

Maastricht Principles on the Human Rights of Future Generations

Launch event parallel to the High-Level Political Forum in New York

13 July 2023, 3:30 – 5:00 PM (EDT)

Tillman Chapel — Church Center for the United Nations

United Nations Plaza (corner of 44th Street and First Avenue), New York City

Already in the 1970s and 1980s, there was a growing understanding that a "business as usual" model was exposing the Earth, present generations (particularly children and youth) as well future generations. In recent times, these threats have multiplied. They include the triple environmental crisis of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss; the exceeding of "planetary boundaries" through unsustainable patterns of production and consumption; global health threats such as the Covid-19 pandemic; inadequately controlled and regulated new technologies; the scourge of war and the deployment of weapons of mass destruction, global conflict and the outbreak of war; and the erosion of long-established norms of democratic governance and civil and political rights in many countries. These and a range of other developments are posing profound threats to the ability of future generations to enjoy all internationally recognized human rights.

Despite the gravity of the human rights threats faced by future generations and a rapidly evolving scholarship on this subject, there has not been enough attention to the human rights of future generations within the UN and other multilateral fora. The time was thus ripe to build on three prior Maastricht initiatives that made major contributions to the development of human rights law: The Limburg Principles on the Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1986); the Maastricht Guidelines on Violations of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1997); and the Maastricht Principles on Extraterritorial Obligations of States in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2011). The fourth Maastricht project thus focuses on addressing the major gap in human rights protection – the human rights of future generations.

The Maastricht Principles, adopted on February 3, 2023, seek both to consolidate and develop existing human rights standards to enhance the protection and fulfillment of the human rights of future generations. They provide a valuable guide to ensure that any action to strengthen solidarity with future generations is in line with international human rights law. It is hoped that the Principles will influence national, regional, and international governance processes, decision-making, standard-setting, and jurisprudence, as well as promote social mobilization to advance the human rights of future generations. Their legal foundations can be found in international instruments, national legislative frameworks, and the Indigenous Peoples' laws.

Human rights experts will present the motivation, the main debates and processes that led to their adoption, and key themes in the Principles. They will discuss with States representatives opportunities to better protect these human rights, including in the context of UN processes, such as the ongoing advisory proceedings at the ICJ concerning human rights and intergenerational equity in the context of climate or the preparation of the Summit of the Future to be convened by the UN Secretary-General in 2024.