



The Fourth Annual McNair Lecture -

'International Conventions – A Time of Crisis or Change?'



On the 14th October 2025, McNair International hosted its 4th Annual Lecture, dedicated in honour of Lord Arnold McNair. This year's event featured a panel discussion of distinguished politicians, lawyers and scholars who came together to address the pressing issue of whether international conventions are facing a time of crisis, or change. Addressing an audience of diplomats, judges and scholars, the panellists addressed four topics:

Former Cabinet Minister Lord Peter Lilley PC addressed The European Convention of Human Rights ('ECHR'), setting out its genesis and reception

within British politics. Lord Lilley's recent report for the Centre for Policy Studies had concluded that there was no democratic mandate for the ECHR with it effectively requiring English judges to take on the political role reserved for Parliament and politicians – undermining sovereignty.

Ms. Jacqueline McKenzie (Partner at Leigh Day), drew on her extensive experience dealing with refugee and immigration law issues and provided insight into the practical operation of the Refugee Convention, contending that its scope should be widened.

Former Attorney General Dominic Grieve KC PC, accepted that problems existed within the UK immigration and asylum process. He maintained however, that the United Kingdom's commitment both to the ECHR and to the Refugee Convention was necessary and justified legally, as well as morally. Mr. Grieve suggested problems within this area be met with practical solutions, as opposed to ideological arguments.

Professor Charles Garraway (former Legal Adviser to the British Army), discussed the historical evolution of the law of armed conflict, highlighting its development both before and after World War II. He identified its key principles: military necessity, humanity, distinction and proportionality, acknowledging that the law faced challenges in the present volatile international climate.

Professor Muthucumaraswamy Sornarajah, a pre-eminent scholar on the law of international investment, explored the relationship between human rights and international investment law. He noted recent trends, and also observed that investment treaties often begin with the objective of promoting the economic development of the host country (typically a developing country), but also noted that such stated objectives are rarely realised as a result of the treaties themselves.

The panellists' presentations were followed by a thought-provoking Q&A session after each topic.

Tom Russell, Managing Director of G3 said of the event: *"It was a genuine privilege to hear a group of exceptional people debate these critical issues frankly but without rancour."*

Peter Mantas, Partner and Head of Dispute Resolution at Fasken Martineau LLP also commented: *"To hear eminent speakers debate controversial international legal issues in a respectful, engaging and intelligent manner was an unexpected treat."*

The event highlighted the risk of a global retreat from the observance of the rule of international law, and the increasing prioritisation of national interests. Whether the rules-based system will adapt to maintain international order remains to be seen. The full event can be viewed [here](#).