**Who Are the Various Actors in International Law?**

Traditionally, international law dealt only with the relations between states, and states were the only creators and subjects of the law. Today that has changed, with new actors joining states as both creators and subjects.  
**1-States :**States play the central and undisputed leading role in the creation of international law. However, the determination of whether an entity is actually a State can present a challenge. Generally speaking, most sovereign states are both states (in law) as well as (in reality). The generally agreed upon criteria for statehood are:  
• Possesses a defined territory  
• Inhabited by permanent population  
• Controlled by an independent government  
• Engages in formal relations with other states

**2-International Organizations:**

International organizations, otherwise known as intergovernmental organizations, or IGOs, are formed between two or more state governments. Some IGOs operate by making decisions on the basis of one vote for each member-state, some make decisions on a consensus or unanimity basis, while still others have weighted voting structures based on security interests or monetary donations.

In the General Assembly of UN, each state has one vote, while in the Security Council, five states are permanent members and have a veto over any action. The World Bank arranges its voting according to the Member State’s shareholding status, which is roughly based on the size of the state’s economy.

This is often thought of as the “one dollar = one vote” approach to representation.

There are nearly 2,000 international organizations that deal with a wide variety of topics requiring international cooperation, such as the International Civil Aviation Organization, the Universal Postal Union, the International Organization for Standardization, and the International Organization for Migration .

**3-Non-Governmental Organizations :**

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), also called “civil society” organizations, are groups formed by individuals working across national borders to affect public policy. Recent progress in technology, coupled with globalization’s emphasis on international cooperation, has allowed the effectiveness of these organizations to grow drastically. Individuals living in different countries can now network with one another, and the Internet has permitted NGOs to both obtain and publish information on an extensive level, previously only available to states.

NGOs have had significant impact on environmental affairs, such as Greenpeace’s advocacy work on climate change, Amnesty International’s advocacy of human rights, and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which won a Nobel Peace Prize for its work in shaping a global treaty to prohibit use of landmines.

However, as the influence of NGOs has grown, more questions are being raised regarding their accountability. Essentially, NGOs are special-interest groups on an international scale, which means that they are unelected and unaccountable to any public oversight, even though they claim to speak for the “public” as a whole. Failure to deliver adequate or promised results, coupled with little to no structural oversight has proven to be a large obstacle, which many NGO’s still currently face scrutiny.

**4-Individuals :** The position of individuals under international law has evolved significantly during the last century. Now, more than ever,under international law individuals are being given more rights and being held responsible for their actions. Human rights law, for example, has tried to establish that every person around the world has certain basic rights that cannot be violated.

At the same time, individual accountability under international law has been established, first at the Nuremburg trials and recently at the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the dawn of the International Criminal Court, the first permanent international institution to hold individuals responsible for violations of the laws of armed conflict.

This issue of individual accountability in the international system can be seen with the actions carried out in June 2011, when the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi for “Crimes against humanity” that were purportedly carried out while trying to quash a growing rebellion within the Libyan Borders (NPR, 2011). However, Gaddafi was eventually captured by National Transitional Council forces and subject to extra-judicial killing along with his son and close advisors in October 2011 (Greenhill, 2011).

**5-Transnational Corporations :**

Transnational corporations (TNCs), also sometimes called multinational corporations (MNCs), also are playing an increased role in the development of international law. TNCs are commercial entities whose interests are profit-driven. Transnational corporations lobby states and international organizations in a manner similar to NGOs, with the hopes of having their interests protected under international law. Many of the same doubts related to NGO accountability and legitimacy can also be raised in the context of TNCs.

For these reasons, the UN has sought both to regulate and to work with TNCs. At the Millennium Forum in May 2000, a proposal was put forth to regulate TNCs. A Draft Code of Conduct on TNCs was reviewed and debated by various UN bodies for years, with no results. TNCs also have been sued in U.S. courts for violating international law in the way they affect the human rights of people in countries where they operate.

In 2005, in another attempt to regulate a code of conduct for transnational corporations, former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan appointed John Ruggie as the UN Special Representative for Business and Human Rights. In 2008, Ruggie created the concept of "Protect, Respect, and Remedy," which was presented in concrete form in 2011 and became known as the "UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights." The Human Rights Council unanimously endorsed these principles and quickly established a group to focus on their implementation (The Kenan Institute, 2012). The group first met in Geneva, Switzerland in December 2012, and found that much progress had been made in recent years (United Nations, 2012).

« If you want to live a happy life, tie it to a goal, not to people or objects. » Albert einstein