

Halifax IHL conference 2026

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AT SEA

DATE: MARCH 9TH, 2026

TIME: 3:00 PM - 5:35 PM AT

LOCATION: SCHULICH FACULTY OF LAW, DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY
WELDON LAW BUILDING, ROOM W104.

Agenda

3:00 pm	Welcome and Coffee	
3:10pm	Opening Remarks	Jason Bowles Conover Dalhousie University
3:20 pm	Intro to International Humanitarian Law	Fanny Dagenais-Dion Canadian Red Cross
3:40pm	The Law of Armed Conflict & Humanity at Sea: Can Drones Meet Search-and-Collection Duties in Modern Naval Armed Conflicts	Ret'd MGen Blaise Cathcart Canadian Armed Forces (CAF)
4:00pm	Break	
4:20pm	The war crime of attacking humanitarian assistance missions, the Gaza flotilla campaigns and the responsibility to protect	Dr. Heidi Matthews York University
4:40pm	Technology, Convoys, and The Law of Naval Warfare (Prof. Rob McLaughlin)	Prof. Rob McLaughlin University of Wollongong
5:00pm	Q&A Period	Moderator: Jason Bowles Conover
5:30pm	Concluding Remarks	

SNACKS AND REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED.



Canadian
Red Cross

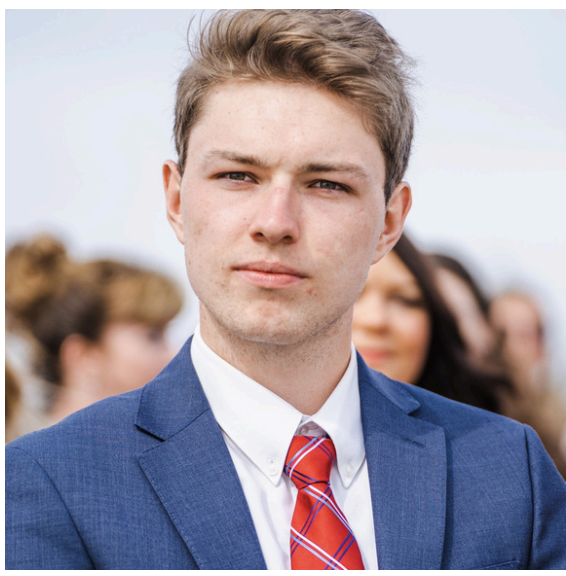
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John E. Read International Law Society
Schulich School of Law at Dalhousie University



DALHOUSIE
UNIVERSITY



Jason Bowles Conover, President of the John E. Read International Law Society at Weldon, Dalhousie University (Moderator)

Born and raised in Toronto, Jason studied history at Queen's University and is now in his final term of law school at Dalhousie. In the summer of 1L, Jason studied Public International Law in Berlin, Germany through the Queen's Castle Program. Jason is the President of the John E. Read International Law Society at Weldon and he is very excited to moderate this conference.



Fanny Dagenais-Dion, Senior Specialist, IHL, Canadian Red Cross

Fanny Dagenais-Dion works as a Legal Advisor and Senior Specialist in International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in the Canadian Red Cross's IHL Unit. As part of her role, she contributes to the dissemination of IHL by organizing and delivering conferences and trainings to diverse audiences and works with national and international partners on its development and implementation. Fanny holds a master's degree in international law from the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) and is a member of the Quebec Law Society. Prior to joining the Red Cross, Fanny worked in Guatemala with a local human rights organization, representing victims of armed conflict.



Major-General (Retired) Blaise Cathcart, OMM, CD, KC, Office of the Judge Advocate General, Canadian Armed Forces

Former Judge Advocate General of the Canadian Armed Forces Major-General (ret'd) Blaise Cathcart served as the Judge Advocate General (JAG) of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) from 2010-2017. He joined the CAF as a legal officer with the Office of the Judge Advocate General in 1990. Serving over 7 seven years as the JAG, he directly advised the Government of Canada, the Governor-General of Canada, the Minister of National Defence, the Chief of the Defence Staff and the Deputy Minister of National Defence on matters of military law and was the superintendent of the administration of the Canadian military justice system.

He served in a number of positions within the Office of the JAG and has a breadth of knowledge and experience, particularly in the areas of operational and international law. He has provided legal advice on issues arising from domestic and international operations and was intimately involved in providing legal advice at the strategic and operational levels during the planning and execution of the CAF participation in the Campaign Against Terrorism in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. He has participated in many CAF missions as a legal advisor, including as legal advisor to Commander Canadian Contingent United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) and the United Nation Peace Forces (UNPF) in the former Yugoslavia in 1994 and 1995, and as the Senior Legal Advisor to the Commander Canadian Task Force Bosnia-Herzegovina (SFOR) from February to September 2000. He was the legal advisor to Joint Task Force 2, the Canadian Armed Forces Counter-Terrorism/Special Operations unit from 1997-2000.

Blaise is a proud graduate of Dalhousie Law School (Bachelor of Laws) and post-graduate studies (Master of Laws) in Public International Law at the London School of Economics and Political Science, London, England (2004) where he graduated with "Distinction".

He was awarded the prestigious appointment of King's Counsel (KC), in 2013, in the Province of Nova Scotia, Canada. He was also awarded a distinguished Honourary Doctor of Civil Law, in 2014, from Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Blaise retired from the CAF on 11 September 2017. He and his spouse, Valerie Jones, are excited to have taken up permanent residence in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Blaise is currently an Adjunct Professor of Law at the University of Ottawa Law School (Common Law) and a former Senior Fellow for the Leiber Institute for Law and Land Warfare at the United States West Point Military Academy



Dr. Heidi Matthews, Assistant Professor, Osgoode Hall Law School

Dr. Heidi Matthews is Assistant Professor at Osgoode Hall Law School, where she co-directs the International and Transnational Law Intensive Program. She researches and teaches in international criminal law, the law of war, and sexuality and the law. Her work theorizes contemporary shifts in the practice and discourse of the global legal regulation of political violence, with particular attention to gender and political theory. She is currently leading two major research grants studying colonial genocide. She is an advisor to the Legal Centre for Palestine, and provides legal support to the Canadian Boat to Gaza, and the Global Sumud Flotilla.



Prof. Rob McLaughlin – Professor of International Law, University of Wollongong

Rob McLaughlin is Professor of International Law at the University of Wollongong, Honorary Professor of Law at the Australian National University, and a non-resident Senior Fellow at the US Naval War College's Stockton Centre for International Law. He previously served in the Royal Australian Navy as a warfare officer and a legal officer, achieving the rank of Commodore, and as the Head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime's Global Maritime Crime Programme.