Background Guide

### International Court of Justice **Right to Strike**



# JACKRABBIT MUN VII L.B. POLY - MAY 24th, 2025

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## CO-HEAD CHAIR LETTERS

### Hello Honorable Delegates!

My name is Alivia Seard, and I am thrilled to be one of your head chairs for this committee! I can't wait to hear your deliberation and witness your collaboration.

As Co-President of our MUN program here at Long Beach Poly High, I genuinely feel that Model UN has been an invaluable experience. I enjoy the debate and love learning about international relations and current events, but what I treasure most about the program is the community that, I believe, is unlike any other. It brings me great joy to see you all becoming a part of that community for JackrabbitMUN VII!

Beyond the pantsuits and placards of MUN, I am Co-President of Poly's Creative Writing Club and a member of Female Leadership Academy and book club. I additionally just finished my internship at the Office of the Mayor of Long Beach, which was a wonderful experience. I love reading, writing, organizing, dancing and baking, and you can often find me watching a political drama. In March of 2024, I also had the honor of being a youth delegate for Girl Scouts USA to the 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York where I was able to take my MUN knowledge and apply it in the real world.

The topic for this room is fascinating and involves the consideration of not only the rights of employees but the precedent set for the ILO and international labor law. I have complete faith that you all will adjudicate with the wisdom and cognizance that this case requires. I wish you the best of luck!

Sincerely, Alivia Seard International Court of Justice | Co-Head Chair <u>alivianseard12@gmail.com</u>



## **CO-HEAD CHAIR LETTERS**

### Hello Honorable Delegates!

I am very excited to be one of the head chairs in this fascinating committee. I may be considered fairly new to MUN as a freshman, and at any rate may not be as experienced as many other delegates, but I am excited to learn and hear all of the insights that delegates have to offer.

Aside from MUN, I can be found in many activities, including mixed martial arts, and golf. I love fashion and films of every kind, I love to read and one of my less useful ambitions is to see every movie ever made, (even the bad ones). Though I know I'll never get there. Aside from being a hardcore fan of the British television show, Doctor Who, I am, if you weren't getting that vibe already, a huge geek as well.

At Poly, I am also a member of the Female Leadership Academy, UNICEF, Poly Students for Equity, Inclusion, and Change, FIDM Fashion club, am participating in our school musical's ensemble, and of course MUN, as well as playing on our JV golf team. I admit I am not the most impressive student but I am very excited to see my first JackrabbitMUN.

It will be a great joy to have a lively committee where we discuss the rights of employees, employers, and labor organizations. I am also excited to see many talented delegates sharing different viewpoints. Good luck and have fun!

Sincerely, Eliza Floto International Court of Justice | Co-Head Chair <u>efloto42@gmail.com</u>



## CASE BRIEF GUIDELINES

- Case Briefs are due at 11:59 PM on **Sunday, May 18th**.
- Delegates **must** submit case briefs to be eligible for **research AND committee awards**.
- Case Briefs will be submitted through a Google Form:
  - https://forms.gle/jkcnWafGFAL6hJayo
- At the top of each brief, include your first and last name, school name, and appropriate committee.

Judge First Last School Name ICJ

- Briefs should be submitted as a PDF file
  - Please name the file [Committee\_Name]
    - Ex. ICJ\_Hermione Granger
- Briefs should be minimum 1-2 pages in length with an additional Works Cited page in MLA format
- Briefs should be single-spaced in Times New Roman 12 pt. font and include no pictures or graphics
- Please include the following sections for each committee topic:
  - Background & Legal Precedent
  - Application (centered on the above Legal Precedent, what is your ruling, and why?)
  - Implications

If you have any questions or concerns, please email one of your chairs.



## TOPIC SYNOPSIS

Is the right to strike protected under international law? If so, to what extent? These are the questions posed to Judges of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague and at JackrabbitMUN VII. For more than a decade, there has been disagreement on whether or not the right to strike is guaranteed under the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention No. 87, an argument that has implications for labor conditions, supply chains, and collective bargaining. This case seeks legal arbitration to end this decade-plus of dysfunction that has plagued the ILO and restore the organization to its usual operations. Without an effective ILO, there is no way for countries that restrict worker organizing or stifle employer agency to face international consequences. In response to walkouts and unprecedented legal action, Judges in this committee will interpret international law to form an advisory opinion deciding if "workplace democracy" will be preserved and how labor law standards will be applied. It is up to the honorable Judges to determine the future of workers' rights across the globe.



## COMMITTEE DESCRIPTION

### ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

"The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations (UN). It was established in June 1945 by the Charter of the United Nations and began work in April 1946.

The seat of the Court is at the Peace Palace in The Hague (Netherlands). Of the six principal organs of the United Nations, it is the only one not located in New York.

The Court's role is to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States and to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies.

The Court is composed of 15 judges, who are elected for terms of office of nine years by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council. It is assisted by a Registry, its administrative organ."

### NOTES ON COMMITTEE PROCEDURE

- 1. For the purposes of this committee at JackrabbitMUN VII, each delegate will represent their own views on "the right to strike" as a Judge unaffiliated with any country or country policy.
- 2. This is a no-tech committee.
- 3. While there will be no Speaker's List, Judges should all be prepared with a 90-120 second speech that will be given at the beginning of committee during a Round Robin. In the absence of a Speaker's List, committee will default to a Gentleman's Unmod if and when all motions fail.



4. Rather than drafting resolutions, Judges will write and submit "findings" to the dais throughout committee. Findings will pertain to separate subtopics of the case, similar to directives in a Crisis committee, but will accumulate into one Advisory Opinion to be voted on at the end of committee.

The procedure to submit a finding to the dais is as follows:

- 1. Upon writing a finding, either individually or with fellow Judges, a delegate may submit their finding to the dais. No vote is necessary for submission.
- 2. Once reviewed by the dais, Judges may motion to formally introduce their finding, much like motioning to present draft resolutions in General Assembly committees.
- 3. If introduced, Judges will proceed to debate the finding until they are prepared to vote.
- 4. Judges will vote in favor or against the finding. Note: the presidents will not entertain dividing the question in this committee. If delegates disagree with one fundamental section of the finding, they are encouraged to informally come to an agreement prior to the vote or submit a Dissenting Opinion after the vote.
- 5. If a majority of Judges vote in favor of the finding, it will become the Majority Opinion.
  - a. If a majority of Judges do not vote in favor of the finding, the authors are encouraged to submit their finding as a Dissenting Opinion after a finding on the same topic passes to which they disagree.
  - b. If a delegate is not a part of the Majority, they may choose to write a Dissenting Opinion and submit it to the dais without a vote.



- c. If a delegate is in agreement with the Majority Opinion but wishes to express their own reasoning separate from that of the Majority, they may submit a Concurring Opinion to the dais without a vote.
- 6. At the conclusion of committee, Judges will vote on the collection of findings in its entirety, including any Dissenting and Concurring Opinions. If passed, the findings officially become the Court's Advisory Opinion.

### TERMS TO KNOW

**International Labor Organization (ILO)**: a UN body centered on labor rights and social justice.

**Tripartite**: the three-party structure by which the ILO is organized; a composition of workers, employers, and government representatives who each have a voice in the ILO.

**Employers' Group**: one of the groups represented in the ILO's tripartite system; made of representatives of employers.

**Employees' Group**: one of the groups represented in the ILO's tripartite system; made of representatives of employees.

**Advisory Opinion**: one of two types of decisions the ICJ can issue. Used when specialized agencies and UN organs request an opinion from the Court; not applied to contentious cases between UN Member States.

**Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations** (**CEACR or "Committee of Experts"**): the sub-body of the ILO responsible for reviewing ILO Conventions, Protocols, and Recommendations. The CEACR aims to create technical and impartial evaluations of how international law functions within Member States.



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## BACKGROUND

### **HISTORY OF THE CASE**

In 2012, the 101st Session of the International Labor Conference was shaken by an unprecedented occurrence: Employers' representatives interrupted proceedings to express their belief that employees' right to strike is not protected under International Labor Organization (ILO) regulations, specifically the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, or Convention No. 87. Chaos followed. With the ILO Workers' Group and sympathetic bodies outraged and the Employers' Group resolute, the long-agreed-upon interpretation of international labor law was thrust into uncertainty.



International Labour

Despite years of attempts at reconciliation, the Employers' representatives refused to **Organization** participate in any form of discussions relating to the right to strike with the ILO. Clearly the

right to strike was a vital international principle that could only be clarified with an outside opinion.

The United Nations Charter, the founding UN document which establishes the entity's purposes, structures, and obligations, has a provision for such scenarios of conflict. Article 96 of the Charter states that an organ of the United Nations or a specialized agency approved by the General Assembly may request the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to give an advisory opinion on any legal question. Because representatives could not reach consensus within the ILO, they turned to the ICJ.



### THE INTERPRETATION OF CONVENTION NO. 87

The question posed to the ICJ: does Convention No. 87 protect workers and organizations' right to strike? Before the crisis within the ILO in 2012, the Organization's interpretation of the Convention was that strikes—including those directly related to working conditions, wages, and employment terms, as well as sympathy strikes supporting other lawful strikes—were protected. General strikes addressing broader socioeconomic issues were also protected when linked to the workers' professional and economic interests. However, certain strikes did face restrictions, such as purely political strikes, those in essential services where public safety is at risk, and strikes by specific public sector workers like police or military personnel. Additionally, strikes that do not involve legal guardrails, such as required notice periods or mediation processes, could have potentially been restricted.

According to the Employers in 2012, however, Convention No. 87 does not protect the right to strike at all. The crux of this group's argument lies in the ambiguous wording of Convention No. 87, where the right to strike is never explicitly stated. Instead, the Convention declares: "Workers' and employers' organizations shall have the right to draw up their constitutions and rules, to elect their representatives in full freedom, to organize their administration and activities and to formulate their programs. The public authorities shall refrain from any interference which would restrict this right or impede the lawful exercise thereof." In other words, the employers argue that Convention No. 87 only protects the right for employees to vote on their own rules without interference from public authorities.

The Workers, on the other hand, argue that the right to organize must be understood in the current context and interpreted freely, permitting the Committee of Experts to perform interpretative functions. While the Employers' representatives



believe that the drafters had no intention of including the right to strike within the Convention and that creating new interpretations is overstepping the role of the committee, Workers' representatives believe that the interpretation of the document maintains the protection of employees' rights.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RIGHT TO STRIKE

While the right to strike may not often be cited as a core liberty, proponents of protected striking express how the action is a fundamental human right. Three of the main arguments for the significance of the right to strike are as follows:

### 1. The ability to strike protects workers.

For decades, strikes have been used to address unsafe working conditions and increase low wages, protecting the interests, livelihoods, and wellbeing of workers.



Without the right to strike, these protections may not continue.

## 2. The ability to strike gives workers a necessary level of autonomy and power.

In many corporations, employees' power can

be limited, and they may not always be able to make their own decisions. Striking can be a way to limit complete control by employers and, more importantly, ensure that employees are not victims within their workplace.

### 3. If the right to strike is not protected, abuse will follow across the globe.

If the right to strike is not protected under international law, governments may allow corporations to harm their employees with impunity. If uniform protection under the law is the goal, the right to strike must be protected internationally.



### ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF LIMITING THE RIGHT TO STRIKE

While the aforementioned virtues of the protected strike were perceived to be largely understood, the renewed uncertainty within the ILO has generated significant debate about them. Much of the dissidence centers not only on whether the right to strike should be protected, however, but to what extent, considering either the explicit language or the original intent within Convention No. 87. The reasoning for limiting the right to strike to certain groups, methods, or strategies include:

### 1. Striking can disrupt daily operations.

Without regulation, employees can choose to strike at times and in sectors that negatively affect normal processes that those in the community, country, and beyond depend on.



### 2. Striking can lead to economic losses detrimental to employees and employers.

While a strike is occurring, normal operations may grind to a halt, stalling generation of profit that can harm companies and, in some cases, those who work for them.

## 3. International protection of the right to strike infringes on national sovereignty.

National governments are the direct form of oversight for corporations. If the right to strike is given general protection internationally, nations' power will be limited.



### THE GRAY AREA

While the breadth of the term "right to strike" is seen as a necessity by some, those who cite any of the above arguments believe that such blanket protection could create challenges in practice. Judges in this committee are encouraged to consider the following options for restricting the right to strike, either as viable solutions or as counterarguments.

### 1. Limiting Strikes within Civilian-Affecting Sectors

The purpose of a strike generally involves some degree of disruption of a particular corporation or sector, potentially encouraging improvement in working conditions, wages, and treatment by administration. Sometimes, however, this disruption has effects that ripple beyond a C–Suite. In healthcare, transport, and communications– areas that offer "essential services–" strikes may threaten the rights of citizens who depend on the functioning of these sectors. Should the ability to strike be limited for these groups to protect the "rights of ordinary citizens" (Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, 2005)?

### 2. Limiting Strikes for National Security

Just as striking within the health sector can have deadly consequences, so striking within the organizations pertaining to national security can cause significant harm. Employees striking within government have the potential to spur positive change, but does one possibility of improvement outweigh another possibility of danger?

### 3. Political Strikes

The right to strike is considered by its proponents a necessary tool to ensure that the workplace is safe and fair for employees. Yet, striking can also be used for a different purpose: to challenge governmental policy. The pre-2012 interpretation of



Convention No. 87 excluded entirely-political strikes from the pool of protected freedoms, but now this too can be reconsidered. Do strikes with an explicitly political aim warrant the same protection as strikes for better working conditions? Who would such a distinction benefit?

### 4. Sympathy Strikes

Another type of action, the sympathy strike, is similarly ambiguous in its



protection status. Strikes started in solidarity with others already striking, sympathy strikes can have significant impacts within countries, but also beyond national borders. Swedish IF Metall mechanics, for instance, went on strike

against Tesla in 2023; Finnish and Danish employees soon followed. Does such expansive collective action fall under the original rights outlined in Convention No. 87, or is such striking beyond the scope of the language?

### 5. Striking Restrictions and Prerequisites

What kind of action needs to take place for a strike to begin? In Spain, Estonia, Poland, and France, among others, strikes are not permitted unless attempts at negotiation have already occurred. Japan has a provision where a 30-day "cooling-off period" must have elapsed before the strike can begin (Cross Currents, n.d.). Germany restricts the right to strike to those who have been in a union for at least three months. Are any of these requirements a necessary condition to the right to strike?



### A NOTE ON CONTEXTUALIZING PERSPECTIVES

While understanding the reasons for and against protecting the right to strike in general is necessary to appreciate the perspectives within the ILO, the merit of striking is not the central question that the Court must address. Rather, Judges must interpret Convention No. 87 within the context of these arguments, recognizing the impact their decision will have on those who passionately advocate for each view. To foster engaging and substantive debate, delegates are advised to focus on the limitations on the right to strike rather than the importance (or lack thereof) of striking alone.



## INTERNATIONAL MODELS

### ALTERNATIVES TO CONVENTION NO. 87

While the strike interpretation in Convention No. 87 has set worldwide precedent– particularly due to the ILO's considerable reach with 187 Member States– other international documents have similarly attempted to address the issue. The International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), a 1966 United Nations General Assembly treaty, explicitly protects the right to strike. However, within the Covenant is a significant caveat: the right to strike exists "provided that it is exercised in conformity with the laws of the particular country." With this addition, when and how striking is protected is far from uniform and can be adjusted as seen fit by various governments.

Another possible alternative is The European Social Charter, which offers no such restriction on striking, simply requiring that any prior "collective agreements" are honored. However, the ESC is inherently a European document, limiting the scope of any protections to the continent. Even without this geographical restriction, the ESC does not specify which types of strikes are safeguarded and confines action to a response to labor conditions only, allowing for potential strikes to be interpreted as beyond the intention of the Charter.

### **ARTICLE 11 OF THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS**

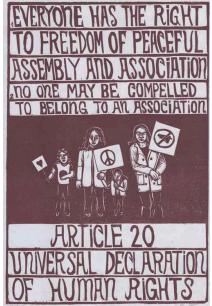
Despite regional limitations, certain documents are models that may inform the ICJ's decision. Taking effect in 1950, the European Convention on Human Rights has been hailed as a groundbreaking affirmation of human rights across Europe. Among those rights, as detailed in Article 11, is the right to "peaceful assembly" and "freedom



of association with others." This section of the Convention has been used as a metric against striking cases, chief among them *Demir and Baykara v. Turkey* in 2008 where the protection of collective bargaining—and the right to strike—were said to be implied under the Article for trade unions. The precedent: international labor law can fully protect workers' ability to strike without explicit text as justification. As a document with similar language, Convention No. 87 now may be met with the same ruling.

### UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Though not considered a legal document, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, too, shines light on the right to strike. While, yet again, the right is not explicitly stated in the Declaration, the protections of "peaceful assembly and association" have been interpreted to include the right to strike. Accompanied with that interpretation is a reminder to Judges of the



significance of the case as one that could reshape the understanding of one of the world's preeminent enumerations of human rights principles.



## DELIBERATING

As Judges write findings based on their interpretation of Convention No. 87, they will have several perspectives to consider, and are encouraged to question the basis of each view during debate. However, Judges likely will find themselves of the belief that Convention No. 87 protects the right to strike without exception, that Convention No. 87 does not protect the right to strike in any capacity, or that Convention No. 87 protects certain types of striking, as detailed previously. Based on these respective positions, Judges may choose to suggest corresponding measures.

### POTENTIAL MEASURES

The ICJ can provide a clear and authoritative interpretation of how the right to strike is protected under international labor conventions such as Convention No. 87. They can also recommend how Member States can align their national laws to ensure effective protection regarding the right to strike. Emphasizing the role of ILO supervisory bodies in monitoring and strengthening workers' rights while urging states to respect the decisions and interpretations of international labor bodies would assist in strengthening protections of striking workers worldwide. The ICJ can also provide an interpretation of how the right to strike is not protected and recommend how Member States adapt their national laws accordingly.

The ICJ can additionally limit the right to strike by interpreting a restrictive approach, based on the lack of specificity in Convention No. 87. Allowing individual nations to have their own interpretations, stating that the ILO's interpretation is nonbinding or incorrect, or specifying which types of strikes are protected and why would all restrict the workers' right to strike.



#### IMPACT

### Workers and Employees

Whether the Court chooses to protect, challenge, or modify the right to strike, the implications of their advisory opinion will be monumental. An opinion fully supporting the interpretation of Convention No. 87 as protecting the right to strike would empower workers across the globe, but might necessitate an adjustment or relinquishing of power for certain governments and corporations. If the Court concludes that the right to strike is not supported in the Convention, the rights of workers would be threatened, but national sovereignty would reign supreme. Meanwhile, a decision to selectively restrict types of strikes based on the intention of the Convention would likely provide basis for future litigation with advancements in technology and shifts in cultures, but could momentarily stifle contention through compromise.

### ILO

While the future of Workers and Employers is at stake, so too is the functioning and legacy of the International Labor Organization. When the Employers' representatives directly challenged the right to strike, they also questioned the right of the ILO's Committee of Experts to interpret conventions in general. An opinion declaring that the ILO's interpretation is inaccurate would, while settling one matter, jeopardize all interpretative decisions of the Committee, past and future. Conversely, confirming in any part the ILO's interpretation would authenticate the Committee's right to interpret labor mandates, returning the Organization to its fully-functional state as before 2012. In either case, the ILO, like the members within it, will be permanently marked by the Court's conclusion.



## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- 1. Does Convention No. 87 protect the right to strike?
  - a. How much is the right to strike implied in the existing language (or not)?
- 2. What existing documents and cases can be used to justify a liberal interpretation of Convention No. 87?
  - a. Which can be used to justify a strict interpretation?
- 3. Should only certain types of strikes be protected?
  - a. If so, which should be protected?
- 4. How would restricting certain types of strikes balance the workers' rights and overall economic stability?
- 5. How does the right to strike intersect with other fundamental human rights, particularly of those not directly involved in the strike?
- 6. How might restricting certain types of strikes affect the groups represented within the ILO's tripartite system?
  - a. Is there language that can define the right to strike while preserving equity among the three parties within the ILO?



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