

CONCEPT NOTE

48TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON OCEANS LAW & POLICY

Developing World Approaches to Ocean Governance:
Perspectives from the Indian Ocean Rim

Date: 9 to 12 September 2025

Place: New Delhi, India

More information :
<https://colp.world/>

EVENT INFORMATION

Background

In 2025, Gujarat Maritime University is honored to host the 48th Conference on Oceans Law and Policy (COLP48), conducted with the Stockton Center for International Law at the U.S. Naval War College and the World Maritime University - Sasakawa Global Ocean Institute (WMU-GOI). This year's event will be held at Ashok Hotel in New Delhi. The theme is "Developing World Approaches to Ocean Governance: Perspectives from the Indian Ocean Rim." With this focus, we seek to honour the regional contributions to oceans law and policy and the development of the law of the sea and ocean governance, while assessing current challenges and opportunities for the Indian Ocean region. The findings from selected presentations will be published in an edited, open-access volume by the same title with the COLP series with Brill - Martinus Nijhoff.

The annual Conference on Oceans Law & Policy (COLP) began at University of Virginia School of Law decades ago as a forum to promote

interdisciplinary interaction with ocean-related legal and public policy issues at all levels, addressing international, national, regional, and State concerns. In 2021 it was transferred to the Stockton Center for International Law at the U.S. Naval War College. Throughout nearly four decades, COLP has been an influential venue to shape the progressive development of oceans law and policy, the international law of the sea, and oceans governance. Recent conferences include Ocean Governance in the South Pacific and Latin America (2024) hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Lima, Peru, Safe, Secure, and Sustainable Shipping (2023) hosted by the Ankara National Center for the Sea and Maritime Law in Istanbul, Türkiye, UNCLOS at 40 (2022) hosted by the Maritime Institute of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia,, and Peaceful Maritime Engagement in East Asia and the Pacific Region (2021) hosted by the Japan Institute of International Affairs and Sasakawa Peace Foundation in Tokyo, Japan,, among others.

"Developing World Approaches to Ocean Governance: Perspectives from the Indian Ocean Rim."



COLP48 Objective

The primary aim of the 48th Conference on Ocean Law and Policy (COLP48) is to facilitate scholarly discussion and exchange of perspectives on the maritime challenges and opportunities within the Indian Ocean Region, with a focus on recent developments in ocean governance and the law of the sea to advance meaningful and tangible policy. The conference seeks to contribute to the academic and policy discourse by enhancing the capacity of policymakers and identifying new avenues for research. These include:



Disseminate knowledge regarding contemporary developments in ocean governance and the law of the sea to policymakers, scholars, marine scientists, and other relevant stakeholders.



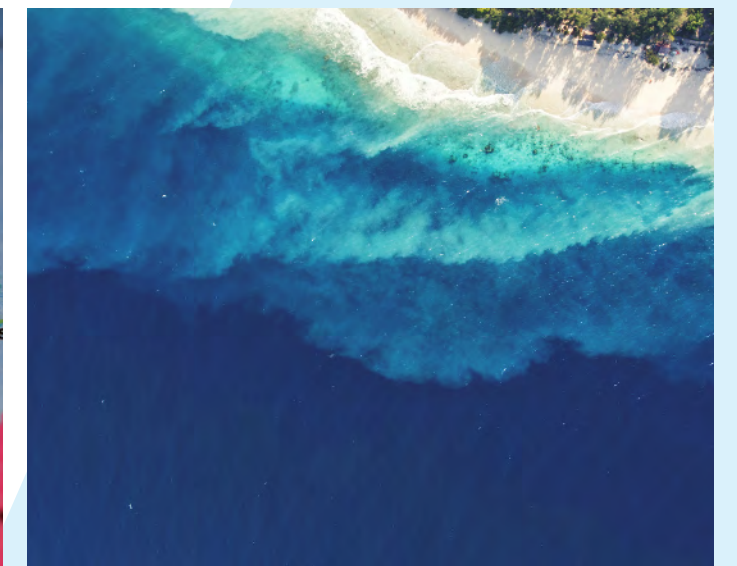
Enhance expertise in ocean law and policy among Indian Ocean states and stakeholders to support informed decision-making in ocean governance, particularly in addressing regional maritime issues.



Identify opportunities for enhanced cooperation and the establishment of partnerships to foster collaborative initiatives.



Propose new areas for interdisciplinary research in ocean law and policy, with relevance to the Indian Ocean Region and broader global contexts.



Date, Format & Structure, and Topics to be Addressed



DATE & LOCATION

The 48th Annual Conference on Oceans Law & Policy (COLP48) will be held 9 to 12 September 2024 at the Ashok Hotel, including a welcome reception, 2-days of the technical conference, and a post-conference cultural tour.



FORMAT & STRUCTURE

Participants may join either onsite or online. The working language of the conference is English. Keynote addresses will set the stage for deeper exploration of selected topics, which will be examined through focused panel discussions followed by Q&A. The programme will combine plenary and parallel sessions for the panel discussions. Each session will have a designated rapporteur to ensure clear documentation and continuity.

The conference structure is expected to be as follows:

Day	Activity
09th September (evening)	Welcome Ceremony
10th September	1st Technical Conference Day
11th September	2nd Technical Conference Day
12th September	Field Trip (optional)



TOPICS FOR PANEL DISCUSSIONS

The organizing team identified the following topics for the conference:

I. PLENARY SESSION 1: TACKLING THE TRIPLE PLANETARY CRISIS: BIODIVERSITY LOSS, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND POLLUTION

The ocean is both a reservoir of life and a witness to its decline. Coral reefs in Palk Bay, the Olive Ridley Corridor in the Bay of Bengal, the Upwelling Zone of the Sumatra-Java Coast, the Mascarene Plateau, the Central Indian Ocean Basin, and the Mozambique Channel, among other marine ecosystems, have experienced significant declines from their pristine states, worsened by human activities and climate change. The influx of plastic waste, estimated at 15 million tons annually, highlights the severity of marine pollution. In the Indian Ocean Region, efforts like those under the Nairobi Convention seek to address these issues by improving water quality and managing river flows, stressing the importance of integrated strategies that tackle the interconnected crises of biodiversity loss, climate instability, and pollution. From coral bleaching and mangrove degradation to warming currents and plastic gyres, the Indian Ocean region is already suffering. This session aims to explore holistic strategies, guided by science, to confront these converging threats, including legal innovations, traditional ecological knowledge, and ecosystem-based approaches.

II. PARALLEL SESSION 2: CRITICAL LAW OF THE SEA CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN IOR: Special interest of SIDS in the Indian Ocean Region | International Trade and Shipping

As climate pressures grow and geopolitical interests align in the Indian Ocean, the parallel segment of this session will examine the unique vulnerabilities and strategic priorities of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) that need focused attention. These states face disproportionate risks, such as rising sea levels, resource insecurity, and external economic shocks, often without equal influence in global decision-making. The parallel session will discuss how the specific needs and capacities of Indian Ocean SIDS can influence ocean governance structures, enhance regional cooperation, and promote climate resilience, a blue economy, and sovereign power in international forums.

Building on the perspectives of Small Island Developing States, whose economies and security are deeply entwined with maritime trade, we now turn to the broader dynamics of the Indian Ocean Region, where the same sea lanes that sustain island nations also anchor the flow of global commerce. Commanding some of the world's busiest sea lanes and most critical chokepoints, the Indian Ocean Region is the connective tissue of global commerce. Here, the movement of oil, goods, and capital converges with the forces of geopolitics, technological change, and the accelerating impacts of climate disruption. Rising sea levels, extreme weather, and the decarbonization of shipping are no longer peripheral concerns but strategic variables shaping trade flows and maritime security alike. The panel on International Trade and Shipping will examine how these dynamics are redefining resilience and competitiveness in the region, and how cooperation can secure both economic vitality and climate-smart stability across this indispensable maritime crossroads.

III. PARALLEL SESSION 3: INTERESTS AND INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN:

Regime Interactions & Role of Non-State Actors | Offshore Oil, Gas and Critical Infrastructure

As multilateralism diversifies and global regimes increasingly overlap, the regional aspect of ocean governance has gained greater importance. The interaction between international legal frameworks, regional instruments, and informal cooperative mechanisms requires careful consideration. The role of non-state actors, from indigenous communities and civil society organizations to philanthropic initiatives and private companies, has become more influential. One part of this session invites views on how regional governance can align diverse norms and institutions, empower new stakeholders, and ensure governance remains flexible, inclusive, and fair.

Strategic mineral resources are found on the seabed, as are the arteries of modern civilization: oil, gas, undersea cables, pipelines, and installations that sustain economies and connect societies. As offshore development speeds up, protecting critical infrastructure becomes directly linked to broader concerns of security and sustainability. What measures are in place to safeguard these assets? How can countries handle competing claims, minimize ecological risks, and balance development with vulnerability?

The discussions in this session will explore the legal framework under UNCLOS, the evolving work of the International Seabed Authority, the need for regional safeguards, and the complex legal, geopolitical, and environmental landscape of seabed mineral mining, offshore energy and infrastructure.

IV. PARALLEL SESSION 4: EMERGING REGULATORY ISSUES IN THE REGION:

Ratification and Implementation of the BBNJ Agreement | Autonomous Shipping

The Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) closes one of the last great gaps in ocean governance by bringing the high seas and their biodiversity under a clear legal regime. For States in the region, ratification is not symbolic, rather a legal fact that will urge binding obligations. Implementation means embedding its rules into municipal laws, building the capacity to enforce them, and taking a seat at the table where the use and protection of areas beyond national jurisdiction will be decided.

The horizon now includes autonomous shipping, a sector set to change how goods are transported across oceans. As uncrewed vessels start to navigate international waters, regulatory frameworks must adapt quickly to address operational, liability, and security issues. This session will highlight the latest advancements in marine technology and examine how science-policy interfaces can guide responsible innovation that benefits both people and the environment.

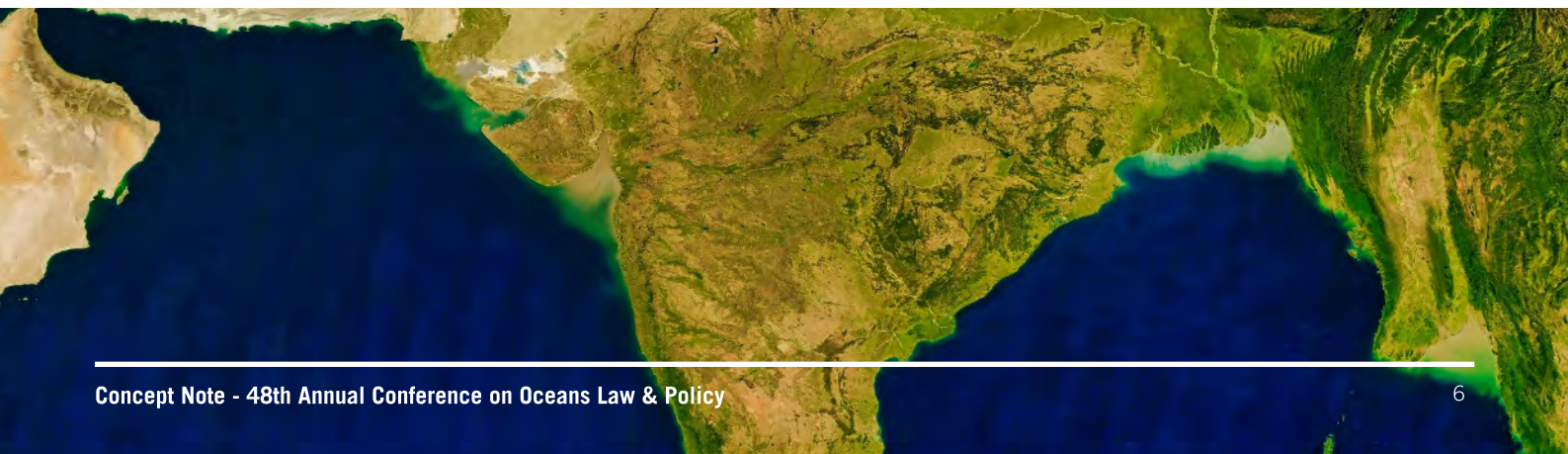
V. PARALLEL SESSION 5: MINERAL RESOURCES AND MARITIME SECURITY IN THE IOR:

Seabed Mineral Mining | Maritime Security

The seabed contains significant mineral resources. In areas beyond national jurisdiction, these resources are governed by the International Seabed Authority and are designated as the common heritage of mankind, placing obligations on states to ensure their exploration and exploitation are carried out for the benefit of all.

However, these resources require careful consideration. As nations explore seabed mining, within and beyond national jurisdiction, the region struggles to balance economic goals with the need for environmental protection. The environmental, legal, and ethical aspects of deep-sea mineral mining and offshore drilling raise urgent questions. How can development be aligned with the precautionary principle? What frameworks are in place to ensure transparency, sustainability, and benefit-sharing?

The Indian Ocean serves as a vital route for global trade, featuring key chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca. However, these waters face threats from piracy, trafficking, environmental damage, and cross-border risks. This discussion explores the maritime regulatory framework (IMO, SOLAS, MARPOL), the structure of the blue trade economy, and the strategic needs of maritime security. Special focus will be on how regional cooperation and information sharing can promote both freedom of navigation and environmental protection. Maritime security issues, such as piracy, attacks on commercial shipping, human trafficking, and migrant smuggling require coordinated actions. India's Operation Sankalp and the creation of the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) show efforts to improve maritime awareness and protect sea lanes crucial for global trade. The question is not whether coordination is needed but whether it can be maintained in a region as diverse and geopolitically complex as the Indian Ocean. This session encourages participants to go beyond theoretical norms and face the operational challenges of safeguarding a sea that benefits everyone, regionally and worldwide.





VI. PARALLEL SESSION 6: LEGAL FRONTIERS: NEW TECHNOLOGIES, FISHERIES AND FOOD SECURITY:

Emerging Technologies and Artificial Intelligence in the Ocean | Fisheries and Food Security

The rise of ocean-focused innovation, from autonomous underwater vehicles and real-time satellite surveillance to AI-powered fisheries management and deep-sea robotics, holds transformative potential. However, progress brings ethical and legal concerns, including data governance and ecological impact. Projects like Meta's Waterworth undersea cable aim to improve digital connectivity across the Indian Ocean, enabling data collection and real-time monitoring. These innovations offer promise for enhancing maritime safety, environmental monitoring, and sustainable resource management, as long as they are implemented thoughtfully and fairly.

Fish are more than just commodities or products to be harvested. They represent culture, livelihoods, nourishment, and are the lifeblood of many coastal communities in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). However, overfishing, habitat destruction, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing in IOR threaten this vital resource. In the Arabian Sea, over 50% of fish stocks are fully exploited, with 25% overexploited. Small-scale fisheries, especially within the Large Marine Ecosystems of the Arabian Sea, are essential for food security, emphasising the need for sustainable management and regional cooperation to protect the interest of the coastal communities. The risk of food insecurity is on the rise, as fish stocks decline due to overfishing, habitat loss, and IUU fishing, particularly for coastal communities and the small island developing states in the region. Just as dwindling fish stocks reveal flaws in current ocean governance, the BBNJ Agreement stands as a vital update to the ocean rulebook. While it represents a breakthrough for ocean governance, its success depends on quick and effective implementation.

This session will explore regional fisheries management, ecosystem-based conservation, and equity in access to marine resources, while seeking to uphold the right to food and the dignity of fishing-dependent communities. Similarly, it will also examine the path from ratification to action: How can states align domestic laws, mobilize capacity, and integrate the BBNJ Agreement with existing regimes? What mechanisms will ensure that benefits are shared fairly and commitments are upheld beyond the negotiating table?

VII. PLENARY SESSION 7: MARITIME BOUNDARIES AND INTERNATIONAL DISPUTE SETTLEMENT

Lines drawn in the sea are never mere cartographic exercises. They determine sovereignty, resource rights, and strategic advantage. In the Indian Ocean Region, maritime boundary delimitation, overlapping claims to exclusive economic zones, and access to living and non-living resources have generated disputes that test the effectiveness of international law. Landmark proceedings, such as the Bay of Bengal Maritime Boundary Arbitration between Bangladesh and India and the ITLOS Judgment in Bangladesh/Myanmar, demonstrate that peaceful adjudication under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea can resolve complex jurisdictional conflicts while preserving relations between neighbours. Yet unresolved tensions persist, underscoring the need for effective recourse to dispute-settlement bodies, whether the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, Annex VII arbitral tribunals, or joint development arrangements. This session will interrogate how these mechanisms can be deployed proactively to uphold the rule of law, secure equitable access to resources, and ensure stability in one of the world's most strategically contested maritime theatres.

VIII. PLENARY SESSION 8: FUTURE OCEAN GOVERNANCE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

The concluding session will explore the evolving framework of ocean governance in the Indian Ocean Region, where competing regimes, institutions, and norms intersect. As states assert strategic claims, the roles of non-state actors such as the scientific community, civil society, and indigenous groups have become increasingly important. How can rights-based approaches best temper sovereign ambitions and bring accountability to marine resource use, environmental protection, and maritime security? The rise of new ocean technologies raises urgent legal and ethical questions. This is not just about jurisdictional issues but about developing a progressive vision for shared stewardship. What will governance look like in 2050? Will multilateralism dominate, or will fragmented control and technological dominance shape the seascape? Using this perspective, the session encourages participants to address the legal, political, and moral factors influencing the future of one of the world's most contested and significant maritime regions.



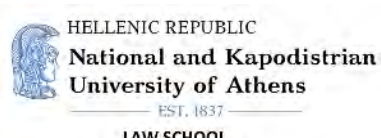
The Ashok Hotel - New Delhi, India

Partners and Sponsors

Organization of the conference will require the valuable support of strategic partners as well as sponsors. The 48th Conference on Oceans Law and Policy is hosted by Gujarat Maritime University, one of the leading institutions for oceans management and governance in Asia, and in partnership with the Stockton Center for International Law at the United States Naval War College and the World Maritime University - Sasakawa Global Ocean Institute, a fusion center for global oceans capacity building and thought leadership.

The COLP series of conferences are successful only because of the generous support and collaboration and contributions of supporting institutions. This year, associate sponsors include:

- Ankara National Center for the Sea and Maritime Law (DEHUKAM)
- Korea Maritime Institute (KMI)
- Japan Institute for International Affairs (JIIA)
- Centre for Climate Change Law and Policy (CLIMA), University of Copenhagen
- IMO International Maritime Law Institute (IMLI)
- UiT/Norwegian Center for the Law of the Sea (NCLOS)
- Centre for International Law (CIL), National University of Singapore (NUS)
- Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India
- National Maritime Foundation
- National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
- Athens PIL Center



Location (venue) and Weather



The conference will be held at the Ashok Hotel in New Delhi, India. We anticipate about 300 in-person participants. The conference will be streamed for remote participants.



Considering the conference may be held during September, the expected weather is 33°C in the peak of the afternoon, while nights are cooler with an average low of 24°C.

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The World Maritime University was established in 1983 within the framework of the International Maritime Organization, a specialized agency of the United Nations.