IMUN 2026 Research Report

General Assembly Issue #4: The question of ensuring accountability for war crimes against civilians.

According to the United Nations, war crimes "are violations of international humanitarian law (whose perpetrators incur individual criminal responsibility under international law) … [and which] always take place in the context of an armed conflict". These include acts such as murder, torture, pillaging, and intentional attacks on civilians, humanitarian workers, and protected infrastructure like schools and hospitals ("International law"). Human rights violations have a broader scope, as they cover any infringement of the rights outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While some infractions such as genocide and other crimes against humanity are examples of human rights violations that are prosecutable through universal jurisdiction, other human rights abuses, like restrictions on freedom of movement, healthcare, education, and expression, have no criminal process for international accountability (*Elements of Crimes*).

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), using definitions stipulated by the Geneva Conventions, grants the ICC jurisdiction over war crimes and sets the expectation that Member States of the ICC must arrest individuals with arrest warrants (*Rome Statute*). The main challenge to the accountability of perpetrators is the ability of states to withdraw from the ICC, which has been used to prevent the arrest of politically aligned leaders with arrest warrants ("International Crimes"). One such example is the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, who has a standing arrest warrant for allegedly committing the war crime of starvation as a method of warfare, as well as other crimes against humanity. Since Israel is not a Signatory to the Rome Statute and is not a member of the ICC, and neither are some of its allies, the execution of the warrant remains uncertain (El Abdallah, "Situation in the State"). Another

example of the same situation is the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, who is allegedly responsible for the war crime of the unlawful deportation and transfer of children, but who cannot be held accountable due to the difficulties facing an arrest (El Abdallah, "Situation in Ukraine"). Another related challenge is political interference in cases. The Permanent Five members of the Security Council have disproportionate influence over the accountability process due to their power to veto the referral of cases to the ICC, a power they use to protect certain politically aligned groups. For example, Russia and China used their veto power to block the referral of cases pertaining to the situation in Syria and allegations of war crimes committed by Bashar Al-Assad ("Referral of Syria").

Delegates should be mindful of the balance between accountability and sovereignty on the question of the jurisdiction to prosecute human rights violations. They should analyze the possibility of strengthening and reforming the ICC and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and amending international law to alter the status of enforcement of universal jurisdiction. Delegates could also analyze and amend the standing treaties on human rights to cover blind spots in enforcement and accountability and strengthen the penalties for certain infractions. It is paramount that delegates do not forget the importance of the betterment of the victim's condition as the goal of international law.

Works Cited

El Abdallah, Fadi. "Situation in the State of Palestine: ICC Pre-Trial Chamber I rejects the State of Israel's challenges to jurisdiction and issues warrants of arrest for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant." *International Criminal Court*, 21 Nov. 2024, www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-state-palestine-icc-pre-trial-chamber-i-rejects-state-israels-challenges. Accessed 2 June 2026.

---. "Situation in Ukraine: ICC judges issue arrest warrants against Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin and Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova." *International Criminal Court*, 17 Mar. 2023, https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-ukraine-icc-judges-issue-arrest-warrants-against-vladimir-vladimirovich-putin-and. Accessed 2 June 2026.

Elements of Crimes. E-book ed., The Hague, International Criminal Court, 2013.

"International Crimes and Accountability: A beginner's introduction to the duty to investigate, prosecute and punish." *Diakonia*, Oct. 2013, apidiakoniase.cdn.triggerfish.cloud/uploads/sites/2/2021/07/international-crimes-and-accountability-a-beginners-introduction-to-the-duty-to-investigate-prosecute-and-punish.pdf. Accessed 2 June 2026.

"International law: Understanding justice in times of war." *United Nations - Regional Information Center for Western Europe*, © United Nations 2025, 27 Mar. 2024, unric.org/en/international-law-understanding-justice-in-times-of-war/. Accessed 2 June 2026.

"Referral of Syria to International Criminal Court Fails as Negative Votes Prevent Security Council from Adopting Draft Resolution." *United Nations - Meeting Coverage and Press Releases*, 22 May 2014, press.un.org/en/2014/sc11407.doc.htm. Accessed 2 June 2026.

Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. E-book ed., The Hague, International Criminal Court, 2021.