What is public international law?

Public international law is the body of rules that is legally binding on States and international organizations in their interactions with other States, international organizations, individuals, and other entities. It covers a range of activities; such as, diplomatic relations, conduct of war, trade, human rights and sharing of oceanic resources. .

Traditionally, international law regulated interactions between States. For example, it determined how a State treats foreign diplomats who are in its country or how international agreements between States are to be regulated.

For example, international law sets out legal obligations, responsibilities, and rights of one State against another. This aspect of international law isbased on sovereign equality. In other words, each State is a sovereign and each State is equal to, and independent of, all other States. This means that when international law regulates the relations between States, it applies equally to all States.

International law also regulates relations between States and non-State actors; for example, individuals, international organizations, and multinational companies. In the case of individuals, international law gives each individual certain rights. For example, international human rights law gives the individual a right not to be tortured. This means that a government cannot torture someone they deem a terrorist to obtain information. International law also imposes on States certain obligations and responsibilities to protect individuals. For example, when States are at war, one State cannot target and kill civilians of the other State who did not take part in hostilities.

It important to remember that international law is not stagnant. It is evolving. International law covers diverse subjects and has multiple fields of application.resources (law of the sea); protecting the environment (environmental law), space law, and to certain crimes (international criminal law).