Part II.
Trailblazing Women in IHL from the Asia-Pacific Region

Interview with APJIHL Board of Experts Members Prof. Deepika Udagama, Dr. Ai Kihara-Hunt, and Dr. He Tiantian

Asia Pacific Journal of International Humanitarian Law Editorial Team

Prof. Deepika Udagama

Chair Professor of Department of Law, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

Prof. Nelum Deepika Udagama is the recently retired Chair Professor of Law at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. She is an academic specialized in International Human Rights. She received her legal education at the Faculty of Law, University of Colombo (LL.B. (Hons.) and LL.M. Degrees) and School of Law, University of California at Berkeley, USA (LL.M. and Doctor of Juridical Science (JSD) Degrees) in international human rights law. In 1991 she founded the Centre for the Study of Human Rights (CSHR) at the University of Colombo and served as its Founding Director (1991-97). She also played a key role in the establishment of the Department of Law at the University of Peradeniya (2009) and in the formulation of a unique inter-disciplinary curriculum for its LL.B. Degree Program with a focus on social justice. She served as the Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (October, 2015 – August, 2020). Under her stewardship the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka was promoted to 'A' status accreditation by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) in 2018. She was elected by the UN Sub-Commission as Co-Special Rapporteur (with Prof. Joe Oloka-Onyango of Uganda) on the theme 'Globalization and its Impact on the Full Enjoyment of Human Rights', resulting in an often-cited pioneering study on the theme (1999-2001). She is the recipient of several academic awards including a Senior Fulbright Scholar Award with a placement at the Harvard Human Rights Center (1997-98). She has taught at the UN University in Tokyo, Faculty of Law, Hong Kong University and the National Law University Delhi. She has also served on editorial boards of international and national academic law journals including the Netherlands Quarterly on Human Rights.

Dr. Ai Kihara-Hunt
Professor, the University of Tokyo

Dr. Ai Kihara-Hunt is Professor at the Graduate Program on Human Security, the University of Tokyo. At the University, she is also Director of the International Law Training and Research Hub, and Director of the Research Center for Sustainable Peace. She previously served as Secretary at the Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS). Her main areas of research and publications are human rights, International Humanitarian Law (IHL), United Nations (UN) Peace Operations, in particular UN Police, the rule of law, and accountability. She coaches student teams on IHL and human rights. Her publications include Holding UNPOL to Account: Individual Criminal Accountability of United Nations Police Personnel (Brill, 2017). She currently serves as an expert member of the Study Group on Future of Peacekeeping for the United Nations Peacekeeping Ministerial 2025. Prior to working at the University of Tokyo, she worked as Human Rights Officer for the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Nepal and at the headquarters, Assistant to the Executive Director of the Independent Special Commission of Inquiry for Timor-Leste, Associate Protection Officer at the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Sri Lanka, Public Information and Community Outreach Officer at the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor, and Human Rights Officer in the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET).

Dr. He Tiantian
Associate Professor, Institute of International Law Chinese Academy of Social Science

Dr. HE Tiantian completed her Ph.D. in International Law from Renmin University of China in 2015. Presently, she serves as an associate research fellow at the Institute of International Law, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Additionally, she is an associate professor at the University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and works as an editor for Chinese Review of International Law. She is now a council Member of Chinese Society of International Law and a member of Asian Society of International Law. Dr. HE Tiantian's research focuses on international humanitarian law, international criminal law and international dispute settlement. She published a book titled "The War Crime of Child Recruitment: Analysis of the First Judgment of the International Criminal Court" in 2018. Her publications have appeared in journals

both in English and Chinese, such as Chinese Journal of International Law, Law Sciences, and Chinese Review of International Law, among others

Prof. Deepika Udagama, Dr. Ai Kihara-Hunt, and Dr. He Tiantian, who are currently members of APJIHL's Board of Experts, sat down with the Editorial Team of APJIHL to discuss their careers as academics and practitioner of IHL, explore the relevance and emerging issues of IHL in the region, and reflections on the importance of scholarship and discourse encouraged by journals such the APJIHL for the Asia-Pacific.

I. Career Experience in International Humanitarian Law

A lot of our readers are scholars and practitioners from the Asia-Pacific region, and there is great interest in how experts like yourself started your career. Could you tell us how you discovered International Humanitarian Law work?

Prof. Udagama: Well, it's interesting because I'm really a student of human rights law. I would say that I'm a specialist in human rights law – a practitioner, not in a legal practitioner sense, but as an academic and as an advocate. It was through human rights law that I discovered IHL.

For me, there was a practical and a very existential dimension to both areas because my country Sri Lanka had a very violent civil war that lasted for nearly three decades. It gained international attention because of the intensity of violence and brutality. For us, there was a conundrum while our Constitution guaranteed human rights, International Humanitarian Law was not yet part of Sri Lanka's legal system. You have what we call a dualist legal system where international law does not automatically become law of the land, so in

the meantime, Human Rights Law came into the picture to provide protection for victims and survivors of the armed conflict. At that time, the discourse had a very clear division between Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law, which was a debate I was also exposed to during my postgraduate studies in the United States and internship at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva. Upon my return to Sri Lanka, and with the realities brought on by the conflict happening in my country, I was struck by the fact that IHL and Human Rights Law have much more in common than the discourse delineates. That's how my interest in IHL really came about. I'm glad that today, we do recognize that the two are absolutely complementary, and that the interface between the Human Rights Law and IHL is very strong.

Dr. Kihara-Hunt: I discovered IHL through my previous work with the United Nations Human Rights Office. I was then working in post-conflict areas such as Timor-Leste (then known as East Timor) and Sri Lanka, as well as Nepal which was then grappling with conflict. The language that we used then was of human rights, which I realised did not mean much unless we understood the context within which these conflicts were happening. In understanding said context, we really need to have IHL be part of the approach. When we talk about the right to life from a purely Human Rights Law perspective, we can say, "Okay, everybody has the right to life, and nobody should be deprived of life." But that discussion becomes very different in the context of conflict, especially in these countries my work had exposed me to. In all three countries, conflict was relatively small-scale in the sense that while the consequences of the conflict were massive, the weapons used, and the number of soldiers or fighters involved were relatively less so. They were very different from other conflicts that have happened since or are currently happening, which involve air bombardment, terrorist activities, or transnational organized crimes.

The scale, nature, and even culture was different. So, I thought it was very important to know and use IHL in approaching and understanding the situation in these countries, which eventually led to my commitment to IHL as well.

Dr. He: I had the opportunity to study and conduct research on IHL during my postgraduate studies. My IHL professor in particular was not only engaging and very generous in sharing stories and examples to illustrate the concepts, but he also stressed the fundamental importance of protecting civilians and children during armed conflict. This sparked my interest in IHL, which led to my doctoral dissertation on the protection of children in armed conflict, using the case of *Prosecutor v Lubanga*. As you know, this was a monumental case for the International Criminal Court as it was the first such case to cover war crimes related to the recruitment of children under 15 years of age. Aside from that, I also think that IHL is important for countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The countries in our region have historically experienced numerous armed conflicts, and due to the large populations that are often involved, the consequences to the civilian population are just as massive. But in the same vein, the countries in Asia-Pacific also have a long history of valuing compassion, empathy, and humanity. For example, China's cultural traditions share many values with international humanitarian law. These are fundamental in times of armed conflict.

Could you share with us some of your most memorable experiences as an IHL practitioner and academic from the region?

Prof. Udagama: I don't know whether there was one key moment as such. I mean some of the key moments in many ways have been the victories in the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka. While I'm not a practicing litigator, many brilliant human rights lawyers had really brought about

a major change in jurisprudence in Sri Lanka, whereby the Supreme Court has held in a string of judgments that even during conflict, even during periods of exception *i.e.* periods of public emergency, there is a core minimum of human rights that must be protected. Interestingly, these core minimum of freedom from torture, right to religion, anti-slavery, and many other things, are common between IHL and Human Rights Law. The Supreme Court of Sri Lanka went even further by holding that due process cannot be compromised extensively during periods of emergency. At that time, when we were celebrating those victories, we did not think of the convergence between IHL and Human Rights Law. We thought those were just human rights victories. but that makes it more poignant in the sense that what we celebrated were, in reality, also victories for IHL. I experienced one moment with someone who had previously been very rigid about the division between IHL and Human Rights but amidst all these developments, realised, "Oh, my! I see the connectivity!" And that moment of revelation was, in a sense, a victory. We are finally going beyond the silos, because humanity cannot be protected by putting these categories into silos.

Aside from these victories secured in my country, the gripping moments included victories that came about through the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. They were cutting edge judgments, clarifying core principles and values even during the high intensity of armed conflict. Whether the conflict is international or non-international in nature for example, command responsibility is a core principle. The weaponisation of sexual violence during armed conflict, genocide, and other violence that had to be accounted for. We knew that already, but the decisions brought it into sharper focus. We see the law progressively evolving, and those developments impact survivors on the ground. So those are key moments.

Dr. Kihara-Hunt: This is an interesting one. I think the first sort of shocking but most impressive experience for me was meeting people who are living in the aftermath of a conflict. I met people who were deprived of everything – no house, no food, and their family members killed. They had nowhere to go back to. That was a deprivation in all fronts. Most of them came to us [the United Nations], reclaiming their dignity as they sought information about their families as well as justice and accountability. I was shocked to learn that they did not come to ask for food, clothes or housing, but came for justice and accountability. Something about that experience changed my view of what is important for human lives. IHL is a key tool and key language in addressing these experiences in a way that can bring back, in some form, what they have lost. That was really the starting point of my deep appreciation for IHL.

Dr. He: Having been inspired by professors I learned from, as a teacher, I always hope that my classes can inspire my students in the same way. To me, it is the experience of teaching and participating in my country's IHL-related activities, such as national moot court competitions, that I find most memorable. For several years, I have served as a judge for domestic moot court competitions, and in 2024, I was able to serve for the first time as a judge in a regional moot court. Meeting other judges and having the opportunity to see students and future advocates from different regions was a great experience. The different styles of presenting arguments and different ways of addressing humanitarian issues were enlightening, and it was exciting to see students being passionate about international issues and international law.

II. Relevance of International Humanitarian Law in Asia-Pacific

The Asia-Pacific region is often characterized by plurality. With the norm of humanity underpinning IHL, based on your experience working in the region, what do you think are the most pressing challenges IHL faces in the Asia-Pacific, particularly in promoting and strengthening IHL compliance? How can states in the region participate meaningfully in IHL law-making, particularly in developing informed and nuanced approaches to understanding IHL?

Prof. Udagama: I would like to think that when it comes to Human Rights Law and IHL, the Asia-Pacific region has opened up dramatically. Let's first talk about the positives. In previous decades, countries from the region were quite reluctant to delve into Human Rights Law, with the justification that as developing countries the focus was more on economic and social rights rather than civil and political rights. However, we have seen this evolve, and the Asia-Pacific region is now very active in the human rights protection discourse, participating in the deepening of international standards in this space. I see IHL as being somewhat in its infancy in the discourse in the region compared to Human Rights Law, and there seems to be a bit of reluctance to go the whole nine yards, so to speak. I think this may in part be due to the insularity as well as a sense of insecurity that in the face of conflict, having international obligations *and* being scrutinized under that lens is nerve-wracking for many countries. Hence, the use of arguments against based on national sovereignty. We also have to acknowledge that there is a huge democratic deficit in our region, and this impacts the reception of laws such as IHL. One main factor that worked in developing Human Rights Law in the region is the active presence of civil society who have truly risen to the occasion, taking on various challenges facing state ratification of

international human rights instruments, raising public awareness and advocating incorporation of international HR norms through courts and by national legislation. As of now, we do not see much of civil society working on IHL, though I think human rights practitioners and civil society groups do see the interconnectedness and the interfacing of the two. But strengthening this is definitely a challenge. However, as clarity on ground realities grows, it's bound to get stronger.

Globally, the rules-based international order is in serious crisis. We need to push for adherence to law, among them IHL. We have to work globally, and of course, regionally and locally to ensure that we preserve this rules-based system. In my view, course-correction is not just the task of well-meaning states, but one of international civil society's too. Historically, states have responded to civil society pressure, and there is an opportunity here for IHL, but we need to amplify the discourse on this. I think this is the role of the Journal and the role of scholars and practitioners – to explain the interconnectedness of these bodies of law.

Dr. Kihara-Hunt: I think the diversity in Asia-Pacific is quite rich – different religions, different cultural backgrounds, different educational systems, and different legal systems. Some countries have a stronger legal culture than others, meaning laws decide everything in some places while cultural norms, such as preserving the peace in the community in pursuit of public good, are valued elsewhere.

This is all evolving within an even bigger challenge in the global context. I think we are now facing a bit of resistance against multilateral humanitarian actions. This is potentially exacerbated by the diversity I had previously mentioned. There may be figures who take advantage of this diversity to discourage the pursuit of IHL, and these could be the same actors benefiting from wars or divisions of

people. The diversity facilitates an almost automatic rejection of something that could be viewed as being imposed from the outside. However, focusing on those differences makes us miss the common part, which is shared principle of humanity that applies to everyone. So, while the diversity could create pockets of challenges, humanity provides possibilities and opportunities.

I think IHL, at the very core of it, is about caring for people. We have to understand what is important to the people affected and have that understanding be rooted in culture. For example, what are the culturally acceptable way of protecting women in a conflict situation? And what protective role does the State play in that given context? Unpacking these questions require engaging civil society groups, academics, minorities, and of course the people who are directly affected themselves. This makes implementation a contextualised one – we have to remember that even in IHL, we do not just apply the rules as if we were robots. We must have a cultural, human perspective here, and that can be started through training, education, and consultation. IHL is a tool for participation.

Dr. He: I think the most pressing challenge IHL faces at present is ensuring that IHL is followed by different parties. We do face a serious compliance issue, though admittedly this is not unique to IHL. However, I think scholars and practitioners can take the lead in addressing this problem. For example, soft law initiatives to promote IHL could be explored at a country-level.

We have seen this done in September 2024, when Brazil, China, Jordan, Kazakhstan, South Africa, and the International Committee of the Red Cross jointly launched an initiative on international humanitarian law, which is to promote compliance with international humanitarian law by various countries. The involvement of press in raising awareness

should also be leveraged, as they have the platform to reach a wider audience. Aside from this, I think for the Asia-Pacific region in particular, there is an opportunity for us to deepen the discourse on context-informed and nuanced approaches to IHL. This not only includes our active participation in the negotiation of treaties but also the amplification of scholarship by international humanitarian law scholars from various countries in the region through journals such as APJIHL.

In your experience, have you found that the Asia-Pacific experiences have contributed to the overall development of IHL rules? Despite these challenges discussed previously, have you found that Asia-Pacific's experiences have contributed to the development of IHL overall.

Dr. Kihara-Hunt: Yes, I think the participation of Asia-Pacific in the development of IHL is quite impressive. There are a few things that we can see visibly. For example, a number of lawyers and legal practitioners who are at the frontlines of developing and promoting IHL are from the region. Many countries from the region are also active in peacekeeping, and the peacekeepers they send of course require extensive training and knowledge in IHL before they could even be considered for deployment. This means that at the domestic level, IHL is already part of their education, which reflects well on the awareness of IHL in our region.

The diversity I spoke of earlier is also a starting point for discourse towards highlighting the common humanity that underpins all these supposed differences. We have managed to highlight this in our previous editions.

Could you highlight a couple of emerging areas, themes, or issues that are relevant to IHL and why it would be important for Asia-Pacific states to actively contribute to?

Prof. Udagama: There are very many emerging issues I think, among them environmental protection in the context of armed conflict and the relevance of the concept of ecocide. These are typically discussed in relation to international armed conflict, but they apply just as much to non-international armed conflict, which in the Asia-Pacific is much more prevalent. Another major issue is the rising frequency of using the anti-terrorism rhetoric to sideline what should be discussed through the human rights and IHL lens. As the discourse evolves, we have to work to ensure that IHL does not get sidelined especially when it is applicable. I also think that while there are emerging technologies that potentially redraw technicalities in IHL, we should also not lose sight of the underlying principles of IHL

These are areas where we are going to find common ground amidst the diversity present in our region and elsewhere. APJIHL is a good example of this. At least in the last couple of issues, we have seen various traditions in the Asia-Pacific, e.g., based on Hinduism and Islam highlighted as fundamentally similar to the modern IHL norms we follow. These are worth exploring because whatever type of challenge we face, the underlying fundamental values of these traditions come forward to provide solutions. While it is important to teach the technical dimensions of IHL, as we look for solutions to new challenges, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, we have to ground our approach on fundamental principles. We have to unpack the issues both from the lenses of legal and moral obligations. It is not enough that we recognize the legal dimensions. We have to understand the issues and applicable principles within the context of culture and tradition to meaningfully and effectively follow the law.

Innovative approaches do not come about just through technicalities of the law.

Dr. Kihara-Hunt: I think there are some obvious ones, such as technology, particularly autonomous weapons and AI. Those are already on the table. Other emerging issues involve the environment and climate, outer space, and information. Private military companies are also worth exploring. But I am also thinking of certain vulnerable people. I think the categorization of vulnerable people has changed a little bit overtime. For example, elderly persons do not show up very much in a need for protection in the way women, children, refugees, or displaced persons show up. There are other types of vulnerabilities, and those result in differences in experiencing war.

There is also not as much discussion about the applicability and actual implementation of peacekeeping by peacekeepers. I am currently doing extensive research on this, and while there is clarity that when States go out and do peacekeeping, they are bound by IHL, but the direct application of IHL becomes less certain when a regional organization, the United Nations, or a coalition of States are involved. This is an area that should be clarified.

Another area that could benefit from clarification is detention. This is already highlighted in the discourse of late as there is a lot of interest here, but there are still a lot that could be clarified. For example, when the United Nations or regional organizations employ armed police, what are the rules exactly? This extends to transitions in post-conflict contexts.

Dr. He: I think there are many emerging issues in IHL these days. What immediately comes to mind is understanding, applying, and further developing IHL rules. This requires recognising that different systems

may have different understanding, application, and interpretation of rules, which is a core problem in the effective compliance of IHL and international law more broadly. While seemingly basic, this requires great attention.

Other issues that should be included in what we are monitoring are the involvement of private military companies in armed conflicts, environmental protection during armed conflict, outer space, and new methods of warfare. I know ICRC has done extensive work in these areas, but there are still opportunities for scholarly contributions to these developments and challenges.

III. Role of Asia Pacific Journal of International Humanitarian Law

APJIHL publishes articles written by scholars from the Asia-Pacific region, and IHL issues in the Asia-Pacific Region. What do you think the APJIHL brings to the academic landscape? What is its unique value?

Prof. Udagama: First of all, in the past few issues we have seen an exploration of the foundational principles of IHL and traditions in the region relating to rules applicable in armed conflict. There you see the commonalities and the differences, but there appears to be much more in common, and I think that research offers a very rich tapestry. I think that is what we are uniquely offering to the world.

IHL is a very secular form of law, but if we revisit our traditions, many regions have been grappling with the same issues IHL grapple with, and for centuries have been finding ways to address these issues. Recognizing this creates an opportunity to look at modern challenges

from an organic, grounded perspective. In many ways, I think "unique issues" of conflict are really global in nature in the sense that while the geographical location is different, the end result of conflict is essentially the same everywhere. The human condition everywhere is virtually the same. The APJIHL has brought this into sharper focus. Instead of making local experiences appear exotic, revisiting traditions shows us that the values are virtually similar and shared. We could use this to move forward in enriching universal norms, while still preserving the relevance and value of our diversity.

Dr. Kihara-Hunt: I see two big things. One is the national implementation of IHL, and we see more of these articles in our recent editions. Articles on Islam and IHL, for example, or how IHL is applied in one country facing unprecedented environmental problems. These are often not covered in regional situations, so amplifying these perspectives has been a strength of the Journal. The other thing is that APJIHL provides a massive space for all discourses related to IHL. It does not just cover cases, it also provides space for discussions on law, culture and society. It invites fresh, innovative scholarship from free- and young-minded writers. Of course, we ensure that the law is discussed correctly, but we also allow new takes and new ideas to flourish. We provide the space for out-of-the-box thinking.

Dr. He: I think our Journal has truly brought regional perspectives to the development and current issues in IHL. It is, after all, a voice for the region, by the region. While we are dealing with universal standards, each country's perspective is key to progressing our understanding of how IHL is experienced in real life. I believe APJIHL plays a very important role in that regard. We serve as a bridge between the global framework and the regional and national points of view.

IV. Advice for Scholars and Practitioners from the Region

What are you most proud of as a practitioner of IHL from the Asia-Pacific region?

Prof. Udagama: It's hard to speak of oneself, really. I think the most endearing experience in my life is that of being a teacher. As a teacher, one can influence young minds, and that builds into being able to contribute to the shaping of societies through knowledge and experiences gathered over the years, even decades. Education is such a powerful change agent.

I also served as the chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka for a while. In that work, you really see the interfacing of IHL and Human Rights Law. My experience in the field of education gave me strength in navigating that space, because in education, we not only explore concepts, but we also look to lived human experiences when we analyse the relevance of the law and its application to real life situations.

We learn a lot from young people. They constantly give you new insights. It's a very ennobling experience being able to take part in the process of sharing thoughts, ideas and exploring as you come to your own understanding of how human rights protection has progressed. At the end of the day, it is about observing and learning from experiences. That is how theoretical concepts too are enriched. I think I am very lucky to be in the field of education.

Dr. Kihara-Hunt: It is a bit difficult to talk about oneself especially highlighting good things, but I will try.

I know that IHL is really necessary, and I want to learn it because I care about humanity. To me, that is the starting point. I teach IHL, too, but when I do, what I always have in mind is that there are people IHL seeks to protect. And when students and researchers gather around to discuss, it becomes very inspiring. It is enjoyable for us because we know that we are doing this not for money or career, but because we believe that we can do something for humanity. I am happy and very proud to be surrounded by great individuals.

Dr. He: I think, as a scholar and as a teacher of IHL, it makes me very happy when I see my students develop an interest in international law and IHL. It reminds me of my experience as a student, inspired to move towards the direction of IHL scholarship. This has led me to the publication of my doctoral thesis as a book, which as I mentioned earlier is on the war crime of conscripting and enlisting children under the age of 15. It is the first such book in my home country that discusses this issue.

I am also very happy whenever my students participate in moot court competitions. It makes me feel like what I am embarking on is worthwhile.

What are the key points on IHL that the next generation of students and international lawyers from the region interested in doing IHL work should be aware of?

Prof. Udagama: I always tell my students that we must never look at IHL, or any body of law, in isolation. It is important to forge the linkages from inception. You need to see the relationship between IHL, International Human Rights Law, International Environmental Law, and others. The underlying principles, e.g., on humanism, are very much the same. The concepts are quite often the same, the

struggles are the same. It is just that in order to deal with specific situations and specific subjects, sometimes there are certain specialized norms and practices to focus on, but one must always see the larger picture. It is the linkages and the synergies among the various areas of law that animate growth of law as a whole.

Laws can be successful in resolving issues only if they capture our imagination as being fair and just. To me, that is the test of a law's legitimacy. So, at the end of the day, our work too becomes relevant and effective only if we develop a passion for it, not develop a calculating technical approach Any area of the law we wish to focus on, especially a deeply sensitive area of the law like IHL, comes alive and becomes worthy of our attention only if we can relate to the human experiences that necessitated that body of law. So, we need to see visuals; we need to hear stories. They engage you, and then you develop empathy. So my advice to emerging scholars is not to get into this area of the law with the goal of having a successful career, but only because we relate to its relevance and value. At the end of the day, we have to value humanism. Explore, discover, recognize the underlying values, develop empathy, and the rest will fall into place.

Dr. Kihara-Hunt: I have two pieces of advice. One is to always have people to whom IHL applies in mind, not only the victims but also soldiers. Do not view things only in black and white, good and bad. There are many interesting conversations to be had in grey areas, and you can really learn from many, different kinds of people. So always think about the people to whom the law applies.

Secondly, always be free to explore. Think about why you are doing what you are doing, and who will benefit from it. Instead of thinking in terms of rules and violations, consider what they mean to people and their actual realities. What do they mean to society? The

environment? The earth? Have a mindset that is open to things outside the legal text.

Dr. He: We share a lot more in common than we highlight. This includes having longstanding traditions from many countries in our region. We can do more to connect despite our diversity and even learn from each other's histories and experiences. Be receptive to new perspectives and ideas. This is how we will be able to contribute more effectively to IHL developments as voices from the Asia-Pacific.