

WORLD FINALS EXPERIENCE REPORT 2024

Singapore Management University

World Champion | Best Memorials

- Elizabeth Ho

The 2024 IISL Manfred Lachs Space Law Moot Court Competition was a long but immensely fruitful journey. As the only member of the team with no prior experience with space law, it was incredibly exciting to learn more about this area of our universe, legally and literally speaking, and I was pushed to new heights both as an individual and as a student of the law.

As a first-time regional representative, our team was naturally nervous at the prospect of progressing directly to the World Semi-Final Round. Nonetheless, we worked hard to prepare for the round against our eventual opponent, the formidable team from McGill University coached by Professor Andrea Harrington, who is herself an expert in space law. We were also pleasantly surprised to find ourselves in an all-female round chaired by Hristina Talkova, who was revealed as one of the authors of this year's moot problem. The bench asked many insightful questions on contemporary practices, the prevailing international guidelines, and the practical considerations behind our application of space law. It was a privilege to hear from a full bench of space law academics and practitioners, and our opponents performed admirably.

Our team prevailed, which was exciting and nerve-wracking upon our discovery that the Final Round would be judged by Their Excellencies Judges Tomka, Iwasawa, and Brant from the International Court of Justice. We were also looking forward to facing off against the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, which has been an outstanding contender in this arena. The Final Round itself was very different from the Semi-Final Round. Apart from the change in venue and the large number of space law practitioners who turned up to watch the round, the

questions asked to both teams focused more on general international law and its relationship with the concepts and duties in space law. Their Excellencies were also humorous even while asking very incisive and tricky questions, and undoubtedly lent a great atmosphere to the round while reinforcing our belief in the need for extensive and holistic preparations as part of our work ethic. Overall, it was a priceless experience that was worth every second of hard work that our team had put into this competition.

While I did not speak in the international rounds, it was still a privilege to observe my fellow teammates and our rival teams. I was able to consider the judges' questions from a bystander's perspective, and to help my team improve and prepare for the next stage of the competition. Of course, it was also great to get to cheer my friends on from the sidelines and enjoy the atmosphere of each round. Beyond the competition, it was also a privilege to meet leading professionals in space law through the International Astronautical Congress and the International Institute of Space Law's gala dinner. In particular, it was great to meet the delegation from Singapore's Office for Space Technology and Industry, which shared many helpful and practical insights about the local and international commercial space sectors.

None of these experiences would have been possible without the efforts of many people – the team and our dedicated faculty advisors, the regional organisers, and the world finals organisers, among countless others. I would especially like to thank Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, including Director Masahiko Sato who supported us on the ground, for its generous logistical and financial support in both the regional and international rounds. I would also like to thank the regional organisers, including Professor Yu Takeuchi and Ms Yui Nakama, not only for organising a smooth-sailing regional round but also for their generous hospitality. Finally, I would like to extend my thanks to the International Institute of Space Law for this opportunity, and particularly Professor Steven Freeland, Dr Kai-Uwe Schrogl, Dr Martha Mejía-Kaiser, and Melissa Force for their meticulous efforts in organising the Manfred Lachs Moot Court Competition and their support for our endeavours. Our successful performances in Tokyo and Milan were made possible only through the

work and generosity of the space law community, and I hope to be able to pay it back in the future.

- Genieve Wu

The 2024 IISL Manfred Lachs Moot Court Competition was an unforgettable journey that pushed me far beyond my comfort zone and deepened my interest in space law. Representing Asia-Pacific, my teammates and I navigated complex legal issues, faced formidable opponents, and engaged with some of the brightest minds in the field. Our team had secured a spot in the World Semi-Finals, where we were pitted against the McGill Institute of Air & Space Law. The tension had been palpable when we entered the courtroom, and faced a bench composed entirely of space law experts, including Hristina Talkova, one of the authors of the moot problem itself. The judges posed incisive questions on pressing contemporary issues, including the legal weight of UN COPUOS guidelines, measures to mitigate light pollution and radio frequency interference for dark and quiet skies, and the interplay between space law and general international law principles like state responsibility. The round was intellectually stimulating and fiercely competitive, made even more remarkable by the fact that it was an all-female bench and oralist round. Prevailing in the semi-finals was exhilarating, but it also meant a tight turnaround to prepare for the World Finals against the team from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. With a little over a day to refine our arguments, we were fuelled by a mix of excitement and anticipation in light of the prospect of pleading before three esteemed International Court of Justice judges – HE Judge Yuji Iwasawa, HE Judge Peter Tomka, and HE Judge Leonardo Brant. The final round took place in a venue buzzing with prominent figures from the space law community, including members of the IISL and representatives from various space agencies including JAXA. The judges posed intricate questions on public international law and court procedure, but also maintained a light-hearted atmosphere with the occasional jest. It was a wonderful experience altogether. Beyond the courtroom, the competition gave us invaluable opportunities to connect with leading professionals in the field. We were happy to have met the Singaporean delegation to the International Astronautical Congress from the OSTIn (Office for Space Technology and Industry), who shared fascinating insights into the

burgeoning commercial space sector. We also reconnected with Professor Steven Freeland and Dr. Kai-Uwe Schrogl (who were judges in the Asia-Pacific regional finals), as well as Professor Yu Takeuchi and members of JAXA, all of whom have imparted much wisdom to us throughout the competition.

The entire experience was a masterclass in advocacy, demanding rigorous legal research, persuasive argumentation, and the ability to think on our feet. However, the competition offered much more than just honing legal skills. It immersed us in the vibrant world of space law, exposing us to the latest developments, challenges, and opportunities in this rapidly evolving field. Attending the IISL Gala Dinner was a particular highlight. It allowed us to interact with passionate individuals dedicated to shaping the future of space exploration and governance, and also made me develop a newfound appreciation for the collaborative spirit and dedication driving this field. We owe many thanks to JAXA for sponsoring not only our flights to and from Milan, but also our very pleasant accommodations there. I am immensely grateful for this unforgettable experience and proud to have represented Asia-Pacific well on the international stage. Thank you, JAXA!

- Raelee Toh

My team and I participated in the world finals of the IISL Moot court in October; this included participating in two rounds: the semi-finals and the world finals. At the semi-finals, we acted as the respondent against the North American winner, McGill University and were judged by a highly experienced team of judges who had extensive knowledge in both space law and public international law. Little did we know that the presiding judge, Hristina Talkova, was one of the moot authors; we only came to know of this during the world finals when the moot authors were revealed. The team from McGill University displayed their knowledge of both the International Court of Justice's jurisprudence and industrial practice of spacefarers from national agencies to private companies. This is unsurprising given that they were coached by Prof Andrea Harrington, who is not only sits on the IISL Board but also has significant background in the field of space law. We also had the opportunity to network with the other teams from the African and Latin American regions – meeting the teams from Zimbabwe and Mexico made me realise how the world of space law is really huge, and transcends the time zones and boundaries on Earth.

We then came to know that we were proceeding to the world finals, and my teammates and I were elated to find out that we were going to present our case in front of three sitting judges of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) (Judge Tomka, Iwasawa and Brandt). As a budding academic with a keen interest in public international law, it was beyond surreal to be able to discuss the court's judgments with the very people who penned them, particularly since I have been keeping updated with the separate/dissenting opinions issued by the various judges. This is especially in light of how active the court has been in recent times, dealing with both contentious disputes and advisory cases. Other than my interest in international law, I am also active in the space field as a member of the IAU CPS on the protection of the dark and quiet skies, as well as member of the AI & Space Law policy research group at the Space Generation Advisory Council (SGAC) working on whether the existing space treaties were sufficient to deal with evolving challenges created by AI. Apart from being able to meet the ICJ judges in-person

and discuss my passions with them, it was exhilarating at the same time to be able to present my case that I have worked tirelessly on for the past year, beginning in September 2023 all the way to October 2024. The world finals was beyond enjoyable: the judges made the pleading process very comfortable with a light-touch of humour while asking tricky questions which have not been previously posed to us during our team's preparation. They also peppered us with many questions on fundamental concepts of public international law, which reinforced my belief in the need for extensive preparation for moots, and any part of my work. I presented my case as the first respondent, and had discussions with the judges concerning issues of attribution, the interaction between treaty and customary law as well as the intersection between the continuing supervision obligation in treaty vis-à-vis the customary due diligence obligation – regardless of the outcome of the competition, this precious experience in itself made every tear and sweat in the lead-up to the competition worthwhile.

As I wrap up my Lachs experience, I will continue to be involved with the space community through the SGAC and other research work. I wish to thank the regional organisers (including Yu Takeuchi) in Japan for their amazing job at organizing the regional rounds in June; they made the process smooth and enjoyable. Their hospitality also made the competition process much less stressful. As a past participant in 2023 in Japan (during the Asia-Pacific rounds), I can attest to the quality of the competition organisation by the organisers. I also want to thank JAXA for supporting the team in terms of funding to the world finals. Last but certainly not the least, the world finals organisers (including Martha Mejía Kaiser), the familiar faces from the Asia-Pacific rounds, Judges Steven Freeland and Kai-Uwe Schrogl, as well as judges across both the Asia-Pacific and world rounds, for providing words of encouragement throughout the competition and being supportive of my team's endeavours at the competition.