

Carrying the Promise Forward

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It feels fitting to begin this concluding reflection with gratitude for the women whose vision and labor brought this symposium on Crimes Against Humanity to life.

Professor Leila N. Sadat has spent more than a decade shepherding this Initiative from an ambitious idea into a mammoth project in treaty making and global norm building.

Colonel Brenda J. Hollis has devoted her entire life to the pursuit of global peace and justice, carrying the burden of atrocity narratives into courtrooms so that survivors would not have to carry them alone.

Professor Melissa J. Durkee, our most generous sponsor, believed in us early and fully, and her trust quite literally made this symposium possible.

And to the extraordinary women on our research team, with whom I have the privilege and honor to panic over this law journey with: working alongside you has been the highlight of my law school career.

I dwell on these women not simply out of sentiment, but because the story of Crimes Against Humanity has too often been told without sufficient attention to those who do the daily, patient work of building institutions and shaping doctrine. Centering their contributions is a reminder that international law is not an abstraction but a human project, crafted by people who bring their own histories, commitments, and courage to the table. In the same way that Crimes Against Humanity seeks to give visibility and voice to those who were meant to disappear, highlighting the women who carried this work forward is a quiet act of reordering whose work we see and remember.

Of course, this symposium was not the work of women alone. I offer my most sincere thanks to all of our panelists, the extraordinary legal scholars, each of whom gave their talent, time, and energy to advance international law, continuing its status as an undeniable reality rooted in legal justice. Res. 79/122 could not have come to fruition without every single one of you. The conversations in these pages reflect the collective labor of many people who worked just as hard, often behind the scenes, to ensure that these ideas could be shared, challenged, and preserved.

WHY DOES THIS DISCUSSION MATTER NOW?

Writing this reflection in November 2025, I believe the timing could not be more appropriate. We are currently finding ourselves in a world that

insists that it has learned the lessons of the twentieth century, even as images of mass displacement, systematic persecution, and organized cruelty appear with unsettling regularity. The vocabulary of “Crimes Against Humanity” was born from attempts to describe horrors that defied ordinary legal categories. Yet the passage of time has made that vocabulary more familiar. That familiarity is dangerous. It tempts us to treat atrocity as a recurring feature of the international landscape rather than as a radical affront to the idea that law can protect *human dignity*.

This symposium asks us to resist that temptation. It takes place at a moment when existing institutions are strained and sometimes paralyzed, when political actors invoke sovereignty as a shield against scrutiny, and when global attention moves quickly from one crisis to the next. Against that backdrop, the project of clarifying, codifying, and implementing Crimes Against Humanity is not purely an academic exercise. It is an attempt to provide a durable legal framework that can outlast news cycles, partisan shifts, and changing administrations.

At the same time, there is space here for a gentle acknowledgment that law alone cannot redeem the world. Legal frameworks can name and condemn, they can deter at the margins, and they can sometimes deliver accountability. They cannot by themselves repair the lives that crimes against humanity shatter. Perhaps the modest wisdom of this symposium is to insist that law should try, nevertheless. Even if the effort is incomplete and even if politics intrudes, the attempt to articulate clear rules, to insist on responsibilities, and to document violations is an act of collective memory and a form of resistance to forgetting.

Finally, for those of us who are students and early career scholars, the symposium offers something else: a glimpse of the community we are entering. To watch seasoned practitioners and leading scholars debate in good faith about doctrine and design is to see how international law is continuously made, unmade, and remade. It is a reminder that Crimes Against Humanity is not a finished monument but an ongoing conversation, one that needs new voices, new experiences, and new imaginations.

This conclusion essay cannot do justice to the richness of the discussion that unfolded in our lecture halls and in these pages. What it can do is extend an invitation. As you read this symposium issue, I hope you will see not only an academic record of a conference, but also an open door into a larger effort to ensure that the phrase “Crimes Against Humanity” remains a promise that such crimes will not be met with silence. If this issue encourages even a few readers to carry that promise into their own work in courts, classrooms, organizations, or communities, then the long hours, late nights, and shared dreams that animated this project will have been well spent.

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Letter from Birmingham Jail (1963)