

The Third Anthropocene Lecture

Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, Berliner Str. 130, 14467 Potsdam
November 29, 2016, 4-6 pm, Ballroom

The Anthropocene and International Law: The New Meaning of Change

Davor Vidas

“Stability is deeply embedded in the fundamentals of international law, where it operates at two levels. The one level concerns the deliberate objective of working towards legally guaranteed stability in international relations, a field prone to frequent political change. The other level of stability is implied: it is the assumption, based on human experience so far, of the generally stable circumstances of the late Holocene. With the onset of the Anthropocene and the changes introduced in that underlying element of stability comes the potential for new and unprecedented types of tension in inter-state relations. A fundamental change of the context in which international law operates – with the challenges increasingly recognized as being the consequences of natural, not only political, changes – could spill over to and exacerbate existing tensions between the territorial integrity of states and territorial claims, coupled with the fact of immense geopolitical differences, on the one hand, and sovereign equality of states as the founding postulate of international law, on the other. The international legal order will always be in search of stability and, ultimately, solutions to facilitate peace and prevent conflict. However, a core challenge emerges: the process of convergence between the Holocene and Anthropocene conditions will require response or transformation, including the development of new legal axioms, in accordance with the needs of the new situation – rather than responding by analogy or precedent based on the earlier situation, no longer valid. This lecture takes up some aspects of Anthropocene changes that began to arise on the horizon of international law – in particular, as regards the international law of the sea and ocean governance.” (Davor Vidas)

Davor Vidas is Research Professor in International Law and Director of the Law of the Sea Programme at the Fridtjof Nansen Institute, Norway. He is the Chair of the Committee on International Law and Sea Level Rise at the International Law Association (2012–2018), and a member of the Anthropocene Working Group of the International Commission on Stratigraphy since 2009. He has served as principal investigator in many international law and interdisciplinary research pro-

jects, most recently in the project 'Climate Change and Sea Level Rise in the Anthropocene: Challenges for International Law in the 21st Century' (Research Council of Norway, 2014–2018). Professor Vidas is the editor-in-chief of the newly launched journal monograph series, Brill Research Perspectives in the Law of the Sea.

