsequent agreement/practice if this position is supported by all parties, following *Whaling in the Antarctic Case* [2014] ICJ Rep 226 at [83]

Whaling in the Antarctic Case [2014] ICJ Rep 226

This case concerned Japan's whaling program for Minke whales around Antarctica, which Australia challenged. Australia was successful in getting the ICJ to hold that Japan's program amounted to commercial whaling, which is prohibited under the treaty for Antarctica.

[83] Article VIII expressly contemplates the use of lethal methods, and the Court is of the view that Australia and New Zealand overstate the legal significance of the recommendatory resolutions and Guidelines on which they rely. First, many IWC resolutions were adopted without the support of all States parties to the Convention and, in particular, without the concurrence of Japan. Thus, such instruments cannot be regarded as subsequent agreement to an interpretation of Article VIII, nor as subsequent practice establishing an agreement of the parties regarding the interpretation of the treaty within the meaning of subparagraphs (a) and (b), respectively, of paragraph (3) of Article 31 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.

Secondly, as a matter of substance, the relevant resolutions and Guidelines that have been approved by consensus call upon States parties to take into account whether research objectives can practically and scientifically be achieved by using non-lethal research methods, but they do not establish a requirement that lethal methods be used only when other methods are not available.

The Court however observes that the States parties to the ICRW have a duty to co-operate with the IWC and the Scientific Committee and thus should give due regard to recommendations calling for an assessment of the feasibility of non-lethal alternatives. The Court will return to this point when it considers the Parties' arguments regarding JARPA II (see paragraph 137).

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 32***Supplementary means of interpretation***

Recourse may be had to supplementary means of interpretation, including the preparatory work of the treaty and the circumstances of its conclusion, in order to confirm the meaning resulting from the application of article 31, or to determine the meaning when the interpretation according to article 31:

- (a) leaves the meaning ambiguous or obscure; or
- (b) leads to a result which is manifestly absurd or unreasonable.

- Supplementary means of interpretation
 - This is governed by Art 32 of the VCLT
 - Supplementary means of preparation include what is known as the preparatory works (*travaux préparatoires*), which can include notes of discussions taken prior to signing/ratification of the treaty

- This is somewhat of a last-resort measure, and is generally used when the reader is scratching their head as to the meaning of the treaty

3.6 Invalidity of Treaties

3.6.1 Void

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 51

Coercion of a representative of a State

The expression of a State's consent to be bound by a treaty which has been procured by the coercion of its representative through acts or threats directed against him shall be without any legal effect.

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 52

Coercion of a State by the threat or use of force

A treaty is void if its conclusion has been procured by the threat or use of force in violation of the principles of international law embodied in the Charter of the United Nations.

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 53

Treaties conflicting with a peremptory norm of general international law ("jus cogens")

A treaty is void if, at the time of its conclusion, it conflicts with a peremptory norm of general international law. For the purposes of the present Convention, a peremptory norm of general international law is a norm accepted and recognized by the international community of States as a whole as a norm from which no derogation is permitted and which can be modified only by a subsequent norm of general international law having the same character.

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 64

Emergence of a new peremptory norm of general international law ("jus cogens")

If a new peremptory norm of general international law emerges, any existing treaty which is in conflict with that norm becomes void and terminates.

3.6.2 Invalid

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 46

Provisions of internal law regarding competence to conclude treaties

1. A State may not invoke the fact that its consent to be bound by a treaty has been expressed in violation of a provision of its internal law regarding competence to conclude treaties as invalidating its consent unless that violation was manifest and concerned a rule of its internal law of fundamental importance.
2. A violation is manifest if it would be objectively evident to any State conducting itself in the matter in accordance with normal practice and in good faith.

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 47

Specific restrictions on authority to express the consent of a State

If the authority of a representative to express the consent of a State to be bound by a particular treaty has been made subject to a specific restriction, his omission to observe that restriction may not be invoked as invalidating the consent expressed by him unless the restriction was notified to the other negotiating States prior to his expressing such consent.

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 48

Error

1. A State may invoke an error in a treaty as invalidating its consent to be bound by the treaty if the error relates to a fact or situation which was assumed by that State to exist at the time when the treaty was concluded and formed an essential basis of its consent to be bound by the treaty.
2. Paragraph 1 shall not apply if the State in question contributed by its own conduct to the error or if the circumstances were such as to put that State on notice of a possible error.
3. An error relating only to the wording of the text of a treaty does not affect its validity; article 79 then applies.

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 49

Fraud

If a State has been induced to conclude a treaty by the fraudulent conduct of another negotiating State, the State may invoke the fraud as invalidating its consent to be bound by the treaty.

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 79

1. Where, after the authentication of the text of a treaty, the signatory States and the contracting States are agreed that it contains an error, the error shall, unless they decide upon some other means of correction, be corrected:
 - (a) by having the appropriate correction made in the text and causing the correction to be initialled by duly authorized representatives;
 - (b) by executing or exchanging an instrument or instruments setting out the correction which it has been agreed to make; or
 - (c) by executing a corrected text of the whole treaty by the same procedure as in the case of the original text.
2. Where the treaty is one for which there is a depositary, the latter shall notify the signatory States and the contracting States of the error and of the proposal to correct it and shall specify an appropriate time-limit within which objection to the proposed correction may be raised. If, on the expiry of the time-limit:
 - (a) no objection has been raised, the depositary shall make and initial the correction in the text and shall execute a procès-verbal of the rectification of the text and communicate a copy of it to the parties and to the States entitled to become parties to the treaty;
 - (b) an objection has been raised, the depositary shall communicate the objection to the signatory States and to the contracting States.
3. The rules in paragraphs 1 and 2 apply also where the text has been authenticated in two or more languages and it appears that there is a lack of concordance which the signatory States and the contracting States agree should be corrected.
4. The corrected text replaces the defective text ab initio, unless the signatory States and the contracting States otherwise decide.
5. The correction of the text of a treaty that has been registered shall be notified to the Secretariat of the United Nations.
6. Where an error is discovered in a certified copy of a treaty, the depositary shall execute a procès-verbal specifying the rectification and communicate a copy of it to the signatory States and to the contracting States.

3.7 Termination, Withdrawal and Suspension

- Termination of a treaty refers to it ceasing to exist
- Denunciation/withdrawal refers to when a party withdraws from a treaty (if it is multilateral, it will continue to exist for other parties)
- Suspension refers to the treaty remaining on foot, but its performance has been suspended/stopped for some period of time

- Internal grounds for termination, withdrawal and suspension stem from the treaty itself or the will of the parties (the required steps are spelled out in the treaty itself)
- External grounds for termination, withdrawal and suspension stem from external factors (e.g., material breach)

3.7.1 Express or Implied Agreement

- Under Arts 54 and 57 of the VCLT, a treaty can be terminated or suspended by agreement of the parties
- This is consistent with the consensual basis of international law

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 54

Termination of or withdrawal from a treaty under its provisions or by consent of the parties

The termination of a treaty or the withdrawal of a party may take place:

- (a) in conformity with the provisions of the treaty; or
- (b) at any time by consent of all the parties after consultation with the other contracting States.

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 57

Suspension of the operation of a treaty under its provisions or by consent of the parties

The operation of a treaty in regard to all the parties or to a particular party may be suspended:

- (a) in conformity with the provisions of the treaty; or
- (b) at any time by consent of all the parties after consultation with the other contracting States.

3.7.2 Denunciation/Withdrawal

- A party may denounce/withdrawal from a treaty if the treaty itself permits it, if all of the parties consent to the denouncement/withdrawal, or if the right to denounce/withdrawal can be implied from the nature of the treaty
- Under Art 56 of the VCLT, a party must give at least 12 months' notice of its intention to denounce/withdrawal from a treaty

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 56

Denunciation of or withdrawal from a treaty containing no provision regarding termination, denunciation or withdrawal

1. A treaty which contains no provision regarding its termination and which does not

provide for denunciation or withdrawal is not subject to denunciation or withdrawal unless:

- (a) it is established that the parties intended to admit the possibility of denunciation or withdrawal; or
 - (b) a right of denunciation or withdrawal may be implied by the nature of the treaty.
2. A party shall give not less than twelve months' notice of its intention to denounce or withdraw from a treaty under paragraph 1.

3.7.3 Material Breach

- If a state breaches a treaty, it commits an internationally wrongful act (see Topic 10)
- Serious breaches can have consequences under the law of treaties
- A material breach is an impermissible repudiation of the treaty or violation of a provision essential for achieving the object and purpose of the treaty, following VCLT Art 60
- If there has been a material breach, the other parties in the treaty can suspend or terminate the treaty, if they wish to do so

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 60

Termination or suspension of the operation of a treaty as a consequence of its breach

1. A material breach of a bilateral treaty by one of the parties entitles the other to invoke the breach as a ground for terminating the treaty or suspending its operation in whole or in part.
2. A material breach of a multilateral treaty by one of the parties entitles:
 - (a) the other parties by unanimous agreement to suspend the operation of the treaty in whole or in part or to terminate it either:
 - (i) in the relations between themselves and the defaulting State; or
 - (ii) as between all the parties;
 - (b) a party specially affected by the breach to invoke it as a ground for suspending the operation of the treaty in whole or in part in the relations between itself and the defaulting State;
 - (c) any party other than the defaulting State to invoke the breach as a ground for suspending the operation of the treaty in whole or in part with respect to itself if the treaty is of such a character that a material breach of its provisions by one party radically changes the position of every party with respect to the further performance of its obligations under the treaty.
3. A material breach of a treaty, for the purposes of this article, consists in:
 - (a) a repudiation of the treaty not sanctioned by the present Convention; or

- (b) the violation of a provision essential to the accomplishment of the object or purpose of the treaty.
- 4. The foregoing paragraphs are without prejudice to any provision in the treaty applicable in the event of a breach.
- 5. Paragraphs 1 to 3 do not apply to provisions relating to the protection of the human person contained in treaties of a humanitarian character, in particular to provisions prohibiting any form of reprisals against persons protected by such treaties.

3.7.4 Impossibility

- A state may terminate or withdraw from a treaty if its performance has become impossible because 'an object indispensable for the execution of the treaty' has permanently disappeared or been destroyed, following VCLT Art 61

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 61

Supervening impossibility of performance

1. A party may invoke the impossibility of performing a treaty as a ground for terminating or withdrawing from it if the impossibility results from the permanent disappearance or destruction of an object indispensable for the execution of the treaty. If the impossibility is temporary, it may be invoked only as a ground for suspending the operation of the treaty.
2. Impossibility of performance may not be invoked by a party as a ground for terminating, withdrawing from or suspending the operation of a treaty if the impossibility is the result of a breach by that party either of an obligation under the treaty or of any other international obligation owed to any other party to the treaty.

3.7.5 Fundamental Change of Circumstances

- A state may suspend/terminate, or withdraw, from a treaty if there has been a fundamental change of circumstances since the treaty was concluded, following VCLT Art 62
- For this to happen, three requirements need to be satisfied:
 - The circumstances at the conclusion of the treaty must have been an essential basis of consent
 - The change must not have been foreseen
 - The change must radically transform the extent of the obligations still to be performed
- International courts are very reluctant to find that impossibility and/or fundamental change of circumstances have been made out (i.e., these have a very high threshold and consequently a very limited scope)

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Article 62*Fundamental change of circumstances*

1. A fundamental change of circumstances which has occurred with regard to those existing at the time of the conclusion of a treaty, and which was not foreseen by the parties, may not be invoked as a ground for terminating or withdrawing from the treaty unless:
 - (a) the existence of those circumstances constituted an essential basis of the consent of the parties to be bound by the treaty; and
 - (b) the effect of the change is radically to transform the extent of obligations still to be performed under the treaty.
2. A fundamental change of circumstances may not be invoked as a ground for terminating or withdrawing from a treaty:
 - (a) if the treaty establishes a boundary; or
 - (b) if the fundamental change is the result of a breach by the party invoking it either of an obligation under the treaty or of any other international obligation owed to any other party to the treaty.
3. If, under the foregoing paragraphs, a party may invoke a fundamental change of circumstances as a ground for terminating or withdrawing from a treaty it may also invoke the change as a ground for suspending the operation of the treaty.

Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Case [1997] ICJ Rep 7

This case involved questions of treaty law, state responsibility, succession of states (new states succeed to their obligation of their parent states, e.g., Soviet Union → Russia), and international environmental law. It arose from disagreement over a joint project between Hungary and Czechoslovakia to construct a series of locks and dams along a shared stretch of the Danube (under a 1977 Treaty). Hungary suspended work on the project after environmental protests were conducted by civil society. Czechoslovakia investigated a unilateral alternative ('Variant C'), resulting in Hungary seeking to terminate the 1977 Treaty.

The rules of the VCLT concerning the termination and suspension of treaties were considered by virtue of being part of customary international law (the VCLT itself was not applicable as the parties joined it after the 1977 Treaty; later treaties cannot be applied to earlier treaties). The 1977 Treaty contained no provision concerning termination, and therefore it could only be terminated according to limited grounds set out in VCLT.

Performance was not impossible (and in any event impossibility cannot be invoked by party which itself breaches treaty). Hungary's argument was that it could not comply with the terms of the treaty without severely damaging the surrounding environment. The plea of fundamental change of circumstances can only be applied in exceptional circumstances,

and there were none here; the court refused to apply art 62, as there were no radical changes to the obligations of the parties. Hungary was not entitled to invoke Slovakia's breach of treaty for terminating, as at that time no breach had yet taken place. Slovakia adopted Variant C because of Hungary's breach; Hungary by its own conduct had prejudiced its right to terminate the treaty. Although both Hungary and Slovakia failed to comply with the treaty, this reciprocal conduct did not bring treaty to an end nor justify its termination.

'The Court would set a precedent with disturbing implications for treaty relations and the integrity of the rule *pacta sunt servanda* if it were to conclude that a treaty in force between States, which the parties have implemented in considerable measure and at great cost over a period of years, might be unilaterally set aside on grounds of reciprocal non-compliance.'

The Court is very reluctant to declare the treaty as ineffective, emphasising the centrality of *pacta sunt servanda*. Thus, this case shows that treaties are very hard to get out of (when drafting treaties, it is wise to include provisions for breach and change of circumstance, as external measures are hard to invoke).

3.8 VCLT and Custom

- The table below outlines which VCLT provisions reflect or may reflect customary international law
- In this table, the following authorities are used:

Aust	Aust, Anthony, <i>Modern Treaty Law and Practice</i> (Cambridge University Press, 3rd ed, 2013)
Corten & Klein	Corten, Oliver, and Pierre Klein (eds), <i>The Vienna Conventions on the Law of Treaties: A Commentary</i> (Oxford University Press, 2011)
Dörr & Schmalenbach	Dörr, Oliver and Kirsten Schmalenbach (eds), <i>Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, A Commentary</i> (Springer-Verlag, 2018)
Hollis	Hollis, Duncan B (ed), <i>The Oxford Guide to Treaties</i> (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2012)
Villiger	Villiger, Mark E, <i>Commentary on the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties</i> (Martinus Nijhoff, 2009)

Table 3.4: Customary International Law Status of VCLT Articles

Article	Customary International Law?	Authority
1	N/A	Schmalenbach in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 94

Continued on next page

Article	Customary International Law?	Authority
2	Yes	Maritime Delimitation and Territorial Questions between Qatar and Bahrain (Jurisdiction and Admissibility) [1994] ICJ Rep 112, para 23
2(1)(a)	Yes	Temple of Preah Vihear (Cambodia v Thailand) (Preliminary Objections) [1961] ICJ Rep 17, p. 31
2(1)(d)	Yes	Maritime Delimitation in the Indian Ocean (Somalia v. Kenya) (Judgment) [2017] ICJ Rep 3, para 42 Summary of Practice of the Secretary-General as Depositary of Multilateral Treaties, prepared by the Treaty Section of the Office of Legal Affairs, UN, 1994, ST/LEG7/Rev.1, p. 49 para. 161 Land and Maritime Boundary between Cameroon and Nigeria (Cameroon v Nigeria: Equatorial Guinea intervening) (Judgment) ICJ Rep p.303, para. 263
3	N/A	Schmalenbach in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 56
4	N/A	Schmalenbach in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 94 Dopagne in Corten & Klein 2011, p. 80
5	Unlikely	Schmalenbach in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 99 H. Anderson in Corten & Klein, p. 103
6	Yes	Turp & Roch in Corten & Klein, p. 111 Schmalenbach in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 115
7	Partly	Hoffmeister in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 132 Maritime Delimitation in the Indian Ocean (Somalia v. Kenya) (Judgment) [2017] ICJ Rep, para 43
7(1)	Yes	Villiger, p. 146
7(2)(a)	Yes	Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (New Application: 2002) case (Democratic Republic of Congo v Rwanda), Jurisdiction and Admissibility, Judgment [2006] ICJ Reports 6, para. 46
7(2)(c)	“Progressive development”	Hoffmeister in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 133
8	Maybe	Angelet & Leidgens in Corten & Klein, p. 157 Hoffmeister in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 146
9(1)	Yes	Villiger, p.163 Hoffmeister in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 153
9(2)	Unclear	Aust, pp.79-80
10	Yes	Villiger, p. 171 Hoffmeister in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 165
11	“Some customary value”	Szurek in Corten & Klein, p. 192

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Article	Customary International Law?	Authority
		Land and Maritime Boundary (Cameroon v Nigeria) (Judgment) ICJ Rep 303, para 264
12	Yes in its entirety	Hoffmeister in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 183
12(1)(a)	Yes	Maritime Delimitation in the Indian Ocean (Somalia v. Kenya) (Judgment) [2017] ICJ Rep 1, para 45
12(1)(b)	Yes	Aust, p. 91
12(1)(c)	No	Van Assche in Corten & Klein, pp.216-217
12(2)(a)	Yes	Van Assche in Corten & Klein, pp.216-217
12(2)(b)	Maybe	Van Assche in Corten & Klein, pp.216-217 Aust p. 91
13	Yes	Van Assche in Corten & Klein, p. 257 Hoffmeister in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 195
14	Yes, but its actual content uncertain	Hoffmeister in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 203
15	Yes	Marchi in Corten & Klein, p. 334 Hoffmeister in Dörr & Schmalenbach 2018 pp. 219
16	Yes	Land and Maritime Boundary between Cameroon v Nigeria (Preliminary Objections), [1998], p.275, para. 31 Horchani, in Corten & Klein, p. 337 Hoffmeister in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 231
17	Yes	Hilling, in Corten & Klein, p. 364
18	Yes	Greece v Commission C-203/07 P [2008] ECR I-8161, para 64 Bradley in Hollis, pp. 212-213 Summary of Practice of the Secretary-General as Depository of Multilateral Treaties, prepared by the Treaty Section of the Office of Legal Affairs, UN, 1994, ST/LEG7/Rev.1, p.61, para. 204
19	Yes	European Commission on Human Rights, in Temelstasch case (1983) 5 EHRR 417, p. 432 Reservations to the Convention on Genocide (Advisory Opinion) ICJ Rep 15, p. 24
20	Yes	Müller in Corten & Klein, p. 495
20(4)	No	Walter in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 311
20(5)	No	Aust, p. 128
21(1)	Yes	Muller in Corten & Klein, p. 542
21(2)	Yes	Walter in Dörr & Schmalenbach, pp. 349
21(3)	No	Swaine in Hollis, p. 294

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Article	Customary International Law?	Authority
22	Yes	Corten & Klein 2011, p. 574 Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (Democratic Republic of the Congo v Rwanda), Jurisdiction and Admissibility, (Judgment) [2006] ICJ Rep 6, para 14
22(1)	Yes	Commentary on guideline 2.5.1, Report of the ILC to the General Assembly, 2003, A/58/10, p.199, para. 14 Walter in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 361
22(3)(a)	Yes	Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (New Application: 2002) (Democratic Republic of the Congo v. Rwanda), Jurisdiction and Admissibility, Judgment, ICJ Reports 2006 p.6, para. 41
23	Yes	Pellet and Schabs in Corten & Klein, p. 596
23(1) and (4)	Yes	Commentary on guideline 2.5.1, Report of the ILC to the General Assembly, 2003, A/58/10, p. 199, para. 14 Walter in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 380
23(2) and (3)	Yes	Walter in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 380
24	Yes	Land and Maritime Boundary between Cameroon and Nigeria (Preliminary Objections) [1998] ICJ Rep 275, para. 31 Krieger in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 425
25(1)	Yes	Villiger, p. 357
25(2)	Maybe	Mathy in Corten & Klein, pp.640-641
26	Binding as a general principle of IL	Gabcikovo-Nagymaros Projects Case (Hungary v Slovakia) ICJ Reports 1997 p.7, para. 142 Pulp Mills on the River Uruguay (Argentina v. Uruguay) (Judgment) ICJ Rep 135, para 145 Boustany & Didat in Corten & Klein, p. 705
27	Yes	Certain Questions of Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters (Djibouti v France) (Judgment) [2008] ICJ Rep 177, para. 124 ELSI (United States v Italy) (Judgment) [1989] ICJ Rep 15 Fisheries Case (UK v Norway) [1951] ICJ Rep 116, 132 Questions relating to the Obligation to prosecute or extradite (Belgium v Senegal) (Judgment) [2012] ICJ Rep 423, para 100

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Article	Customary International Law?	Authority
28	Yes	Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Croatia v. Serbia) (Judgment) [2015] ICJ Rep 3, para 95 Case of Janowiec and Others v Russia [2013], ECHR 1003, para 121
29	Likely yes	Karagiannis in Corten & Klein, p. 735 Council v Front Polisario [2013] ECJ C-104/16 P 973, para 95 von der Decken in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 522
30	Uncertain	Aust, p. 228 von der Decken in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 542 Orakhelashvili in Corten & Klein, p. 774
31	Yes	Dispute regarding Navigational and Related Rights (Costa Rica v. Nicaragua) (Judgment) [2009] ICJ Rep 213, para. 47 Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro), (Judgment) [2007] ICJ Rep 43, para. 160 Arbitral Award (Guinea-Bissau v Senegal) [1991] ICJ Rep 53, para 48 Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Advisory Opinion) [2004] ICJ Rep 136, para. 94 Territorial Dispute (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya v Chad) (Judgment) ICJ Rep 83, para. 41 Sovereignty over Pulau Ligitan and Pulau Sipadan (Indonesia/Malaysia) (Judgment) [2002] ICJ Rep 645, para. 37
32	Yes	Same as Article 31 Le Bouthillier in Corten & Klein, p. 846
33	Yes, especially 33(4)	LaGrand (Germany v. United States of America), (Judgment), ICJ Rep 466, para. 101 Dörr in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 63
34	Yes	Harris and Sivakumaran, Cases and Materials on International Law (8th ed, 2015) p. 687 David in Corten & Klein, pp.888-889 Proelss in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 657
35	Yes	Laly-Chevalier in Corten & Klein, p. 903

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Article	Customary International Law?	Authority
		Question of the Delimitation of the Continental Shelf between Nicaragua and Colombia beyond 200 nautical miles from the Nicaraguan Coast (Nicaragua v. Colombia) (Preliminary Objections) [2016] ICJ Rep 100, (Separate opinion of Judge Owada) p. 154, para 34
36(1)	Maybe	D'Argent in Corten & Klein, pp. 930-931 Proelss in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p.732
36(2)	Probably	D'Argent in Corten & Klein, p.944
37	Maybe	Gaja in Corten & Klein, p. 949
38	Maybe	Proelss in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 94
39	Maybe	Sands in Corten & Klein, p. 968 Von der Decken in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 761
40	Yes, but diverging opinions	Summary of Practice of the Secretary-General as Depository of Multilateral Treaties, prepared by the Treaty Section of the Office of Legal Affairs, UN, 1994, ST/LEG7/Rev.1, p.76, para. 252 von der Decken in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 769 Ardault and Dormoy in Corten & Klein, p. 980
41	Likely	Jadhav Case (India v. Pakistan) Provisional Measures, Order of 18 May 2017, [2017] ICJ Rep 231, Declaration of Judge Bhandari p. 5, para 12 Rignaux et al in Corten & Klein, p. 994
42	Yes	Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros (Hungary v Slovakia) [1997] ICJ Rep 92, para. 100 von der Decken in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 794
43	Yes	Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua (Nicaragua v United States) (Merits) [1986] ICJ Rep 14, para 178 Tehran Hostages Case (United States v Iran) [1980] ICJ Rep 3, para 62 von der Decken in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 816
44	Yes	Falkowska in Corten & Klein, p. 1053
45	Yes	Certain Norwegian Loans (France v Norway) Separate Opinion of Judge Lauterpacht [1956] ICJ, pp 56-7 Maritime Delimitation in the Indian Ocean (Somalia v. Kenya) (Judgment) [2017] ICJ Rep 161, para 49
46	Yes	Von der Decken in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 828
47	Yes	Rensmann in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 866 Rensmann in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 878
48	Yes	

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Article	Customary International Law?	Authority
		Phillips Petroleum Co v Iran Case No 39, (1982) 70 ILR 483 Joe Verhoeven, 'Invalidity of Treaties: Anything New in/under the Vienna Conventions' in Enzo Cannizzaro (ed), The Law of Treaties Beyond the Vienna Convention, (Oxford Scholarship Online 2011) pp.302-303
49	No	Rensmann in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 913
50	No	Rensmann in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 921 Cot in Corten & Klein, p. 1173
51	Yes	Distefano in Corten & Klein, p. 1185 Rensmann in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 934 Dubai-Sharjah Border Arbitration (1981) 91 ILR 543, 569
52	Yes	Fisheries Jurisdiction (United Kingdom v. Iceland) (Jurisdiction) ICJ Rep 3, para.24 Genocide Case (Further Requests for the Indication of Provisional Measures) (separate opinion Lauterpacht) [1993] ICJ Rep 407, para 100 Schmalenbach in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 959 Corten in Corten & Klein, p. 1204
53	Yes	Lagerwall in Corten & Klein, p. 1465 Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (Democratic Republic of the Congo v Rwanda) (Separate Opinion of Judge ad hoc Dugard) [2006] ICJ Rep 6, para. 8 Suy in Corten & Klein, p. 1226 Schmalenbach in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 966 Prosecutor v Morris Kallon and Brima Bazzy Kamara, (2004) case no. SCSL-2004-15 AR72 and no. SCSL-2004-16-AR72, paras 61-62
54(a)	Yes	Giegerich in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 1018 Chapaux in Corten & Klein, p. 1238
54(b)	Maybe	Chapaux in Corten & Klein, p. 1240-41
55	No	Chapaux in Corten & Klein, p.1247-48 Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua (Jurisdiction and Admissibility) [1984] ICJ Rep 392, para 60 Giegerich in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 1058

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Article	Customary International Law?	Authority
56(1)(a)	Yes	Giegerich in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 1063
56(2)	Yes but content uncertain	Giegerich in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 1077
57	No	Giegerich in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 1082
58(1)(a)	Yes	Giegerich in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 1084
58(1)(b)	Maybe	Giegerich in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 1084
58(2)	Yes	European Communities-Measures Affecting the Importation of Certain Poultry Products, WT/DS69/R (12 March 1998) (Report of the Panel), para 206
59	Yes	Giegerich in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 1128
60	Yes “in many respects”	Legal Consequences for the States of the Continued Presence of South Africa in Namibia (South West Africa) (Advisory Opinion) ICJ Rep 47, para 95 Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros (Hungary v Slovakia) [1997] ICJ Rep 7, para 99, 109 Simma and Tams in Corten & Klein, pp. 1356-1357
61	Yes “in many respects”	Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros (Hungary v Slovakia) [1997] ICJ Rep 92, p.7, paras. 99 and 102
62	Yes, “in many respects”	Fisheries Jurisdiction (United Kingdom v. Iceland) (Jurisdiction), ICJ Reports 1973 p.3, para. 36 Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros (Hungary v Slovakia) [1997] ICJ Rep 92, para. 46 and 99 Shaw and Fournet in Corten & Klein, p. 1416-19
63	Yes	Giegerich in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 1197 United States Diplomatic and Consular Staff in Tehran (United States of America v Iran) (Merits) [1980] ICJ Rep 3, p.28, para. 54 Angelet in Corten & Klein, p. 1440
64	Yes	Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros (Hungary v Slovakia) [1997] ICJ Rep 92, para 112 Schmalenbach in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 1206-7 Lagerwall in Corten & Klein, p. 1459 and 1465
65	Yes, “generally reflect[s] customary international law”	Fisheries Jurisdiction (United Kingdom v. Iceland) (Jurisdiction) ICJ Rep 3, para 44 Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros (Hungary v Slovakia) [1997] ICJ Rep 92, para 109 Krieger in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 1213 Prost in Corten & Klein, p. 1490 and 1498
66	Mixed views	“[G]enerally reflect[s]” CIL: Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Project (Hungary/Slovakia) [1997] ICJ Rep 7, para 109

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Article	Customary International Law?	Authority
		Not CIL: Armed Activities Case (DRC v Rwanda) (Jurisdiction and Admissibility) [2006] ICJ Rep 6, para 125 Krieger in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 1234
67	Yes, “generally reflect[s] customary international law”	Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Project (Hungary/Slovakia) [1997] ICJ Rep 7, para 109 Tzanakopoulos in Corten & Klein, p. 1548-9
68	Yes, “in many respects”	Legal Consequences for the States of the Continued Presence of South Africa in Namibia (South West Africa) (Advisory Opinion) ICJ Rep 47, para. 94 Tzanakopoulos in Corten & Klein, p. 1565
70	Yes	Appeal Relating to the Jurisdiction of the ICAO Council (India v Pakistan) [1972] ICJ Rep 46, 54, para 16 Wittich in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 1299
71	Unclear	Crépeau, Côté and Rehaag in Corten & Klein, p. 1615 Wittich in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 1317
72	Unclear	Couveur and Espalieu Berdud in Corten & Klein, p. 1628 Wittich in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 1326
73-75	Generally not CIL	Krieger in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 94 Angelet and Clave in Corten & Klein, p. 1678 Tomuschat in Corten & Klein, p. 1689
76 & 77	Yes	Tichy and Bittner in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 1410, 1414, 1416 Caflisch in Corten & Klein, p. 170 Ouguergouz, Villalpando & Morgan-Foster in Corten & Klein 2011, p. 1717
78 & 79	No progressive development	Tichy & Bittner in Dörr & Schmalenbach, p. 1433, 1439 Kolb in Corten & Klein, p. 1779, 1782
80	Yes	Klein in Corten & Klein, p. 1799
81-85	No	Final Provisions

Topic 4

International Law and Australian Law

4.1 Role of International Law in Domestic Law

- Domestic law can be taken as a source of public international law, as evidence of custom and/or the general principles of public international law
- International law may recognise institutions of domestic law that have an important/extensive role in international law (e.g., in the case of *Barcelona Traction (Belgium v Spain)* [1970] ICJ Rep 3, the ICJ recognised that corporations can be recognised within international law)
- States cannot invoke absent/inconsistent domestic law as an excuse for failing to meet their obligations under international law
 - In *Alabama Claims Arbitration (US/Britain)* (1872), it was held that Britain could not “justify itself for a failure in due diligence on the plea of insufficiency of the legal means of action which it possessed”
 - * Here, the US was successful in pursuing compensation for Britain’s failure to perform its obligations as a neutral party during the civil war, by claiming Britain had failed to stop the construction of Confederate ports
 - * Britain claimed that they did not have executive permission to do so
 - * The court held that in matters of international law, the British government cannot justify itself by reference to insufficient or absence of domestic law
 - In *Sandline Arbitration* (1998), Papua New Guinea (PNG) could not rely on internal law to support their plea that an international contract was invalid
 - * This case was a commercial arbitration between PNG and Sandline (which was a mercenary company). The government of PNG entered into a \$36m contract for Sandline to supply mercenaries to assist the PNG defence forces in their fight against the boganville revolutionary army
 - * PNG made a payment of \$18m, but declined to make the second half of the payment, claiming that the agreement had been reached contrary to the PNG constitution (i.e., they didn’t have approval from Parliament for the hiring of external military forces)
 - * The tribunal held that the contract was governed by international law, and applied the principle that a state cannot rely on its own internal laws for the basis that the claim was wrong/illegal

* This case reinforces the principle that a state cannot cite inconsistent/absent domestic law to escape their obligations

- In an Australian Court, public international law, like Australian law, cannot be proved law by expert evidence, following *ACCC v PT Garuda (No 9)* [2013] FCA 323
 - Generally, to refer to the law of another country, expert evidence can be called upon to give context and content of the other country's law
 - This is not the case for international law, as it is treated as being the same as Australian law for the purposes of interpreting it

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission v PT Garuda (No 9) [2013] FCA 323

This case concerned the ACCC's claim that PT Garuda had engaged in price fixing in relation to air cargo services. The ACCC sought to rely on expert evidence to prove the existence of public international law, which the court rejected.

The court held that public international law, like Australian law, cannot be proved by expert evidence. This is because the court is the ultimate arbiter of the law, and so it is the court's responsibility to determine the law, rather than an expert witness.

Perram J at [31]	In truth, opinion evidence is not receivable on an issue of domestic law because the law is not a matter for proof or disproof. It is for this reason, as pointed out in Cross on Evidence at [3075], that a judge is not obliged to accept a proposition of law agreed upon by the parties: cf <i>Damberg v Damberg</i> (2001) 52 NSWLR 492 at [149].
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4.2 Monism and Dualism

- **Monism** refers to the idea that international law and domestic law are part of a single legal system, and that international law is automatically incorporated into domestic law
- Incorporation refers to the notion that international law is automatically a part of domestic law, and there are several variations of this notion:
 - (a) The courts are to apply international law unless it is inconsistent with statute (i.e., apply international law over common law)
 - (b) The courts are to apply international law unless it is inconsistent with statute or common law
- It is relatively rare to find a state that automatically accepts international law; it is much more likely that the process of incorporation will be mediated by the courts
- **Dualism** refers to the notion that there are two independent systems of law; international law has no direct impact upon municipal law, and must be implemented into domestic law through executive order, legislation or judicial decision (i.e., the opposite of monism)
 - If there is an interaction between domestic and international law, it must be governed by either international law or domestic law; they cannot just freely interact

- Transformation refers to the notion that international law must be transformed into domestic law before it can be applied, and has several variations:
 - (a) Only legislation may implement the provisions of international law
 - (b) Legislation or court decisions may implement the provisions of international law

4.3 Customary International Law in Australian Law

- In Australia, the automatic incorporation of customary international law has been rejected
 - There is no clear authority on this, but it can be said to a high degree of confidence that the Courts are not happy with custom becoming an automatic part of Australian common law
- However, custom can influence courts, and be a source of common law, which is known as the soft transformation approach
 - This approach has not been clearly endorsed by the courts (i.e., the notion that custom may be adopted by the courts, and not exclusively left to the parliament to implement)
- This is in contrast to the UK, where they are more open to the incorporation approach with the exception for international crimes
- The case of *Trendex Trading [1977] QB 529*, which was a case involving foreign state immunity, approached this issue
 - This case concerned a contract for the purchase of cement by the Nigerian government; the terms of the contract were governed by English law and gave jurisdiction to the courts of England and Wales
 - The case looked at the extent to which the rules of immunity under international law could apply in English common law
 - The shipments of concrete were clogging up the port of Lagos
 - The Central Bank of Nigeria cancelled these contracts, and Trendex sued the Central Bank of Nigeria under the contract, and the Court found that the bank was separate from the state, and could not claim immunity
 - This case demonstrated that when the rules of international law had changed, the UK courts were justified in applying these new rules
 - Per Lord Denning MR at page 544, “[i]ntl. law does change: and the courts have applied the changes without...any Act of Parliament. In a sense, the doctrine of incorporation admits to the reality of international law”
- Likewise, the recent example of *Law Debenture Trust v Ukraine [2023] UKSC 11* held that it was English, and not international, law which was to be applied to ascertain whether the defence of duress applies to an English contractual dispute
 - The facts of this case relate to a loan made by Russia to Ukraine (who, at the time of writing, remain engaged in armed conflict)

- As part of this conflict, Ukraine stopped paying moneys owed under this loan, and raised various justifications for doing so, under both English contract law and under PIL
 - Ukraine claimed economic and military duress as to being forced into the threat, arguing that they could rely on the doctrine of countermeasures, which allowed for them to take retaliatory measures against Russia in response to Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea
 - The Court held that the relationship between domestic and international law was far more complex than as suggested in *Trendex*
 - The UK Supreme Court adopted PIL as a source of law, so long as it was not inconsistent with English law
 - At [204], the court held that “It seems preferable, therefore, to regard customary international law not as automatically a part of the common law but as a source of the common law on which courts in this jurisdiction may draw as appropriate.”
- The cases of *Chow Hung Ching v R* (1949) 77 CLR 449 and *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)* (1992) 175 CLR 1 provide some insight into the influence of public international law in Australian law
 - Additionally, in *Habib v Commonwealth* (2010) 183 FCR 62, for some claims surrounding fundamental human rights, the common law should reflect universal norms

Chow Hung Ching v R (1949) 77 CLR 449

This was a pivotal case concerning Chinese army labourers who had been convicted of assault in Papua New Guinea (which was then under Australian UN mandate), with the central question being whether they enjoyed immunity as ‘visiting armed forces’. The Chinese government claimed that the labourers were immune from prosecution under international law, as they were part of the Chinese army. The HCA held that no immunity applied as they were in PNG as civilians, not in their capacity as members of the military forces of China. Generally, when foreign armed forces are present in a country, they are protected by a status of forces treaty, which affords them certain types of immunities.

Latham CJ at Page 462	International law is not as such part of the law of Australia (<i>Chung Chi Cheung v. The King</i> , and see <i>Polites v. The Commonwealth</i>), but a universally recognized principle of international law would be applied by our courts: <i>West Rand Central Gold Mining Co. v. The King</i> .
Dixon J at Page 477	The theory of Blackstone (automatic incorporation) is ‘regarded as without foundation’ and the ‘true view’ is that of Brierly ‘that international law is not part, but is one of the sources’ of Australian law. The immunity of foreign armed forces held to be part of the common law.

hline Starke J at Page 471	The Courts acknowledge the existence of a body of rules which nations accept amongst themselves. On any judicial issue they seek to ascertain what the relevant rule is, and, having found it, they will treat it as incorporated into the domestic law, so far as it is not inconsistent with rules enacted by statutes or finally declared by their tribunals.” What then are the immunities of arms and military forces of other nations accepted by our courts? It is by no means easy to answer that question, for in modern times those immunities are settled by conventions between the nations
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This case held that the common law can be developed by regard to customary international law where it is not inconsistent with domestic law (i.e., it opens up potential for development, but does not automatically give it status). Here, there was no relevant treaty, and so the issue was of common law and of customary international law

Mabo v Queensland (No 2) (1992) 175 CLR 1

This was a landmark case that recognised the native title of Indigenous Australians to the lands of Australia. Additionally, it provides some insight into the influence of public international law. In it, the High Court rejects the automatic inclusion of international law in the Australian legal system, but holds that it is still a good influence. This is particularly the case when referring to aspects of international law that touch on universal human values (e.g., areas like international human rights law may be more amenable to being relevant in terms of incorporating international law).

Brennan J at Page 42	“The common law does not necessarily conform with international law, but international law is a legitimate and important influence on the development of the common law, especially when international law declares the existence of universal human values.”
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Habib v Commonwealth (2010) 183 FCR 62

This case was a civil claim for torture committed overseas. Habib was an Australian citizen, and was accused of being involved in various terrorist offences for which he was never proven to have committed. He was kept in detention overseas; moreover, the Australian authorities knew he was being detained and was being seriously mistreated. He brought a civil claim for tort against the Australian government seeking damages for what he alleged was torture. Ordinary, this is a type of case that is hard to win in an Australian Court as they will not decide on matters that happened by other governments in their country. However, Black CJ of the federal court held that the foreign act of state doctrine must yield when we are looking at a case involving torture (which is one of the most serious international crimes) - i.e., the doctrine could be modified to take note of the international prohibition of torture. The overarching principle of this case is that in a civil claim for torture (or any serious crime forbidden under international norms), the common law of state doctrine should reflect universal norms.

Black CJ at [7]	I agree with Jagot J that the common law has evolved such that the authorities do not support the application of the act of state doctrine in the present case. If, however, the choice were finely balanced, the same conclusion should be reached. When the common law, in its development, confronts a choice properly open to it, the path chosen should not be in disconformity with moral choices made on behalf of the people by the Parliament reflecting and seeking to enforce universally accepted aspirations about the behaviour of people one to another.
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4.3.1 Criminal Law and Customary International Law

- The courts have held that customary/international criminal law established by custom can **never** be part of the Australian common law, following *Nulyarimanna v Thompson* (1999) 165 ALR 621, and *R v Jones* [2006] 1 All ER 741

1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide Article 2

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Nulyarimanna v Thompson (1999) 165 ALR 621

This case questioned whether genocide was an offence under criminal law (this case was decided before Australia became a party to the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and implemented the Statute in legislation). At the time, Australia was a party to the genocide convention, but it was yet to implement the crime of genocide as a matter of legislation.

A number of indigenous people had argued that the Commonwealth had committed genocide against their people (by extinguishing their native title, and failing to apply for UNESCO for their lands). They alleged that Commonwealth ministers and certain others had committed genocide by:

- (a) Adopting laws and policies that extinguished native title; and
- (b) Not applying for World Heritage listing of certain Indigenous lands

The Court held that genocide was not part of Australian common law, and so it never

decided. Wilcox J and Whitlam J held that a *jus cogens* prohibition of genocide was not automatically part of Australian common law, and that criminal offences must be created by statute, not by the courts. Moreover, it is for Australian parliaments to create criminal law, not for the common law to decide criminal law. Wilcox J held that if custom could create common law crime, 'it would lead to the curious result that an international obligation incurred pursuant to customary law has greater domestic consequences than an obligation incurred, expressly and voluntarily, by Australia signing and ratifying an international convention'. It is a point of the treaty process in Australia that mere ratification isn't sufficient to make it law; it must be placed into legislation by parliament. Merkel J (dissenting) held that the offence of genocide is an offence under Australian common law, and that the Australian approach is the 'common law adoption approach'; a rule of international law is to be adopted by a court so long as it is not inconsistent with legislation or public policy.

Wilcox J held that if domestic criminal law could be influenced by customary/international criminal law, it would lead to the position where international obligations have greater obligations than domestic consequences, sidelining domestic law and thus a state's independence to make its own criminal laws.

Wilcox J at [20]	If this were the position, it would lead to the curious result that an international obligation incurred pursuant to customary law has greater domestic consequences than an obligation incurred, expressly and voluntarily, by Australia signing and ratifying an international convention.
McHugh J at [66]	"This Court has never accepted that the Constitution contains an implication ... that it should be interpreted to conform with the rules of international law ... If the rule were applicable to a Constitution, it would operate as a restraint on the grants of power conferred".

R v Jones [2006] 2 All ER 741

In 2003, Margaret Jones and others broke into a RAF base, and caused damage to fuel tankers and bomb trailers at the beginning of the second Iraq war. They were subsequently charged with conspiracy to cause criminal damage contrary to the UK's *Criminal Law Act 1967*. The defendant sought to rely on the legal justification that she had acted to impede the commission of the customary international law crime of aggression by the UK and the US (i.e., they should not be culpable because they broke the law to prevent the worse crime of aggression).

The House of Lords held that whilst the crime of aggression was part of customary international law, it was not a crime under English law in the absence of any specific statutory authority saying otherwise - no such authority existed. Lord Bingham held that automatic incorporation of common law crimes would unjustifiably usurp the legislature. Likewise, Lord Mance held that 'even crimes under public international law can no longer be, if they ever were, the subject of any automatic reception or recognition in domestic

law by the courts'. Moreover, Lord Hoffman held that new domestic offences 'should not creep into existence as a result of an international consensus to which only the executive of this country is a party', emphasising the concerns surrounding the separation of powers.

4.4 Treaties in Australian Law

- The power to enter into treaties is an exclusively Executive prerogative power under s 61 of the Constitution
 - This power was inherited from the UK Imperial government, who initially negotiated and entered into treaties on Australia's behalf
 - From 1926, Australia began to enter into treaties on its own behalf
- "The federal executive, though the Crown's representative, possessed exclusive and unfettered treaty-making power" - *Koowarta v Bjelke-Petersen* (1982) 153 CLR 168 at [215], per Stephen J

Constitution s 61

The executive power of the Commonwealth is vested in the Queen and is exercisable by the Governor-General as the Queen's representative, and extends to the execution and maintenance of this Constitution, and of the laws of the Commonwealth.

- The power to implement treaties is a legislative power, and is vested in the Parliament under s 51(xxix) of the Constitution ("The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to: ... external affairs")
- The provisions of a treaty do not form part of Australian law, unless they have been implemented by statute, which was determined in *Dietrich v R* [1992] HCA 57
- The same principle applies to implementing the resolutions of international organisations (such as those of the United Nations' Security Council), following *Bradley v Commonwealth* (1973) 128 CLR 557
- This approach arises as a result of the separation of powers doctrine (treaty-making is for the Executive, law-making is for the Parliament); there are limited exceptions for peace treaties and maritime boundary agreements, although these have never been tested

Dietrich v R [1992] HCA 57

In this case, the accused made an argument that he was entitled to publicly-funded legal representation in a criminal case under art 14 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (of which Australia was a party). The High Court held that this was not the case, as the ratification of the covenant as an executive act did not have any effect on Australian law, since its provisions had not been legislated and therefore implemented by the Parliament, following Brennan CJ, and Mason and McHugh JJ. **The Court held that the provisions of a treaty do not form part of Australian law unless they have been**

implemented by statute.

Bradley v Commonwealth (1973) 128 CLR 557

In this case, the executive was concerned about the activities of a place in Crows Nest known as the Rhodesian Information Centre, which was an agent of the illegal Southern Rhodesian regime. The UN Security Council passed a binding resolution on all members, requiring them not to recognise the illegal Rhodesian regime, and to take action against them in their own jurisdictions. In line with this, the Australian government shut down all communications to this centre, but as the resolution had not been implemented in Australian law, it was found that the government did not have any legislative authority to do what it had done.

Barwick CJ and Gibbs J at Page 582	Two matters were suggested as justifying an exercise of discretion in the defendants' favour. First, reliance was placed upon the resolutions of the Security Council to which reference has already been made. These resolutions are, in their terms, addressed to Member States who, by Art. 25 of the Charter, have agreed "to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council in accordance with the present Charter". However, resolutions of the Security Council neither form part of the law of the Commonwealth nor by their own force confer any power on the Executive Government of the Commonwealth which it would not otherwise possess. The Parliament has passed the Charter of the United Nations Act 1945 (Cth), s 3 of which provides that "The Charter of the United Nations (a copy of which is set out in the Schedule to this Act) is approved". That provision does not make the Charter itself binding on individuals within Australia as part of the law of the Commonwealth.
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4.5 Treaty Making Process

- Australia can enter into two different types of treaties:
 - Bilateral treaties, which enter into force for Australia after
 1. Signature
 2. Subsequent exchange of notes stating that the constitutional process is completed
 - Multilateral treaties, which enter into force for Australia after
 1. Signature
 2. Subsequent ratification (or accession if there was no previous signature)
 - This process for multilateral treaties allows for the Commonwealth to implement any legislation to allow for the treaty's provisions to be enlivened in domestic law (i.e., sign → prepare domestic law for the treaty's provisions → ratify)
- There is no constitutional requirement for the Parliament to be involved in the treaty-making process
 - However, only Parliament can pass legislation to implement treaties

- The Commonwealth can enter into any treaty that it wishes to, but it cannot implement the treaty without the Parliament's approval
- As a matter of policy, since 1996 Parliament has been consulted on the treaty-making process
 - However, they are not given a veto, but rather are provided a capacity to provide input into this process
 - This was the result of the 1995 report of the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee ('Trick or Treaty?')
 - It is now 'required' that all proposed treaty actions are tabled in Parliament at least 15 sitting days prior to any binding action being undertaken (with exemptions for urgent or sensitive treaties)
- To implement a treaty, a National Interest Analysis (NIA) must be prepared, which is akin to an explanatory memorandum for a treaty, and outlines why Australia has entered into a treaty
- The treaty should also be reviewed by the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties (JSCOT), which is a parliamentary committee that reviews Australia's participation in treaties

4.6 Implementing Treaties

4.6.1 Constitutional Considerations

- The constitution enables the executive to enter into treaties as part of the 'external affairs' provision in s 51(xxix) of the *Constitution*
 - This provision governs the relations between Australia and other countries/international organisations, matters external to Australia, and the implementation of international law (including custom, treaties, international recommendations, etc.)
- The Commonwealth parliament does not have plenary power to legislate on whatever it wants to, but only to legislate with respect to matters conferred on it by the *Constitution* (s 51)
- The external affairs power will support legislation applicable to matters geographically external to Australia (*Horta v Commonwealth* (1994) 181 CLR 183)

Horta v Commonwealth (1994) 181 CLR 183

In 1995, Indonesia invaded East Timor, and remained in occupation of it until the early 2000s; this occupation was held to be unlawful as a matter of PIL. However, this did not stop Australia from accepting Indonesia sovereignty over East Timor, and subsequently, Australia concluded a treaty with Indonesia which allowed for them to access oil in the Timor Gap. The plaintiff argued that the law implementing the 1989 Timor Gap Treaty was invalid as the treaty itself was void (by virtue of recognising Indonesia's unlawful occupation of East Timor). The High Court said that they do not have to address that issue, as there is an element of the external affairs power that says that they have to only

look at whether the law applies geographically externally to Australia; the law applied to the Timor sea, which was valid. Moreover, even if the treaty was void as a matter of PIL, that didn't undermine or impugn the character of this law as one with respect to external affairs.

Per Curiam, 'the area of the Timor Gap and the exploration...and exploitation of, petroleum resources ... [are] matters ... geographically external to Australia. There is an obvious and substantial nexus between each of them and Australia' '[E]ven if the Treaty were void or unlawful under international law ... the [impugned Acts] would not thereby be deprived of their character as laws with respect to "External Affairs"'. Moreover, this case leaves unresolved the question as to whether the executive can enter into treaties that are unlawful; the HCA did not deal with it as they held that it was still lawful in a way.

- It has been reinforced that the external affairs power will support legislation that implements treaties in Australian law

***Koowarta v Bjelke-Petersen* (1982) 153 CLR 168**

The Aboriginal Land Fund Commission had entered into a contract to purchase a pastoral lease in Queensland. The Queensland government refused to consent to the transfer as the purchaser was Aboriginal. The Commission sued under the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth), and the Queensland government challenged the validity of the legislation. The Court found that the Act was valid as it implements the *1969 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)*. Mason J held that a law implementing custom would be a law with respect to external affairs, indeed 'any matter which has 'become the topic of international debate, discussion and negotiation constitutes an external affair before Australia enters a treaty relating to it'.

***Commonwealth v Tasmania* (1983) 158 CLR 1**

This case concerned the validity of the *World Heritage Conservation Act 1983* (Cth), which implemented the *1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*. The majority of the Court held that most of the legislation was valid in respect to external affairs and the external affairs power; Tasmania had challenged the validity of the legislation. The majority additionally held that the Commonwealth can legislate to implement a treaty, but that power is not unlimited.

Deane J held that the law under s 51(xxix) of the *Constitution* must carry into effect treaty obligations, and be reasonably considered to be appropriate and adapted to achieving this objective (i.e., reasonable proportionality between the designated object and the means for achieving it). That is, the legislation must bear some relation to the treaty, and must be reasonably appropriate and adapted to achieving the objective of the treaty.

4.6.2 Legislative Concerns

- Australia will generally not ratify a treaty until the legislation to domestically implement the provisions of the treaty is in place

- Legislation will be needed to implement a treaty if the treaty creates rights for or imposes obligations upon individuals; however, it will not be very detailed as often there is existing legislation or common law at the state or federal levels that allows Australia to comply with the terms of the treaties
- Existing legislation can often be used to make the necessary regulations to implement international provisions
 - For example, the *Charter of the United Nations Act 1945* (Cth) was used to implement UNSC resolutions dealing with sanctions and the listing of terrorist organisations and the subsequent freezing of assets; generally, this legislation is used to implement UNSC regulations (i.e., it is delegation legislation)
- Legislation may ‘give a treaty the force of law’
 - This generally occurs where the treaty has been drafted with domestic incorporation in mind (e.g., the *Diplomatic Privileges and Immunities Act 1967* (Cth) s 7, which holds that the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations is to have force of law)
- Generally, there is the translation of treaty provisions into domestic legislation
 - This is the most common practice
 - It avoids uncertainty by directly translating the terms of the treaty into Australian law
 - It may refer to terms of a treaty (e.g., *Migration Act 1958* (Cth) s 4 refers to the definition of a ‘refugee’)
- If legislation ‘approves’ a treaty, it is not binding
 - This merely notes that the terms of the treaty are acceptable to Australia, but does not implement them (i.e., it is not sufficient to be binding)
 - The mere approval of Parliament does not give a treaty the force of law, as discussed in *Bradley v Commonwealth* (1973) 128 CLR 557 (which discussed the *Charter of the UN Act 1945* (Cth))
 - The practice of approving the provisions of treaties has since lapsed

4.7 Statutory Interpretation and International Law

- There are several scenarios where international law can be used to interpret domestic law
- International law can be used as extrinsic material when interpreting legislation which refers to a treaty, following the *Acts Interpretation Act 1901* (Cth) ss 15AB(1) and (2)(d)
- International law can be used to interpret a legislative provision that incorporates a treaty provision (here, the rules of treaty interpretation (i.e., the VCLT) are applied, rather than the rules of statutory interpretation)
- If its language permits, a legislative provision is interpreted to avoid placing Australia in breach of its international obligations, following the Polites principle

Acts Interpretation Act 1901 (Cth) s 15AB(1)-(2)

- (1) Subject to subsection (3), in the interpretation of a provision of an Act, if any material not forming part of the Act is capable of assisting in the ascertainment of the meaning of the provision, consideration may be given to that material:
 - (a) to confirm that the meaning of the provision is the ordinary meaning conveyed by the text of the provision taking into account its context in the Act and the purpose or object underlying the Act; or
 - (b) to determine the meaning of the provision when:
 - (i) the provision is ambiguous or obscure; or
 - (ii) the ordinary meaning conveyed by the text of the provision taking into account its context in the Act and the purpose or object underlying the Act leads to a result that is manifestly absurd or is unreasonable.
- (2) Without limiting the generality of subsection (1), the material that may be considered in accordance with that subsection in the interpretation of a provision of an Act includes:
 - (a) all matters not forming part of the Act that are set out in the document containing the text of the Act as printed by the Government Printer;
 - (b) any relevant report of a Royal Commission, Law Reform Commission, committee of inquiry or other similar body that was laid before either House of the Parliament before the time when the provision was enacted;
 - (c) any relevant report of a committee of the Parliament or of either House of the Parliament that was made to the Parliament or that House of the Parliament before the time when the provision was enacted;
 - (d) any treaty or other international agreement that is referred to in the Act;
 - (e) any explanatory memorandum relating to the Bill containing the provision, or any other relevant document, that was laid before, or furnished to the members of, either House of the Parliament by a Minister before the time when the provision was enacted;
 - (f) the speech made to a House of the Parliament by a Minister on the occasion of the moving by that Minister of a motion that the Bill containing the provision be read a second time in that House;
 - (g) any document (whether or not a document to which a preceding paragraph applies) that is declared by the Act to be a relevant document for the purposes of this section; and
 - (h) any relevant material in the Journals of the Senate, in the Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives or in any official record of debates in the Parliament or either House of the Parliament.

4.7.1 Polites Principle

- The Polites principle refers to the presumption that Parliament intends to give effect to Australia's obligations under international law (following *Polites v Commonwealth* (1945) 70

CLR 60)

***Polites v Commonwealth* (1945) 70 CLR 60**

In this case, Mr Polites (a Greek national), was given notice under regulations requiring him to serve in the Australian Defence Force (i.e., a situation where a foreign national was being conscripted, which is explicitly prohibited by international law). This case resulted in the High Court reviewing the legislation, and held that the legislation was valid. This was despite an established rule of international law that aliens may not be required to serve in armed forces.

Latham CJ stated, at page 69 of the judgement, that “It must be held that legislation otherwise within the power of the Commonwealth Parliament does not become invalid because it conflicts with a rule of international law, though every effort should be made to construe Commonwealth statutes so as to avoid breaches of international law and of international comity.” From this, it is the case that the Commonwealth parliament can still pass legislation that is inconsistent with public international law, but every effort should be made to avoid this where possible.

Dixon J at Page 77	It is a rule of construction that, unless a contrary intention appear, general words occurring in a statute are to be read subject to the established rules of international law and not as intended to apply to persons or subjects which, according to those rules, a national law of the kind in question ought not to include.
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- The Polites principle does not apply for constitutional interpretation, following *Al-Kateb v Godwin* (2004) 208 ALR 124, as it would violate s 128 of the Constitution otherwise
 - s 128 of the Constitution requires a referendum to amend the constitution; to allow the constitution to be modified under the Polites principle would violate this requirement

***Al-Kateb v Godwin* (2004) 219 CLR 562**

This case concerned whether a stateless Palestinian man could be subject to indefinite detention as a result of a lack of a state to which he could be deported to. Whilst this case has been overturned, the discussion between Kirby J and McHugh J is still relevant, especially in the context of the Polites principle.

Kirby J at [175]	Whatever may have been possible in the world of 1945, the complete isolation of constitutional law from the dynamic impact of international law is neither possible nor desirable today. That is why national courts, and especially national constitutional courts such as this, have a duty, so far as possible, to interpret their constitutional texts in a way that is generally harmonious with the basic principles of international law, including as that law states human rights and fundamental freedoms.
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McHugh J at [66]	“This Court has never accepted that the Constitution contains an implication ... that it should be interpreted to conform with the rules of international law ... If the rule were applicable to a Constitution, it would operate as a restraint on the grants of power conferred”.
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- McHugh J’s position reflected that of the majority of the HCA
- The majority held that the constitution is fundamentally different from statute, and so it is not to be interpreted in a way to conform to the rules of public international law, as to do so would violate the independence of the constitution under s 128

Australian Constitution s 128

This Constitution shall not be altered except in the following manner:

The proposed law for the alteration thereof must be passed by an absolute majority of each House of the Parliament, and not less than two nor more than six months after its passage through both Houses the proposed law shall be submitted in each State and Territory to the electors qualified to vote for the election of members of the House of Representatives.

But if either House passes any such proposed law by an absolute majority, and the other House rejects or fails to pass it, or passes it with any amendment to which the first-mentioned House will not agree, and if after an interval of three months the first-mentioned House in the same or the next session again passes the proposed law by an absolute majority with or without any amendment which has been made or agreed to by the other House, and such other House rejects or fails to pass it or passes it with any amendment to which the first-mentioned House will not agree, the Governor-General may submit the proposed law as last proposed by the first-mentioned House, and either with or without any amendments subsequently agreed to by both Houses, to the electors in each State and Territory qualified to vote for the election of the House of Representatives.

When a proposed law is submitted to the electors the vote shall be taken in such manner as the Parliament prescribes. But until the qualification of electors of members of the House of Representatives becomes uniform throughout the Commonwealth, only one-half the electors voting for and against the proposed law shall be counted in any State in which adult suffrage prevails.

And if in a majority of the States a majority of the electors voting approve the proposed law, and if a majority of all the electors voting also approve the proposed law, it shall be presented to the Governor-General for the Queen’s assent.

No alteration diminishing the proportionate representation of any State in either House of the Parliament, or the minimum number of representatives of a State in the House of Representatives, or increasing, diminishing, or otherwise altering the limits of the State, or in any manner affecting the provisions of the Constitution in relation thereto, shall become law unless the majority of the electors voting in that State approve the proposed

law.

In this section, Territory means any territory referred to in section one hundred and twenty-two of this Constitution in respect of which there is in force a law allowing its representation in the House of Representatives.

Appendix A

Scaffolds

How to Answer a Problem Question

1. Read the question
 - (a) Read the question in one go (no notes, no highlighter, just a straight reading)
 - (b) Read the question again, making notes of the potential issues in the margins and why specific words/provisions are being used
 - (c) Read the question a third time to ensure nothing has been missed, and whether any issues interact with each other
 2. Identify how the question will be answered (generally in sequential order)
 3. Make sure to cover IRAC:
 - (a) Issue
 - (b) Rule
 - (c) Analysis
 - (d) Conclusion
 4. Unless the question is direct, use vague terminology and argue both sides (e.g., 'it appears', 'it might be the case that', etc.)
 5. It is good to refute arguments where possible and then point to a secondary argument, as this shows depth
 6. Remember to use subheadings to distinguish issues!
- Remember to look at obligations both under a treaty and under general international law!

A.1 Development, Nature and Scope of Public International Law

A.2 Sources of Public International Law

1. Is the document a source of public international law?

- (a) The ICJ is the principal judicial organ of the UN
 - (b) Under Art 38(1) of the *1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties* (Page 2), the sources of public international law are:
 - i. Treaties
 - ii. Custom
 - iii. General principles of law
 - iv. Judicial decisions and the teachings of publicists
 - (c) Art 38(1) is 'generally regarded as a complete statement of the sources of international law' – *Ure v Commonwealth* (2016) 329 ALR 452 at [15] (Perram, Robertson and Moshinsky JJ) (Page 3)
 - (d) Did the state consent to be bound to the jurisdiction of the ICJ/to the terms of the source?
2. Was the source a treaty?
- (a) Under Art 38(1)(a) of the *ICJ Statute*, treaties are a source of international law
 - (b) Was the document a bilateral and/or multilateral convention between two or more states?
 - (c) See Topic 3 scaffolds (A.3 on Page 65) for a detailed analysis
 - (d) Note that if there are a number of instances of states contravening a treaty, it is not necessary for the states to provide consistently correct conduct and that some variations in practice are acceptable, and they do not form a new rule – *Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua* [1986] ICJ Rep 14 [186]
3. Was there international custom involved?
- (a) Under Art 38(1)(b) of the *ICJ Statute*, custom is a source of international law, and requires two elements: – *North Sea Continental Shelf Cases (Germany v Denmark; Germany v Netherlands)* [1969] ICJ Rep 3 (Page 5)
 - i. State practice - objective evidence that the custom is practiced widely
 - ii. *Opinio juris* - the belief that the practice is legally required
 - (b) Unless they are persistent objectors, all states are bound to customary international law
 - (c) Certain customary norms are *jus cogens*, which are peremptory norms from which no derogation is permitted
 - (d) Was there state practice?
 - i. State practice can be evidenced by materials that demonstrate the activities and views of states and state officials
 - ii. State practice can generate custom if the following requirements are met: – *North Sea Continental Shelf Cases* (1969) ICJ Rep 3
 - A. The practice was consistent over time (but not necessarily entirely uniform) – *Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua* [1986] ICJ Rep 14 (Page 5)
 - B. The practice was widespread

- C. The practice was representative of multiple states (especially those who are most likely affected by it)
 - D. The practice was developed over a lengthy period of time (this is not a steadfast requirement; customary norms may still emerge rapidly if there is an overwhelming practice of it)
 - iii. State practice can be shown through government legal opinions, treaty provisions and conduct in connection with resolutions that the country makes – UN *Draft conclusions on identification of customary international law* Conclusion 10(2)
 - iv. Under Conclusion 10(3), failure to react over time to a practice may serve as evidence of acceptance provided that the State was in a position to react and the circumstances called for some reaction
 - (e) Was there *opinio juris*?
 - i. *Opinio juris* refers to the belief that the practice is legally required
 - ii. *Opinio juris* is hard to show, and generally can be shown through statements made by countries (*North Sea Continental Shelf Cases (Germany v Denmark; Germany v Netherlands)* [1969] ICJ Rep 3 at [77]), although it can also be shown through an omission of a state, which evinces a belief that the said State is obligated by law to refrain from acting in a particular way (*The Lotus Case (France v Turkey)* (1927) PCIJ Series A No 10 at page 28)
 - iii. If there is extensive state practice, then *opinio juris* tends to be less important, and vice-versa
 - (f) It is possible for treaty norms to become custom, and for treaty provisions to become customary international law – *North Sea Continental Shelf Cases* (1969) ICJ Rep 3 at [72]
 - i. However, the custom exists independently of the treaty – *Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua* [1986] ICJ Rep 14 at [25]-[30] and [40]
4. Was there regional custom involved?
- (a) The ICJ has recognised that it is possible for regional custom to exist, but invoking it requires a higher standard than general international custom – *Asylum Case (Colombia v Peru)* [1950] ICJ Rep 226
 - Regional custom must have a higher degree of stability and continuity to apply as international law in that area – *Asylum Case (Colombia v Peru)* [1950] ICJ Rep 226
 - Such an example was made out in the English Court of Appeal in *R (app. Al-Saadoon v Sec. of Defence)* [2010] 1 All ER 271, where rules of regional custom were found to exist, but had not met the high threshold to be invoked (Page 8)
5. If there was custom involved, was the party a persistent objector?
- (a) The doctrine of a persistent objector is fairly narrow, and enunciates that states which consistently object to the emergence of a rule from its earliest point of gestation will not be bound by it – *Anglo Norwegian Fisheries Case (UK v Norway)* [1951] ICJ Rep 116

- (b) A state cannot be a persistent objector to a *jus cogens* principle – *International Law Commission 2019 Report Chapter V Conclusion 14* (Page 8)

6. Was the source a general principle of international law?

- (a) Under Art 38(1)(c) of the *ICJ Statute*, general principles of law recognised by civilised nations form a source of PIL, with the objective of avoiding the *non liquet* (the situation where ‘it is not clear’ by enabling the ICJ to look at different legal systems for inspiration)
- (b) General principles of international law and municipal law are included in this provision
- (c) General principles of law may be implicitly adopted in judicial decisions to enable a conclusion to be made – *Bay of Bengal (Bangladesh/Myanmar)* [2012] ILTOS 12
- (d) For example, various domestic legal systems were examined in relation to the issue of estoppel to aid the Tribunal in its decision – *Chagos Marine Protected Area Arbitration (Mauritius v United Kingdom)* (2015) XXXI RIAA 359

7. Was there a judicial decision and/or the teachings of a publicist?

- (a) Whilst Art 38(1)(d) of the *ICJ Statute* enables judicial decisions and the work of publicists to be considered as sources of PIL, they are subsidiary means for the determinations of the rules of law, and are treated as having lesser significance than other sources
- (b) Decisions taken by the ICJ do not constitute binding precedent in future decisions, but remain merely persuasive – *Statute of the International Court of Justice Art 59*
 - i. These sources are “resorted to by judicial tribunals not for the speculations of their authors concerning what the law ought to be, but for trustworthy evidence of what the law really is” – *The Paquete Habana* 175 US 677 (1900)
- (c) Was this a UN General Assembly Resolution?
 - i. The UN General Assembly (UNGA) is the plenary body of the UN, and as all UN members have a seat, it has become a great forum for state practice and *opinio juris*
 - ii. Decisions of the UNGA are not binding, except in the key areas of (without these areas, the UN could not function):
 - A. Admission of member states
 - B. Suspension of member states
 - C. Matters related to the UN budget
 - iii. Resolutions of the UNGA can provide evidence for state practice
 - iv. UNGA resolutions can influence international law in three key ways
 - A. Interpreting the *Charter of the United Nations*
 - B. Affirming recognised customary norms (through passing a resolution)
 - C. Influencing the creation of new customary norms
 - v. UNGA resolutions, whilst normally not binding, may have normative value, and can provide “evidence important for the establishing the existence of a rule or the emergence of a *opinio juris*” – *Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons* [1996] ICJ Rep 254 at [70] - [73] (Page 13); such evidence can include:

- A. The voting records of the UNGA
- B. Transcripts of what was said on the floor of the UNGA
- C. Margins of the votes undertaken in the UNGA
- (d) Was this a UN Security Council Resolution?
 - i. The UN Security Council (UNSC) has limited law-making capacity, but can adopt certain binding resolutions
 - ii. UNSC resolutions are binding only on the members of the UN – *Charter of the United Nations Art 25* (Page 14)

8. Was there a measure of soft law involved?

- Soft law refers to rules that are binding but vague, and/or ‘rules’ that are clear but are not binding
- They can articulate standards/norms that will, over time, become binding, and can also be used to interpret other sources of international law

A.3 The Law of Treaties

1. Was there a treaty involved?

- (a) “Treaty” means an international agreement concluded between States in written form and governed by international law, whether embodied in a single instrument or in two or more related instruments and whatever its particular designation – *VCLT Art 2(1)(a)* (Page 16)
- (b) It has been accepted that a treaty may be written across multiple documents – *Maritime Delimitation and Territorial Questions (Qatar v Bahrain)* (1994) ICJ Rep 112 at [23] (Page 18)
- (c) A unilateral declaration can be considered to have binding effect – *Nuclear Test Cases (Australia v France)* (1974) ICJ Rep 253 at [43]
 - i. “An undertaking ... if given publicly with an intent to be bound, even though not made within the context of international negotiations, is binding”
 - ii. This case outlines four key characteristics for a unilateral declaration to be binding:
 - A. The undertaking is made publicly with an intention to be bound
 - B. It must be clear and specific
 - C. It can be oral or written
 - D. It must be made by someone who is authorised by the state to make a binding conclusion

2. Does the *1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (VCLT)* apply?

- (a) Was the treaty between two or more states? – *VCLT Art 3* (Page 17)
 - i. Under Article 3, the VCLT does not influence agreements between states and other subjects or between other subjects of international law
- (b) Was the treaty in writing? – *VCLT Art 3* (Page 17)

- i. The VCLT applies to written treaties only, but as many of its provisions are now customary law, those provisions may still apply to non-written treaties (see Table 3.4 on Page 36)
 - (c) Had the treaty commenced after 1980 (when the *VCLT* entered into force)?
 - As the *VCLT* entered into force in 1980, it only applies to treaties concluded after 1980, but many of its provisions can apply to treaties concluded before 1980 as provisions of general international law (see Table 3.4 on Page 36)
3. Was the treaty registered with the United Nations?
 - A treaty must be registered with the UN in order to be used as a binding instrument in proceedings before the UN – *Charter of the United Nations Art 102*; *VCLT Art 80* (Page 21)
 - This is not a requirement for a treaty to be binding in general, but is a requirement for the treaty to be recognised before the UN
4. Was the treaty signed by an appropriate authority/representative?
 - (a) Was the party entering into the treaty a state, an international organisation or an international entity with capacity to enter into the treaty?
 - i. Every state possesses capacity to conclude treaties – *VCLT Art 6* (Page 19)
 - (b) Has the individual representing the party produced full powers evincing their authority to enter into the treaty? – *VCLT Art 7(1)(a)* (Page 16)
 - i. “Full powers” refers to a document emanating from the competent authority of a State designating a person or persons to represent the State for negotiating, adopting or authenticating the text of a treaty, for expressing the consent of the State to be bound by a treaty, or for accomplishing any other act with respect to a treaty – *VCLT Art 2(1)(d)* (Page 16)
 - ii. Heads of State, Heads of Government and Ministers of Foreign Affairs are taken to have the capacity to conclude treaties without producing full powers – *VCLT Art 7(2)(a)* (Page 16)
 - iii. Heads of diplomatic missions will likewise not need to produce full powers if they are accredited to adopt treaties in that area – *VCLT Art 7(2)(b)* (Page 16)
 - iv. A representative of a state will not need to produce full powers if they have been sent to a conference/organisation with the purpose of adopting the text of a treaty at that conference/organisation – *VCLT Art 7(2)(c)* (Page 16)
 - (c) If the individual has not produced full powers, is it evident from the practice of the States concerned or from other circumstances that the person is representing the State? – *VCLT Art 7(1)(b)* (Page 16)
5. Did the state enter into the treaty?
 - (a) Signing is a two step process, entailing signature, and either ratification or accession
 - (b) Upon **signing** a treaty, the state expresses a willingness to continue the treaty-making process, and agrees with the treaty in principle
 - i. However, the state is not bound by the treaty at this point

- (c) If the treaty is a new one, was it **ratified** by the party?
 - i. Upon ratification, the party indicates that it has consented to be bound by the treaty once it enters into force
 - (d) If the treaty is an existing one, was it **accessioned** by the party?
 - i. This only applies if a state is becoming party to a treaty that is already negotiated and signed by other states
 - ii. This has the same legal effect as ratification
6. Was the treaty in force at the time of contention?
- (a) A treaty enters into force in accordance with the relevant provisions in the treaty – [VCLT Art 24\(1\)](#) (Page 20)
 - (b) If the treaty is silent on this point, it will enter into force when all parties have consented to being bound by it – [VCLT Art 24\(2\)](#) (Page 20)
 - (c) If a party signs a treaty after its formation, it will be binding upon that state on the day that consent to being bound is established – [VCLT Art 24\(3\)](#) (Page 20)
7. Does the treaty apply to the present scenario?
- (a) The principle of *pacta sunt servanda* requires that “every treaty in force is binding upon the parties to it, and must be performed by them in good faith” – [VCLT Art 26](#) (Page 22)
 - (b) A party may not invoke the provisions of its internal law as justification for failing to perform its obligations – [VCLT Art 27](#) (Page 22)
 - i. However, they may do so if the other party was aware of that law, and the law was not contrary to the treaty – [VCLT Art 46](#) (Page 30)
 - (c) If the treaty has been signed but not ratified/approved/accepted, a state is obliged to not undermine the spirit of the treaty, and moreover is required to refrain from acts that would defeat the object and purpose of the treaty – [VCLT Art 18\(a\)](#) (Page 22)
 - The same principle also applies where a state has expressed its consent to be bound by the treaty, pending the entry into force of the treaty – [VCLT Art 18\(b\)](#) (Page 22)
 - (d) Treaties do not impose obligations or create rights for third states in the absence of their consent (*pacta tertiis nec nocent nec prosunt*) – [VCLT Art 34](#) (Page 23)
8. Was there any reservation to the treaty?
- (a) Was there a reservation or an interpretive declaration?
 - i. A reservation is a unilateral statement, however phrased or named, made by a State, when signing, ratifying, accepting, approving or acceding to a treaty, whereby it purports to exclude or to modify the legal effect of certain provisions of the treaty in their application to that State – [VCLT Art 2\(1\)\(d\)](#) (Page 16)
 - ii. Interpretive declarations are statements made by a state to clarify its understanding of a treaty; it does not affect the legal effect of a treaty
 - (b) Was the reservation permissible?
 - i. By default, a reservation is permissible, unless: – [VCLT Art 19](#) (Page 23)

- A. The reservation is prohibited by the treaty – *VCLT Art 19(a)* (Page 23)
 - B. The treaty provides that only specified reservations may be made and the reservation in question is not in that list – *VCLT Art 19(b)* (Page 23)
 - C. The reservation is otherwise incompatible with the object and purpose of the treaty – *VCLT Art 19(c)* (Page 23)
- ii. Incompatibility hinges on whether it “affects an essential element of the treaty that is necessary to its general tenor, in such a way that the reservation impairs the *raison d’être* [the most important reason] of the treaty” – *ILC Guide to Practice on Reservations Art 3.1.5*
- iii. If a reservation is impermissible:
Briefly mention both points in discussion, and then note the first point is the predominant view.
 - A. Traditionally, this vitiates the consent of the state to the treaty as a whole and results in the state not being a party to the treaty (this is the predominant view) – *Reservations to Genocide Convention [1951] ICJ Rep 15 at page 18*
 - B. More recently, the offending reservation will be held void, with the state being bound without the protection of the reservation (i.e., it is cut out), unless consent is conditional on reservation, in which case they are not bound to the treaty at all
- (c) Was the reservation accepted or objected to? – *VCLT Art 20* (Page 24)
 - i. If a treaty expressly allows for reservations, then no acceptance of a reservation is required by other parties – *VCLT Art 20(1)* (Page 24)
 - ii. If a treaty has a small number of parties and the application of the treaty in its entirety is an essential condition of signing, acceptance by all parties is required – *VCLT Art 20(2)* (Page 24)
 - iii. If a treaty is a constituent instrument of an international organisation, and unless it otherwise provides, a reservation requires the acceptance of the competent organ of that organisation – *VCLT Art 20(3)* (Page 24)
 - iv. Acceptance by the other contracting state(s) of the reservation results in the reserving state being bound by the treaty (with the reservation incorporated) – *VCLT Art 20(4)(a)* (Page 24)
 - v. Objection to a reservation does not prevent entry into force of a treaty between the objecting state and the reserving state, unless the objecting state says otherwise – *VCLT Art 20(4)(b)* (Page 24)
 - vi. An act indicating consent to being bound by the treaty that contains a reservation is effective as soon as at least one other state has accepted the reservation – *VCLT Art 20(4)(c)* (Page 24)
 - vii. Unless the treaty provides otherwise, a reservation is considered to have been accepted if no objections are raised within 12 months of notification of the reservation, or by the date on which it consented to be bound to the treaty, whichever is the later – *VCLT Art 20(5)* (Page 24)
- (d) What is the legal effect of the reservation?
 - i. If State A accepts State R’s reservation, then the treaty is modified only between States A and R, to the the extent of the reservation – *VCLT Art 21(1) and (2)*

(Page 25); *Republic of India v CCDM Holdings, LLC* [2025] FCAFC 2 at [63] (Page 26)

- A. However, other states will not be bound by this reservation; it acts as a side agreement between State A and State R – *VCLT Art 21(2)* (Page 25)
- ii. If State B objects to State R's reservation, and says the treaty is not to apply, then there is no treaty between them at all – *VCLT Art 20(4)(b)* (Page 24)
- iii. If State C objects to State R's reservation but does not say that the treaty is not to apply, then the treaty applies, but "the provisions to which the reservation applies do not apply ... to the extent of the reservation" – *VCLT Art 21(3)* (Page 25)
- (e) Was the state a persistent objector?
 - i. States which consistently object to the emergence of a rule of custom from its earliest point of gestation will not be bound by it – *Anglo Norwegian Fisheries Case (UK v Norway)* [1951] ICJ Rep 116 (Page 9)
 - ii. A state cannot be a persistent objector to a *jus cogens* principle – *International Law Commission 2019 Report Chapter V Conclusion 14* (Page 8)

9. How was the treaty interpreted by the state?

- (a) There are a number of different approaches to treaty interpretation:
 - i. Formalist/Textual (formal adherence to the terms of the treaty)
 - ii. Restrictive (deference to state sovereignty)
 - iii. Teleological (to give effect to the object and purpose of the treaty)
 - iv. Effectiveness (to ensure the treaty regime remains as effective as possible)
 - v. Originalist (to focus on the original purpose of the treaty)
- (b) The Australian courts will apply the VCLT when interpreting a treaty that has been incorporated into Australian law – *DHI22 v Qatar Airways* [2024] FCA 348 at [30] (Halley J), citing *Povey v Qantas Airways Ltd* (2005) 233 CLR 189 at [24] (Gleeson CJ, Gummow, Hayne and Heydon JJ) (see Section 3.5 on Page 26)
- (c) The VCLT contains rules on how to interpret treaties – *VCLT Art 31* (Page 27)
- (d) Under the VCLT, instruments used in treaty interpretation must have been adopted by all states – *Whaling in the Antarctic Case* [2014] ICJ Rep 226 at [83] (Page 28)
- (e) As a last resort, supplementary means of interpretation can be used to interpret the provisions of a treaty under Art 31 – *VCLT Art 32* (Page 28)

10. Is the treaty void or otherwise invalidated?

- (a) Is the treaty void?
 - i. If the State's representative had been coerced into entering the treaty, or there were acts or threats directed against the representative, a State's consent will not be made out and so the treaty will be void – *VCLT Art 51* (Page 29)
 - ii. If a State's consent was obtained through a threat or the use of force, it is void – *VCLT Art 51* (Page 29)
 - iii. If a treaty conflicts with a *jus cogens* norm, it is void – *VCLT Art 51* (Page 29)

- iv. If a new *jus cogens* norm has emerged since the ratification of a treaty and the treaty conflicts with that *jus cogens* norm, the treaty is void – *VCLT Art 51* (Page 29)
 - (b) Is the treaty invalid?
 - i. Did the state's consent to a treaty involve a violation of an internal law of fundamental importance? – *VCLT Art 46(1)* (Page 30)
 - A. A state may not invoke inconsistent internal law as a basis on which it could not sign a treaty, unless that rule is of manifest importance
 - ii. If a representative of a state had gone beyond what he was authorised to do so in signing the treaty, their omission to observe their limitations will not constitute an invalidation of the treaty, unless the restriction was notified to other states prior to the expression of consent – *VCLT Art 47* (Page 30)
 - (c) Was there an error of fact that formed the essential basis of consent? – *VCLT Art 48* (Page 30)
 - i. Consent may be validated by means of an error if the error relates to a fact or situation assumed by the state that existed at the time when the treaty was concluded, and forms an essential basis of its consent to be bound by the treaty – *VCLT Art 48(1)* (Page 30)
 - ii. An error of fact cannot be plead by a party if they contributed to it, could have avoided it, or were otherwise put on notice of a possible error – *VCLT Art 48(2)* (Page 30); *Temple of Preah Vihear (Cambodia v Thailand)* [1962] ICJ Rep 6 at Page 17
 - iii. If there is an error relating to only the wording of the treaty's text, its validity is not affected, and *Art 79* is enlivened – *VCLT Art 48(3)* (Page 30)
 - (d) Had the state been induced to conclude the treaty by the fraudulent conduct of another state? – *VCLT Art 49* (Page 30)
11. Are there grounds to terminate, withdraw or suspend the treaty?

The following constitute internal grounds of termination, withdrawal or suspension.

- (a) Was the treaty terminated or withdrawn from under:
 - i. Its provisions? – *VCLT Art 54(a)* (Page 32)
 - ii. By consent of all of the parties after consultation with the other contracting states? – *VCLT Art 54(b)* (Page 32)
- (b) Was the treaty suspended under:
 - i. Its provisions? – *VCLT Art 57(a)* (Page 32)
 - ii. By consent of all of the parties after consultation with the other contracting states? – *VCLT Art 57(b)* (Page 32)

The following constitute external grounds of termination, withdrawal or suspension.

- (c) Was there a denunciation or withdrawal from the treaty when there is no provision to do so? – *VCLT Art 56* (Page 32)
 - i. There is generally no right of denunciation, except where: – *VCLT Art 56(1)* (Page 32)

- A. It is established that the parties intended to admit the possibility of denunciation or withdrawal – *VCLT Art 56(1)(a)* (Page 32)
 - B. A right of denunciation or withdrawal may be implied by the nature of the treaty – *VCLT Art 56(1)(b)* (Page 32)
 - ii. Under this provision, a party must give at least 12 months' notice of its intention to denounce/withdrawal from the treaty – *VCLT Art 56(2)* (Page 32)
- (d) Was there a material breach? – *VCLT Art 60* (Page 33)
 - i. A material breach involves a wrongful act being intentionally committed by a party – *Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Case [1997] ICJ Rep 7 at [72]-[81]* (Page 35)
 - ii. In a bilateral treaty, this entitles the other party to terminate the treaty or suspend its operation, in whole or in part – *VCLT Art 60(1)* (Page 33)
 - iii. If there was a breach in a multilateral treaty: – *VCLT Art 60(2)* (Page 33)
 - A. The other parties can unanimously opt to suspend or terminate the treaty either (i) between themselves and the defaulting state, or (ii) between all parties – *VCLT Art 60(2)(a)* (Page 33)
 - B. A party who has been especially affected has grounds to suspend the treaty in whole or in part between itself and the defaulting state – *VCLT Art 60(2)(b)* (Page 33)
 - C. Any party other than the defaulting party may suspend the treaty in whole or in part if the breach is such that it radically changes the position of every party with respect to the further performance of its obligations under the treaty – *VCLT Art 60(2)(c)* (Page 33)
 - iv. Moreover, a material breach entails:
 - A. A repudiation of the treaty not sanctioned by the present Convention – *VCLT Art 60(3)(a)* (Page 33)
 - B. The violation of a provision essential to the accomplishment of the object or purpose of this treaty – *VCLT Art 60(3)(b)* (Page 33)
 - v. A party cannot claim material breach if they themselves had committed the wrongful act – *Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Case [1997] ICJ Rep 7 at [92]-[94]* (Page 35)
- (e) Did the performance of the treaty become impossible? – *VCLT Art 61* (Page 34)
 - i. A state may terminate or withdraw from a treaty if its performance has become impossible because 'an object indispensable for the execution of the treaty' has permanently disappeared or been destroyed – *VCLT Art 61(1)* (Page 34)
 - ii. However, impossibility of performance may not be invoked if the impossibility is the result of a breach by that party either of an obligation under that treaty or any other international obligations owed to any other party of the treaty – *VCLT Art 61(2)* (Page 34)
- (f) Was there a fundamental change of circumstances that precluded the operation of the treaty? – *VCLT Art 62* (Page 35)
 - i. Under the principle of *pacta servanda sunt* (*VCLT Art 26* on Page 22), the party must have exhausted all possible avenues before claiming a fundamental change of circumstances
 - ii. A fundamental change of circumstances entails: – *Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Case [1997] ICJ Rep 7 at [104]* (Page 35)

- A. The circumstances at the conclusion of the treaty must have been an essential basis of consent
 - B. The change must not have been foreseen
 - C. The change must radically transform the extent of the obligations still to be made performed
- iii. A fundamental change of circumstances may not be invoked as a grounds for termination/withdrawal unless: – *VCLT Art 62(1)* (Page 35)
 - A. The existence of those circumstances constituted an essential basis of the consent of the parties to be bound by the treaty; **and** – *VCLT Art 62(1)(a)* (Page 35)
 - B. The effect of the change is radically to transform the extent of the obligations still to be performed under the treaty – *VCLT Art 61(1)(b)* (Page 35)
- iv. A fundamental change of circumstances may not be invoked as a ground for terminating or withdrawing from a treaty: – *VCLT Art 62(2)* (Page 35)
 - A. If the treaty establishes a boundary – *VCLT Art 62(2)(a)* (Page 35)
 - B. If the fundamental change is the result of a breach by the party invoking it – *VCLT Art 62(2)(b)* (Page 35)
- v. If a party invokes a fundamental change of circumstances as a ground for terminating or withdrawing from a treaty, it may also invoke the change as a ground for suspending the operation of the treaty – *VCLT Art 62(3)* (Page 35)
- vi. International courts are very reluctant to find that impossibility and/or fundamental change of circumstances have been made out (i.e., they have a very high threshold and thus a very limited scope, as suggested by the negative wording of the Articles) – *Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Case* [1997] ICJ Rep 7 at [104] (Page 35)
- vii. **Art 62** has generally been accepted as a codification of the existing customary law on termination by fundamental change of circumstances – *Fisheries Jurisdiction (United Kingdom v Iceland)* ICJ Reports 1973, pg. 63, para. 36

A.4 International Law and Australian Law

1. Was this a matter involving Australia, or a state which follows the Australian approach to adopting international law?
2. How does international law influence Australian law?
 - (a) International law applies between states, but may also recognise institutions of domestic law that have an extensive/important role in international law (e.g., corporations) – *Barcelona Traction (Belgium v Spain)* [1970] ICJ Rep 3 (Page 44) [where corporations could be recognised within international law]
 - (b) Absent/inconsistent domestic law is not excuse for failing to meet international obligations – *Alabama Claims Arbitration (US/Britain)* (1872); *Sandline Arbitration* (1998)
 - (c) Expert evidence cannot be adduced to prove or explain statements of international law – *ACCC v PT Garuda (No 9)* [2013] FCA 23 at [31] (Perram J) (Page 46)

- (d) Common law can be developed with regard to international law, where it is not inconsistent with domestic law – *Chow Hung Ching v R* (1949) 77 CLR 449, 471 (Starke J) (Page 48)
 - i. However, international law is not incorporated as part of Australian law, but rather is a source – Latham CJ at page 462; Dixon J at page 477
 - (e) International law cannot automatically be imported/included in Australian law, but remains a “legitimate and important influence on the development of the law” – *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)* (1992) 175 CLR 1, 42 (Brennan J) (Page 49)
 - i. This is especially the case when referring to aspects of international law that touch on universal human values (e.g., human rights)
 - (f) However, in cases such as a civil claim for torture (or any other serious crime forbidden under international law), the common law of state doctrine should reflect universal norms – *Habib v Commonwealth* (2010) 183 CLR 62 at [7] (Black CJ) (Page 49)
3. Has customary international law been implemented in Australian law?
Always explore monism and dualism for a nuanced discussion, and describe how this results in Australia’s hard transformation approach.
- (a) Whilst there is no clear authority, the automatic incorporation of customary international law in Australia has been rejected
 - (b) Australia has rejected the monism approach (where states and international law form one entity), and has adopted a hard transformation approach that tends towards dualism (where states and international law form two separate entities) (Section 4.2 on Page 46)
 - i. Under the **hard transformation approach**, only legislation may implement the provisions of international law into domestic law; otherwise, international law does not apply (this is the approach favoured in Australia, following *Chow Hung Ching v R* (1949) 77 CLR 449 (Latham CJ at 462; Dixon J at 477) (Page 48))
 - ii. The **soft transformation approach** holds that legislation or court decisions may implement the provisions of international law (discussed by Latham CJ in *Chow Hung Ching v R* (1949) 77 CLR 449 (Page 48)), but so far has been rejected – *Dietrich v R* [1992] HCA 57 (Page 52)
 - A. “International law is not as such part of the law of Australia, but a universally recognized principle of international law would be applied by our courts” – *Chow Hung Ching v R* (1949) 77 CLR 449, 462 (Latham CJ) (Page 48)
 - (c) If the country is instead following the UK’s approach, see Section 4.3 on Page 47
4. Was this a matter involving international criminal law?
- (a) Customary/international criminal law can never be a part of the Australian common law/transformed or implemented by the courts (it can only be imported by statute) – *Nulyarimanna v Thompson* (1999) 165 ALR 621 (Page 50)
 - i. At [20], Wilcox J held that if domestic criminal law could be influenced by customary/international criminal law, it would lead to the position where international obligations have greater obligations than domestic consequences,

sidelining domestic law and thus a state's independence to make its own criminal laws

- ii. This is moreover a position adopted in the UK – *R v Jones* [2006] 2 All ER 741 (Lords Bingham, Mance and Hoffman) (Page 51)
- (b) *Jus cogens* principles of international law are not automatically part of Australian common law, and criminal offences must be created by statute, not by the courts – *Nulyarimanna v Thompson* (1999) 165 ALR 621 at [17], [20], [32], [57] (Wilcox and Whitlam JJ) (Page 50)
 - i. For example, the *jus cogens* prohibition of genocide was not automatically part of Australian common law, and had to be created by statute (see the above paragraphs for context)
 - ii. Merkel J dissented, and held that the approach that should be taken was the 'common law adoption approach', which is that a rule of international law is to be adopted by a court so long as it is not inconsistent with legislation or public policy
5. Does the matter involve a treaty being implemented into Australian law?
 - (a) The power to enter into treaties is exclusively an Executive prerogative power – *Constitution s 61* (Page 52)
 - i. In interpreting the external affairs power, the HCA has held that they only need to look at whether the law applies geographically externally to Australia, not whether the international law was void by virtue of the underlying treaty being void – *Horta v Commonwealth* (1994) 181 CLR 183, 191
 - ii. "The federal executive, through the Crown's representative, possessed exclusive and unfettered treaty-making power" – *Koowarta v Bjelke-Petersen* (1982) 153 CLR 168 at [215] (Stephen J) (Page 55)
 - (b) The power to implement the provisions of a treaty is a legislative power – *Constitution s 51(xxix)* [the 'external affairs' power]
 - i. Treaty provisions do not form a part of Australia law until they have been implemented by statute – *Dietrich v R* [1992] HCA 57 (Brennan CJ, Mason and McHugh JJ) (Page 52)
 - ii. Resolutions of international organisations (e.g., the UN Security Council) do not form a part of Australian law until they have been implemented by statute – *Bradley v Commonwealth* (1973) 128 CLR 557, 582 (Barwick CJ and Gibbs J) (Page 53)
 - A. If Parliament 'approves' a treaty, it is not binding
 - B. The mere approval of Parliament does not give a treaty the force of law (this practice has since lapsed)
 - iii. Under *Constitution s 51(xxix)*, the law must carry into effect treaty obligations, and be reasonably considered to be appropriate and adapted to achieving this objective – *Commonwealth v Tasmania* (1983) 158 CLR 1, 40 (Deane J) (Page 55)
 - iv. Ratification only occurs after a treaty has been implemented into internal legislative provisions/given the force of law (the legislative approach is the preferred one, as it the most common and avoids uncertainty)
6. Does the matter involve Australia entering into/making a treaty?

- (a) Australia can enter into two types of treaties:
 - i. Bilateral treaties, which enter into force for Australia after
 - A. Signature
 - B. Subsequent exchange of notes stating that the constitutional process is completed
 - ii. Multilateral treaties, which enter into force for Australia after
 - A. Signature
 - B. Subsequent ratification (or accession if there was no previous signature)
 - (b) Whilst there is no constitutional requirement for the Parliament to be involved in the treaty-making process, since 1996, Parliament has been consulted on the treaty-making process (without a veto) – *Trick or Treaty?* (1995 Report of the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee)
 - i. The present convention is that all proposed treaty conventions are tabled in Parliament at least 15 sitting days prior to any binding action being undertaken (with exemptions for urgent or sensitive treaties)
 - ii. A National Interest Analysis (NIA) is also prepared, which is akin to an explanatory memorandum for a treaty
 - iii. the treaty should also be reviewed by the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
7. Should international law be used to interpret Australian statute?
- (a) International law can be used as extrinsic material when interpreting legislation which refers to a treaty – *Acts Interpretation Act 1901 (Cth) ss 15AB(1) and (2)(d)* (Page 57)
 - (b) International law can be used to interpret a legislative provision that incorporates a treaty provision; in this instance, the rules of treaty interpretation apply rather than statutory interpretation
 - (c) Is the *Polites* principle enlivened?
 - i. The *Polites* principle refers to the presumption that the Parliament intends to give effect to Australia's obligations under international law, in the absence of express words/intention to the contrary – *Polites v Commonwealth* (1945) 70 CLR 60, 77 (Dixon J) (Page 58)
 - A. It is a general rule of statutory interpretation that, in the absence of express words to the contrary, it is presumed that legislation is intended to be in conformity with the treaty-based rules of international law
 - ii. Once a treaty is ratified and implemented into domestic law, statutory interpretation requires courts to presume that legislation is intended to be in conformity with international law (*Polites* Principle) because Parliament, *prima facie*, intends to give effect to Australia's international obligations
 - iii. The *Polites* principle does not apply to constitutional interpretation, as it would violate the requirement for a referendum to modify the *Constitution* under s 128 – *Al-Kateb v Godwin* (2004) 208 ALR 124 (Page 58)
 - A. At [66], McHugh J outlined that it was never the case that the *Constitution* should have been interpreted to conform with the rules of international law

- B. At [175], Kirby J (in dissent) held that the *Constitution* should be interpreted in a way that is generally harmonious with the basic principles of international law, including as that law states human rights and fundamental freedoms

8. How is treaty law implemented into Australian law?

(a) Signing of the treaty

- i. The Commonwealth Executive has the exclusive power to sign treaties (see 5a)
- ii. Parliamentary approval is not necessary, but as a matter of convention, it has been sought (see 5b)

(b) Implementation of the treaty

- i. Parliament will generally be consulted about the treaty, but constitutionally, its approval is not required to sign the treaty (see 5b)
- ii. Following the *Trick or Treaty* report (see 6b), the Executive will consult Parliament before signing treaties
- iii. All proposed treaty actions are tabled in Parliament at least 15 sitting days prior to a binding action
- iv. Parliament can provide recommendations and scrutinise the treaty, but ultimately the Executive has the final say

(c) Ratification of the treaty

- i. The treaty is ratified by the executive once domestic legislation is present to incorporate the terms of the treaty
- ii. Under *VCLT Art 2(1)(b)* (Page 16), ratification is the intentional act whereby a state indicates its consent to be bound to a treaty if the parties intended to show their consent (generally, the depositary will collect the ratifications of all states)

Appendix B

Tutorial Problems

There was no tutorial problem for Topic 1, and the tutorial problem for Topic 2 consisted of source evaluation only.

B.3 Treaties

Astra, Benthos and Ceres are neighbouring states on Torrent Island. Astra is located in the eastern and mountainous part of Torrent Island and is highly industrialised. Benthos and Ceres are developing states located on the western and low-lying part of Torrent Island.

The River Delta flows from Astra into Benthos and then on to Ceres. In 1977 Astra, Benthos and Ceres concluded the River Delta Treaty ('RDT'). Article 1 of the RDT commits the parties to 'cooperate to achieve the reasonable and equitable use of the River Delta'. In Article 10 of the RDT, Benthos and Ceres are guaranteed defined minimum volumes of water per annum. On signing the RDT, Astra lodged the following declaration:

'The Government of the Astra Republic, in approving the Treaty, declares that reference to the concept of reasonable and equitable use of transboundary waters does not constitute recognition of a principle of customary law, but illustrates a general principle of cooperation between Parties to the Treaty.'

In 2024, due to an ongoing drought exacerbated by climate change, Astra announced that it was unable to supply any water to Benthos. Benthos in turn was unable to comply with its obligations under Article 10 to supply a required volume of water to Ceres.

In January 2025, Astra announced that the RDT was 'hereby terminated with immediate effect'. In doing so Astra referred to the persistent drought conditions, and the record of negotiations for the RDT during which former President of Benthos commented that 'of course whatever the treaty says must be subject to the vagaries of nature and we may have to put the treaty on hold if the river dries up.' The RDT includes no provision relating to suspension or termination.

Benthos and Ceres contend that the RDT remains in force and that Astra is also bound by

a customary law obligation to provide reasonable and equitable access to a shared freshwater resource.

Astra, Benthos and Ceres are parties to the 1997 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational uses of International Watercourses (the UN Watercourses Convention) which provides, in Article 3, that ‘In the absence of an agreement to the contrary, nothing in the present Convention shall affect the rights or obligations of a watercourse State arising from agreements in force for it on the date on which it became a party to the present Convention.’

Astra, Benthos and Ceres are parties to the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.

At the urging of the UN Secretary-General, the three States have agreed to mediation to resolve their dispute. You have been asked to prepare a legal brief advising the mediator on the legal issues that arise under the law of treaties from these facts.

- What does each country want?
 - Astra: to terminate the treaty
 - Benthos: to remain in force
 - Ceres: to remain in force
- Are all of countries party to the VCLT?
 - Here, they are all party to the VCLT
 - If a country is not, many of the VCLT provisions can apply as customary law regardless (Table 3.4 on Page 36)
 - *In this instance*, as the treaty was ratified in 1977, the VCLT would not apply as it was ratified in 1980 and does not have retroactive application (its provisions are being applied as customary international law)
- Can Astra terminate the treaty?
 - The first point to start at is the treaty itself
 - * Since the treaty contains “no provision relating to suspension or termination”, internal grounds are excluded, and we must turn to external grounds (VCLT Art 60-62)
 - * The purpose of the treaty is to cooperate to achieve a reasonable and equitable use of the River Delta (under Art 1)
 - There is not a clear circumstance where there will be a breach in the first place
 - There is most likely not a material breach here
 - * Supervening impossibility is most likely the strongest argument present
 - The river has dried up, and the drought could possibly continue forever
 - Droughts tend towards climate change – even if it ends in 100 years, it is still a supervening event

- Refer to VCLT Art 61
- This needs to be a permanent disruption - the drought could be cyclical or temporary
- Must radically transform the obligations to an extent where the obligation itself is completely changed
- Was there a fundamental change of circumstances?
 - * Statement by the President of Benthos
 - Drought was not foreseen, but there was the possibility planned for in this circumstance - doesn't go for a supervening impossibility
 - This could be evidence of preparatory work
 - Was this a reservation or not?
 - Look at the definition of a reservation in the VCLT - likely that this is a declaration and not a reservation, as it was not made to exclude or modify the legal effect of that provision (thereby, they're not bound)
 - * Not foreseen by parties
 - Benthos - they could've possibly foreseen it as "if the river dries up"
 - Art 26 - pacta servanda - should've looked for alternative measures or made changes to account for this provision (put this in the conclusion! Go through termination/suspension/etc, then say art 26 could apply and suggest what else could be done)
 - On the facts - not completely foreseen by the parties
 - * Radical change in obligations
 - Could still give less water
 - Drought is a dire situation, but isn't an actual disaster - the countries can bounce back
 - Countries are not unaware that droughts can happen - climate change causes a lot of unforeseen events (we're in 2024/2025, so it's reasonable to make that assumption)
 - * A fundamental change of circumstances is very difficult threshold to reach in the first place (*Anglo Norwegian Fisheries Case (UK v Norway)* [1951] ICJ Rep 116 on Page 9) threat of economic instability isn't considered to be a fundamental change
 - To pass this threshold, the agreement in question must have disappeared (e.g., if a state sank away, the treaty would be radically transformed)
- Art 26 is about good faith - need to look for other alternatives - the parties should've looked at reasonable alternative (Astra's keeping all resources to themselves, even though they're highly industrialised and can produce more (e.g., desalination/mountain water))
- Art 26 is used - when a party can't perform obligations fully, they should still try to fulfil them to their best extent, following *pacta sunt servanda* (e.g., if astra tried to give water/gave water, this would be met and art 26 isn't made out)
- If the treaty is terminated, are they still bound by customary law?
 - * Art 1 is very vague, but art 10 is very specific (both can't be general practice)

- * Here, it isn't fundamentally non-creating, but state practice and opinio juris is still conductional
- * Might be some form of state practice under the 1997 convention - compliance over a long period of time
- * Opinio juris - not much on the facts, but that A and B are attempting to enforce suggests some form of uniformity/state practice
- If the text being examined is a treaty per the definition in the VCLT, one sentence is needed to acknowledge this
- Consider geographic and socioeconomic inequality
- Astra is a developed state, and so they have more responsibilities and obligations when it comes to giving water
- In this treaty, Astra is not guaranteed a minimum amount of water
- The object and purpose for this treaty is defined in paragraph 1
- 1 - socioeconomic status, 2 - who has the obligations (A and B, to B and C respectively), 3 - object and purpose of the treaty
- To interpret the treaty, use VCLT (look at the ordinary meaning in terms of the context of the treaty) (Art 31(1) - good faith; and Art 32)
- Also include the interpretative assistant provided by the UN's Watercourses convention
- Astra's declaration is an interpretative declaration, as it doesn't modify the text of the treaty but instead clarifies Astra's position
 - This could be a reservation (Art 2(1)(d)), but it is not as it does not change the terms of the treaty, but merely is interpreting the law as they are understanding it (whether it applies or not depends - is this considered 'persistent objector'? - the later signing of the 1997 treaty interferes any issue with objections, and so not a persistent objector)
 - Astra could show this is a persistent objection to this becoming customary international law
- Lack of water supply shows both A and B have breached the treaty - not providing water = breach of Article 10 (which shows that they have to give minimum amounts of water downstream)
- Astra had an attempt to terminate - was this valid?
 - RDT is silent, so look to the VCLT
 - Options - material breach, impossibility, change of circumstance (art 60-62 respectively)
 - Astra can't rely on its own breach to terminate - art 60
 - Look at benthos - art 10 was not a material breach as the object and purpose of the treaty had been breached by not supplying minimum water quantity

- Material breach is no water, can't argue drought, as the fact don't show that there is no water, but only that there is a drought (you can still supply water, Art 1 talks about cooperation, reasonable and equitable)
- They could terminate if there was no water
- A and B both breached Art 1, as they didn't fulfil their supply obligations to the next country
- Drought means that there is no rain, not that the river has dried up
- "Ongoing drought" - in the future, there could be a fundamental change of circumstances (and hence no material breach)
- Was the declaration of Benthos a unilateral declaration?
 - Here, it says dried up vs drought (not the same), so not a unilateral declaration
 - Unilateral declaration - if its against the treaty, it's just a statement
 - B also uses vague terminology in their declaration, so not a unilateral declaration
 - Head of state says something - unilateral declaration - can be an acceptance of the law by a state
- There are no provisions of suspension and termination
 - Astra will argue these under Art 61 and 62 (impossibility and fundamental breach)
 - Can argue this as the treaty doesn't have a provision on this - see VCLT 56(1) - if a treaty doesn't have these clauses, then they may withdraw, but that withdrawal cannot be on an understanding other than art 61/62
- B/C contends that the treaty will remain on force and that all parties are bound by customary international law
 - Was there a customary obligation?
 - * See Art 38(1) of ICJ statute - requires state practice and opinio juris
 - * UN watercourse had 103 in favour, 3 against and 27 abstentions
 - * UN watercourse is in force, has 40 parties, and 16 states sign at launch, so more states joining over time indicates a growing acceptance
 - * Similarities in goals between the un convention and the RDT - almost the same wording in regards to reasonable and equitable water use - trend in law making by states - UN watercourses has general language that has the qualities of law making treaties (sets out how to interpret), indicating a wider phenomena and acceptance
 - * Art 1 of this treaty and art 5 of UN is similar
 - * 106 states and 40 parties showing that there is a developing customary law (state practice and opinio juris - north sea continental shelf (anywhere talking about customary international law and opinio juris, put this case!))
 - * Which one of the two will prevail?
 - In absence of an agreement to the contrary
 - Due to art 3 of the UN treaty, RDT remains valid as it came before and there was no agreement to subsume/supersede it

- Art 3 doesn't say that all other agreements are repealed (on the contrary, it says that it will coexist and continue in peace)
 - RDT and watercourse convention both continue to exist, and hence there is no conflict between the two
 - Art 3 - when they join, it will not influence any previous agreements that were in force when the states entered into the treaty
 - If in any place a state is a party (they have ratified, making sure it has become law), or states who have signed the agreement (they have not ratified) - key distinction as to whether an agreement is applicable or not and the obligations that apply to those states
 - If people have signed, its not binding, but the signing shows evidence of state practice (good for customary international law)
- To answer the whole question:
 - Look at the whole question
 - Determine the obligations and responsibilities of each state
 - Is there a declaration/reservation/attempt to be a persistent objector? (e.g., could the Presidential statement be an example of persistent objection?)
 - Was suspension/termination allowed or not? (here, no internal grounds, and so turn to external grounds in the VCLT)
 - Discuss what could be argued by Astra under VCLT Art 60-62
 - Compare the convention to the RDT, analysing the similarities and differences (how is it similar to customary law?)
 - With one line, note that the VCLT does not apply as a treaty, but rather its provisions do as a matter of customary law

B.4 International Law and Australian Law

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples ('the Declaration') was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 13 September 2007, by a majority of 143 states in favour, 4 votes against (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States) and 11 abstentions. The four states that voted against subsequently declared their support for the Declaration (including Australia in 2007, following the election of the Rudd Government).

The Declaration mentions Treaties between Indigenous Peoples and States in its Preamble and in Article 37. The latter provides:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the recognition, observance and enforcement of treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements concluded with States or their successors and to have States honour and respect such treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements.
2. Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as diminishing or eliminating the rights of indigenous peoples contained in treaties, agreements and other

constructive arrangements.

You are a legal advisor in the independent Treaty Authority established in Victoria to oversee negotiations between the Victorian Government and the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria to ensure a fair process in the conclusion of a Treaty that delivers self-determination for Victoria's First Peoples. Victoria was the first State to commit to all three elements of the Uluru Statement from the Heart (Voice, Treaty and Truth). The relevance of the Declaration to the Treaty-making process has been considered in detail by Dr Harry Hobbs. Statewide Treaty negotiations began in Victoria in November 2024.

You have been asked to provide legal advice addressing the following questions:

1. What is the status of the Declaration under international law?
2. What is the status of the Declaration under Australian law?
3. In *Love v Commonwealth* [2020] HCA 3, Bell J (at [73]) cited the Declaration when making the following observation:

“It is not offensive, in the context of contemporary international understanding, to recognise the cultural and spiritual dimensions of the distinctive connection between indigenous peoples and their traditional lands, and in light of that recognition to hold that the exercise of the sovereign power of this nation does not extend to the exclusion of the indigenous inhabitants from the Australian community.”

What legal effect was Bell J ascribing to the Declaration under Aboriginal law?

4. In what respects does the Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018 (Vic) implement the Declaration in Victorian law?
5. What status will a Treaty or Treaties between Indigenous Victorians and the State of Victoria have as a matter of Victorian, Australian and international law?

Question 1

- UNGA Resolutions are not binding, but they can be evidence of state practice and *opinio juris* for customary law (and may possibly be a piece of soft law)
- This declaration is not a treaty, as there is no objective evidence that the parties sought to be bound nor that they made any decisions
- To determine whether it is a source of law, Art 38(1) must be looked at:
 - It does not fit in with any of the sources mentioned in Art 38(1)
 - It might be possible to argue that it is customary international law under Art 38(1)(b); nonetheless, it would be hard to make out *opinio juris* on the facts
 - It is still possible that there is state practice present, as there are 143 states voting in favour of the declaration; moreover, the reversal in position by the states that voted against it, which all had high levels of Indigenous populations, indicates a strengthening of support for the declaration and hence may evidence state practice

- Moreover, there is some form of international consensus, but there is no specific consensus/practice present
- Some aspects of UN Declarations have attained customary international law status (*Horta v Commonwealth* (1994) 181 CLR 183 (Page 54)), but it is unlikely that this is the case here
- Given the declaration has not been signed and ratified, it is fundamentally not directly binding on states
- Moreover, the UN sets out legal principles; the consensual, non-binding status of its decisions makes it especially active to bring states together
- Declarations are a serious matter; since states do not wish to get on the wrong side of the international community, they are an easy way of getting them all on the same page
- Any detailed analysis of this point must begin with why the declaration is non-binding, but as soft law, it nonetheless evidences state practice and *opinio juris*
 - A link to *Horta v Commonwealth* (1994) 181 CLR 183 (Page 54) is then required to evidence how UN principles may become customary international law
 - A connection to self-determination must then be made to explore why states continue to nonetheless accept these declarations

Question 2

- There is no Act directly implementing the Declaration, but there is statute, such as the *Native Title Act 1993*; moreover, aspects of the declaration had already been implemented into Australian law (which had occurred before the signing of this declaration)
- As there is no specific Act in Australia that implements this declaration, it is not binding on Australia's domestic law (since Australia takes a hard transformation approach, it is only binding if the legislature enacts legislation that aligns with the declaration)
 - For full marks, discuss the theories and process that Australia adopts (i.e., monism vs dualism, and the resultant transformation approach)
 - It is possible for customary international law to be a source of domestic law, or otherwise influence Australian law (*Mabo*)
 - Under these cases, a universally recognised principle of international law will be applied, but does not explicitly form a part of Australian law
- The declaration is quite possibly a source of non-binding soft law
- Under *Constitution s 51*, international legislation can be implemented into domestic legislation
- In *Chow Hung Ching v R* (1949) 77 CLR 449 (Page 48), Latham CJ held that a universally recognised principle could be applied by the courts
 - This approach was followed in *Mabo*, where it was held that international law is an influence on development; if it is customary, it would take effect, but not be directly applicable

- The *Polites* principle is of relevance here: in the absence of express words to the contrary, it is assumed that domestic legislation is intended to conform with international law and should be taken as such
- A treaty will only be ratified when legislation with respect to it has been passed in the Commonwealth parliament
- Customary international law can be applied in Australian Courts (*Chow Hung Ching v R* (1949) 77 CLR 449 (Page 48)), but when there is a conflict between domestic and international law, domestic law will prevail

Question 3

- Bell J referred to the Declaration's legal effect, and for the capacity for it to be used as a source of international law
- This is a demonstration of contemporary understanding of indigenous rights, which can be a source of evidence for the current global understanding around this area
- *Al-Kateb v Godwin* (2004) 219 CLR 562 (Page 58) holds that a direct application of international law to interpret/modify the *Constitution* would contradict *Constitution s 128*, which holds that it can only be changed by Australia; thus, any external influence cannot be detrimental to this, nor can it be used to assist in the interpretation of Australia
 - Bell J was using the declaration here to inform her understanding about whether Indigenous people have a connection to their land (thus, it was not a source of law, but rather a supplementary material to help understand the context)
 - In this minority opinion in *Al-Kateb v Godwin* (2004) 219 CLR 562, Kirby J stated that the law should be pragmatic and evolve with the times (“the complete isolation of the constitution from international law is not possible/desirable”; “national courts and constitutional courts have a duty to interpret constitutional texts with respect to international sources”)
- Moreover, the exploration of this treaty does not have any legal effect; only the legislature is able to enact treaties/declarations into binding law
- The main issue in *Love v Commonwealth* [2020] HCA 3 was whether indigenous peoples could be deported as aliens
 - The common law recognises native title, and hence they cannot
 - The use of the Declaration was purely for interpretive purposes
 - The use of extrinsic material is permissible, but has no legal effect
- Furthermore, the approach taken here was not one of soft transformation

Question 4

- The Victorian parliament can implement the Declaration into Victoria law using its plenary power

- The Declaration was not used in the Act itself, but references were instead placed in the preamble to ensure its relevance, thereby making it highly influential
- The terminology of Art 37 of the declaration is also used to connect the Act to the Declaration (moreover, there are similarities in the Act and the Declaration, giving it substantial adoption but not making it binding)
- The Act does not implement the Declaration, but instead provides the Victorian government a framework to be consistent with the Declaration; it still does not have any binding effect (in any case, it would be the Federal Government who would enact the Declaration, as Federal Parliament has the external affairs power, per *Constitution s 51(xxix)*)
- The Act is just a framework and shows good faith on the part of the Victorian government, rather than anything of important or of relevant substance
- The treaty upholds the representative process, and recognises the right to self-determination
- It does not directly implement the declaration in Victorian law, but continues to have a strong influence

Question 5

- The treaty will be binding in Victoria unless there is federal law that conflicts with it, or the commonwealth legislature legislates against it (*Commonwealth v Tasmania* (1983) 185 CLR 1) (Page 55)
- However, this is not binding on any other territories in Australia, following *Constitution s 109*
- Since the Commonwealth is not a party to this treaty, it is not binding upon the Commonwealth
- Moreover, this treaty is not binding internationally, as the state of Victoria (being a state of a State) and Indigenous Peoples both are not peoples of international law
 - Under *VCLT Art 2(1)(a)*, only states have the power to enter into a treaty, as only they can consent to its principles
 - There is no evidence of state practice, as Victoria is once again not an international state

Glossary

J

Jus cogens Peremptory norms of individual from which no derogation is permitted (i.e., they are absolute and binding, irrespective of any objections).

O

Opinio juris A subjective belief that a state perceives itself to be bound by a legal practice.

P

Pacta servanda sunt “Agreements must be kept”; the oldest principle in international law.

R

Raison d'être The most important reason or purpose for someone or something's existence.