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**AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNAL LAW
INSTITUT AFRICAIN DE DROIT INTERNATIONAL**

**WORKSHOP ON PRECOLONIAL AFRICAN
INTERNATIONAL LEGAL HISTORY**

Claims about the precolonial history of international law in Africa are commonplace. Indeed, some critical approaches to international law emerging from Africa often invoke a specific memory of a precolonial past of international law on the continent. Notably, Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL), a strand within critical approaches to international law that has become tremendously influential, espouse normative claims about the history of international law on the continent, often to make claims about a (radical) break/alteration that European colonialism brought about in the law and institutional design governing international relations on the continent. Significantly, these critical narratives have become influential in policy circles, finding expression in the debates over the proper place of Africa in the international legal system—and in accounts of the inextricable links between the colonial encounter and Africa’s trajectory in the global order. Yet even as these narratives (and memories) abound, there is a paucity of systematic and primary-source-driven research (especially by international lawyers) into the legal and institutional design of international relations in the years preceding European colonialism in Africa. The African Institute of International Law Precolonial African International Legal History Project (“the Project”) seeks to fill this vacuum by conducting systematic and primary source-informed research on the history of the laws and norms governing international affairs in precolonial Africa.

The AAIL inaugurated the Project in July 2023 through the generous funding of the Gerda Henkel Foundation, the African Union, Osgoode Hall Law School, Nathanson Centre for Transnational Human Rights and Security, and Harvard Law School. In furtherance of the Project, the AAIL seeks to convene an interdisciplinary cohort of scholars at a July 15-17, 2024, workshop in the historic town of Arusha, Tanzania (noted for its prominent place in African international law praxis). Economy class travel, lodging, and meals will be covered. In preparation for the July 2024 workshop (the “Workshop”), participants will meet virtually for a pre-Workshop discussion on February 16 and 17, 2024, during which participants will engage each other on their proposed Workshop contributions.

**3rd Floor, Kilimanjaro Wing, Arusha International
Conference Centre, Arusha, Tanzania**



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Papers are expected to map and interrogate issues that lie within the gap in the precolonial historiography of international law in Africa by investigating a range of topics that shed light on the precolonial norms, principles, and laws governing the relations between empires, kingdoms, communities, 'states,' and other political formations in precolonial Africa. In the context of the Workshop, the precolonial period refers to the period preceding nineteenth-century formal European imperialism. Examples of topics to be addressed by Workshop contributions may include migration; state formation; trade; exchange of diplomatic relations; resource sharing; the laws of war; and conflict resolution. This list is non-exhaustive, and we welcome contributions spanning other topics in the field.

We plan to collect and publish papers presented at the Workshop in an edited volume. Below is the timeline:

Proposed topics: **December 1, 2023**

2-page Think Piece: **February 5, 2024**

Pre-Workshop Zoom gathering: **February 16 and 17, 2024**

Paper drafts (~5,500 words): **June 21, 2024**

Arusha Workshop: **July 15-17, 2024**

Final Paper submissions for the edited volume: **November 15, 2024**

Participation in the Workshop is by invitation only. Graduate Students whose work centers or draws on African International Legal History especially in the period preceding nineteenth and twentieth century European colonialism on the continent are invited to submit applications to participate as trainees through this link:

[PLEASE CLICK HERE](#)

For general enquiries, contact AILL Fellow and Project chair, Rabiata Akande, at africanintllegalhistory@gmail.com.

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