

2024 YEAR-END UPDATE



WAR CRIMES RESEARCH OFFICE

As we reflect on 2024, we are pleased to share the ongoing achievements and significant progress made by the War Crimes Research Office (WCRO). This year, we continued our vital role in providing legal and technical assistance to tribunals and organizations working to combat impunity for atrocity crimes.



In an ever-evolving global landscape, WCRO has maintained its commitment to promoting accountability, strengthening the pursuit of justice for victims, and offering students transformative opportunities to engage with international criminal law. Despite challenges presented by shifting geopolitical dynamics, our work in supporting transitional justice processes and training the next generation of legal professionals remains as critical as ever.

Legal and technical assistance, in-depth research and advocacy

Through partnerships and collaborations, our team continued to provide specialized legal and technical assistance to mechanisms charged with investigating and prosecuting atrocity crimes, as well as civil society organizations representing victims in atrocity crime cases.

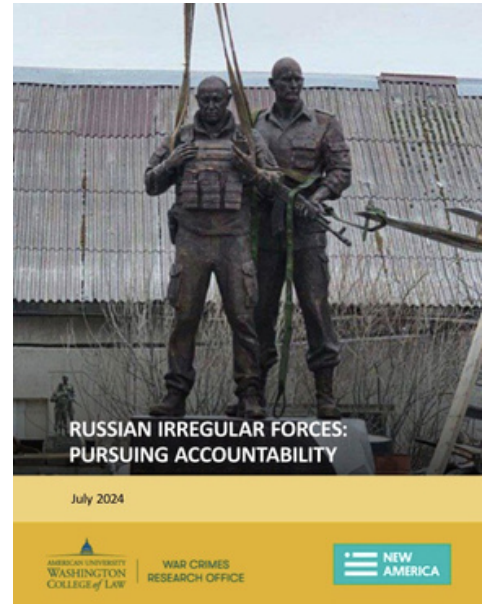
Supporting Colombia's Special Jurisdiction for Peace

- Throughout 2024, the WCRO partnered with the Laboratorio de Justicia y Política Criminal (LJPC), a Colombia-based non-profit organization with expertise providing technical assistance to transitional and criminal justice mechanisms, and law enforcement agencies, on a multi-year project entitled Enhancing the Impact of Colombia's Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP) through a Holistic Transitional Justice Approach.
- The project, which began in late 2022 and was recently extended for an additional two years, has four key objectives: 1) strengthening the capacity of the SJP to redress atrocity crimes committed during the Colombian; 2) ensuring the SJP's cases reflect a gender perspective and intersectional approach; 3) enhancing victim participation in SJP processes; and 4) bolstering current efforts to ensure that victims have access to competent and independent legal representation.
- WCRO Director SáCouto traveled to Bogotá, Colombia, several times over the course of the year, to conduct a series of workshops and meetings with colleagues from the LJPC, and magistrates and staff from the SJP.



Russian Irregular Forces: Pursuing Accountability

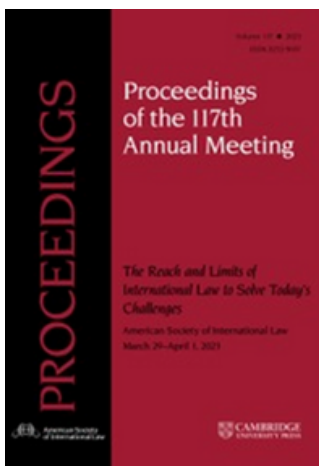
- On June 24, 2024, WCRO Director Susana SáCouto, WCRO Assistant Director Natalie Coburn and Senior Director of Future Frontlines and Planetary Politics at New America Candace Rondeaux published a brief entitled *Can the Wagner Group Be Prosecuted Post-Prigozhin: Exploring the Viability of War Crimes Trials for Russia's Irregular Forces.*
- That same month, WCRO Director SáCouto and Assistant Director Coburn launched their report on *Russian Irregular Forces: Pursuing Accountability* in collaboration with New America.



- On October 22, WCRO Director SáCouto spoke at a briefing at New America on accountability options for atrocities committed by irregular armed groups. She was joined by Candace Rondeaux, Senior Director, Future Frontlines and Planetary Politics, Ben Dalton, Program Manager, Future Frontlines, and Dr. Sorcha MacLeod, Associate Professor in the Faculty of Law at the University of Copenhagen.

Contributing to the International Criminal Court's Policy on Slavery Crimes

- WCRO Director SáCouto participated in consultations and submitted comments in response to the International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor's call for public comments for his Office's new *Policy on Slavery Crimes*. The Policy, which was published in December 2024, sets out the scope of slavery crimes under the Rome Statute that established the ICC and aims to guide the Office in its investigation and prosecution of enslavement and sexual slavery as crimes against humanity and sexual slavery as a war crime.



117 Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the American Society of International Law

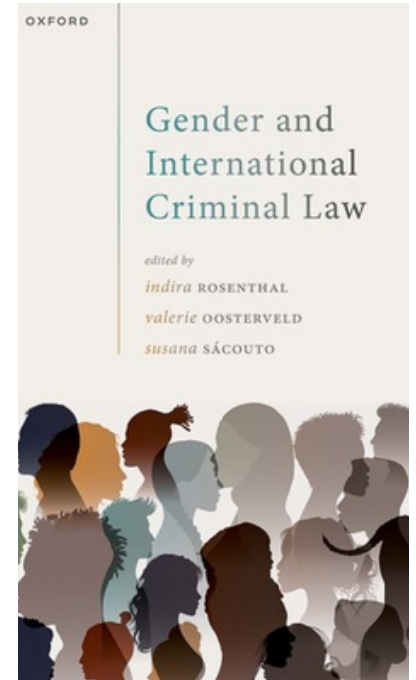
- In October, WCRO Director SáCouto published several pieces in the 117 Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the American Society of International Law, including her remarks from the panel entitled *A Hopeful Conversation: Overcoming Impunity for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence*; the closing plenary of the ASIL Annual Meeting 2023; and the ASIL-WILIG Scholarship Prize winners panel discussion.

Promoting accountability for gender-based atrocity crimes

Throughout 2024, the WCRO continued to lead and engage in initiatives aimed at promoting accountability for gender-based crimes. These efforts included:

[Gender and International Criminal Law Conference](#)

- WCRO Director SáCouto participated in the [Gender and International Criminal Law Conference](#), held in The Hague on January 16 and 17, 2024. The conference convened over 200 gender justice actors to discuss the themes of the book, including challenges and best practices in efforts to secure gender justice for core international crimes.
- The impetus for the conference – hosted by Women’s Initiative’s for Gender Justice, Legal Action Worldwide, UN Women, the Grotius Center for International Legal Studies, the Australian Embassy in The Hague, and the International Gender Champions Network – was the publication of a book entitled [Gender and International Criminal Law](#) co-edited by WCRO Director Susana SáCouto and published by Oxford University Press in 2022. The book was awarded the 2023 Best Book prize from the Women in International Law Interest Group of the American Society of International Law.
- During the Conference, WCRO Director SáCouto co-lead the opening panel on *Understanding gender is vital. Why does it matter that we get it right?*; chaired two panels entitled *Shaping gender-sensitive accountability and Act local, think global? A discussion around national practice*; and served as a speaker on the last panel, *The future is feminist: re-imagining International Criminal Law*.



- In January, WCRO Director SáCouto also joined her co-editor Indira Rosenthal for a presentation of their book [Gender and International Criminal Law](#) at the International Gender Champions Network convening hosted by the Swiss Embassy in The Hague.

Panel on Afghan Women Lawyers and Judges

- In March, The WCRO hosted a panel on *Afghan Women Lawyers and Judges: Where They Were and Where They Are Now*, co-sponsored by the International Association of Women Judges and the American Bar Association Section of International Law's International Human Rights Committee. The panel, which included three Afghan women judges and lawyers, was moderated by former Alaska State Superior Court Judge Bev Cutler. Opening remarks were presented by WCRO Director Susana SáCouto and closing remarks by WCL LL.M. Wendy Taube.



International Conference of Prosecutors on Accountability for Conflict-Related Sexual Violence



- On March 27, WCRO Director SáCouto chaired a session at the 3-day *International Conference of Prosecutors on Accountability for Conflict-Related Sexual Violence*, organized by the UN Team of Experts on Rule of Law/Sexual Violence in Conflict and co-sponsored by the governments of The Netherlands, United Kingdom and France, held at the Peace Palace in The Hague. The session featured a discussion with two Guatemalan prosecutors who played a critical role in the landmark Sepur Zarco case, which provided redress for indigenous victims of sexual violence and sexual slavery that occurred during Guatemala's civil war.

Conversations on Gender Persecutions

- In May, WCRO Director SaCouto served as a panelist on a panel hosted by the Association for the Advancement of Innovative Solutions to Global Challenges and the Sigmund Freud University based in Vienna, Austria on Gender Persecution. [See here.](#)
- In November, WCRO Director SaCouto participated as an expert in a full day convening on the development of gender persecution principles, hosted by the Rule of Law Institute at Loyola University in Chicago. The group of experts met on the one-year anniversary of the launch of the International Criminal *Court's Policy on Gender Persecution* to discuss implementation of the policy and contribute to a set of principles on gender persecution, consultations about which the Court launched in 2024.

Addressing Gender-Based Violence at the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, beyond Macro Case 11

- In August WCRO Director SáCouto spoke on a panel discussing international and comparative perspectives at a *Conference on Addressing Gender-Based Violence in the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, beyond Macro Case 11* co-organized by the Colombian-German Institute for Peace (CAPAZ) and the School of Gender Studies of the National University of Colombia.

Commemoration of 15-year Anniversary of UN Mandate on Sexual Violence in Conflict

- In October, WCRO Director SáCouto participated in the all-day 15-year *Anniversary Commemoration of the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary General's Mandate on Sexual Violence in Conflict*, held at the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations.

Manta and Vilca case Discussion

- In October, the WCRO co-hosted with the Latin American Network for Gender-based Strategic Litigation (ReLeG), and the Academy of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law a discussion on the historic *Manta and Vilca case*, which convicted members of the Peruvian Army for sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence committed against women and girls in the districts of Manta and Vilca during the armed conflict.
- The panel included: Cynthia Silva Ticllacuri: Director of DEMUS, Carlos Rivera Paz: Director of the Legal Defense Institute, and Gisela Astocondor Salazar: Deputy Senior Prosecutor, Public Ministry of Peru; and was moderated by WCRO Director SáCouto.



Public education and outreach

The WCRO continued to advance public education on international criminal law and human rights issues through its War Crimes Speaker Series and other initiatives, including:

Putin's Ghost Army: Prospects for Accountability for Russian Irregulars

- In March, WCRO Director SáCouto joined Beth VanSchaack, State Department Ambassador-at-Large for Global Criminal Justice, and Candace Rondeaux, Senior Director of the Future Frontlines program at New America, for a conversation about *Putin's Ghost Army: Prospects for Accountability for Russian Irregulars* at an in-person luncheon co-hosted by New America, the McCain Institute and the War Crimes Research Office and moderated by Paul Fagan, Director of Democracy Programs at the McCain Institute.

The Longest Arm: Universal Jurisdiction and War Crimes Prosecution



- In April, the WCRO co-sponsored with AU International Law Review the full-day symposium, *The Longest Arm: Universal Jurisdiction and War Crimes Prosecution* with WCL's AU International Law Review. The event brought together practitioners, students, and scholars to explore the use of universal jurisdiction (UJ) to address atrocity crimes.

- WCRO Assistant Director Natalie Coburn welcomed attendees on behalf of the Office and introduced a panel addressing the factors that trigger the use of UJ. The day closed with a discussion on UJ trends and applicability to the war in Ukraine as well as to the Syrian regime's brutal crackdown on dissent since 2011.

Interview on ICC Prosecutor's Request for Arrest Warrants in the Palestine Situation

- In May, WCRO Director SaCouto was interviewed by Radio Free Europe on ICC Prosecutor's Request for Arrest Warrants in the Palestine Situation.

Career Power Hour

- In September WCRO Director SáCouto moderated a Career Power Hour sponsored by the WCRO and Office of Career & Professional Development.
- The session featured WCRO alumni council members sharing their career journeys, valuable advice, and tips on navigating the human rights, international humanitarian law and international criminal law field.



- This panelists included: Vy Nguyen (JD '15), Tara Vassefi (JD '16), Ali Boyd (JD '19) and Kate Holcombe (JD '18).
- The event offered a fantastic opportunity for students to engage in 1-on-1 conversations with these esteemed professionals, learning firsthand about "a day in the life" in HR/IHL/ICL legal career paths.

Experiential education opportunities

Throughout 2024, the War Crimes Research Office (WCRO) provided students with unique opportunities to deepen their understanding of international criminal law and engage in impactful projects that promote accountability for atrocity crimes. These experiences not only helped students develop essential legal and advocacy skills, but also enabled them to build valuable professional connections crucial for careers in international criminal law and justice.

18th Annual Summer Law Program in The Hague

- One of the standout offerings was the **18th Annual Summer Law Program in The Hague**, held from June 2nd to June 29th in The Hague, Netherlands which allowed students from Washington College of Law (WCL) and other U.S. law schools to engage directly with leading practitioners, courts, and tribunals shaping the future of international justice and counterterrorism.



- The program, which is a long-standing collaboration between WCL's War Crimes Research Office and the T.M.C. Asser Institute, welcomed 20 students—16 from WCL and 4 from esteemed institutions including Southern Methodist University, University of Maine, Golden Gate University, Faulkner University and Columbia University. The program provided an in-depth exploration of international criminal law and the evolving legal framework of counterterrorism in the 21st century.

- During the program WCRO Director SáCouto moderated a **career panel** with WCL alumni, including ICC Prosecutor Eric Iverson WCL JD '06, Senior Dutch Diplomat Rochus Pronk WCL LLM '95, and International Nuremberg Principles Academy Project Officer Emma Brandon WCL JD '17, among others.



Opportunities to engage in and support the WCRO's confidential and public research projects and programming



- 14 students supported the WCRO's confidential and public research projects and programming through the International Criminal Law Practicum and research assistant positions.

[IHL MootCourt Competitions](#)

- From 25 February to 3 March 2024, WCL competed in the Jean-Pictet International Humanitarian Law Competition held in Bredene, Belgium.
- The team was represented by WCL JD students Jack Kirk, Mandy Spiegel, and Amal Rass.
- The 2023-2024 competition hosted 28 teams, including four from the United States: WCL, Georgetown University Law Center, Santa Clara University School of Law, and Pennsylvania State University School of Law.
- The WCL team was one of only four teams from their section to make it to the semifinals!
- The team was coached by AUWCL's War Crimes Research Office and WCL alum Vy Nguyen (JD '15), as well as Jean-Pictet alum Ben Crawford (JD'24).



[Volunteer Opportunities](#)

- More than 20 students and alumni volunteered on WCRO projects, including doing cite-checking and writing posts on news and jurisprudential developments coming out of international and other tribunals tasked with trying grave crimes for the [International Criminal Law Updates blog](#).

[WCRO Alumni Council Updates](#)

We are thrilled to announce that Chris Keeler (JD/MA'16) and Ben Crawford (JD '24) joined the WCRO Alumni Advisory Council.

[Chris Keeler \(JD/MA'16\)](#)

- Chris is a highly skilled privacy and compliance Attorney with over 7 years of legal experience, including in global privacy and data protection law. Chris has proven expertise in building and managing global privacy compliance programs, interpreting complex multi-jurisdictional legal requirements, and negotiating privacy contracts. He is currently serving as Lead Counsel for Legal Privacy Compliance at Meta Platforms, Inc. And he is active in the International Association of Privacy Professionals as the Denver Knowledge Net Co-Chair.



Ben Crawford (JD '24)

- Ben is a recent WCL graduate, recipient of the prestigious Arthur C. Helton fellowship from the American Society of International Law, for which he conducted post-graduate research on and advocacy for the respect of international humanitarian law. While in law school, Ben served as a legal fellow for the American Red Cross – International Humanitarian Law Program; an Atrocity Prevention intern for the U.S. Department of State – Bureau of Conflict & Stabilization Operations; a legal intern for the Office of Policy, Programmes, and Legal at Geneva Call; and a legal intern for the Office of General Counsel at Families Against Mandatory Minimums.



In Memoriam

Honoring the legacy of Benjamin Ferencz and Thomas Buergenthal



- On June 2, 2024, at the Peace Palace in The Hague, WCRO Director SáCouto took part in a heartfelt ceremony of remembrance, honoring the legacy of Benjamin Ferencz and Thomas Buergenthal.



Benjamin Ferencz, who passed away in April 2023, was the last living Nuremberg prosecutor, while Thomas Buergenthal, who died in May 2023, was a distinguished jurist, former judge at the International Court of Justice and former dean of AUWCL.

We thank you for your support and wish you a wonderful holiday season.

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