Volume 7 Number 1, January 2025: pp. 1-14.
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p-ISSN: 1978-5186 E-ISSN: 2723-2603
http://jurnal.fh.unila.ac.id/index.php/lajil

Actio Popularis in International Accountability: A Case Research of the UAE

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Submitted: January 24, 2025; Reviewed: April 10, 2025.; Accepted: May 9, 2025

Article Info

Keywords:
Actio popularis; deprivation of nationality; erga omnes; erga omnes partes; international accountability

DOI:
10.25041/lajil.v7i1.3965

Abstract

Nationality deprivation has become a tool of political repression, undermining fundamental human rights and rendering individuals stateless. In the United Arab Emirates, the government increasingly uses nationality deprivation to silence political dissidents, raising concerns about compliance with international legal standards. This research examines the UAE's nationality deprivation policies in light of international human rights law and explores the potential of actio popularis as a legal mechanism for holding states accountable. Using a normative legal analysis, the paper evaluates the UAE's practices against key international treaties, including the Arab Charter on Human Rights and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. It also assesses the relevance of actio popularis, erga omnes, and erga omnes partes principles in enabling states to challenge human rights violations affecting collective international interests. Drawing on recent case law, such as The Gambia v. Myanmar, this research explores how states may invoke these doctrines before international courts. The findings indicate that the UAE's nationality deprivation practices violate key principles of proportionality and non-arbitrariness under international law, contributing to statelessness and severe human rights abuses. This research underscores the evolving role of actio popularis in international accountability and advocates for its broader application in nationality deprivation cases. Strengthening international safeguards against arbitrary nationality deprivation is essential for ensuring legal protection and preventing the misuse of citizenship laws as a tool of repression.

A. Introduction

Nationality constitutes a foundational legal and social relationship between individuals and the state, granting access to essential rights such as education, healthcare, and political

participation.[1] However, the deprivation of nationality has increasingly become a tool of political repression, particularly within authoritarian regimes. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), this practice has been employed to target political dissidents and their families, rendering them stateless and exposing them to severe human rights violations.[2] This research examines the UAE's nationality deprivation policies in light of international legal standards and human rights obligations.[3]

While existing literature predominantly addresses the domestic legal implications and individual impacts of statelessness, including analyses by Heather Alexander (2030) and reports by the UNHCR, limited attention has been given to the potential role of international legal principles—particularly *actio popularis*—in holding states accountable.[4] *Actio popularis*, rooted in Roman law, permits legal action in defense of the public interest, even absent direct injury. In international law, it aligns with obligations *erga omnes* and *erga omnes partes*, which require state compliance with norms protecting the international community as a whole.

Recent jurisprudence, such as South Africa v. Israel before the International Court of Justice, illustrates how these doctrines enable states to challenge human rights violations beyond their own national interests. This paper extends such reasoning to the context of nationality deprivation, arguing that *actio popularis* may offer a viable legal avenue to address systemic abuses.

The research's novelty lies in applying *actio popularis* to nationality deprivation—an area largely overlooked in existing scholarship. Moving beyond individual rights claims, it situates nationality deprivation within the framework of international state responsibility, offering a new lens through which to examine the misuse of nationality laws.[5]

Using a normative legal method, the paper analyzes relevant treaties, jurisprudence, and state practice, focusing on instruments such as the Arab Charter on Human Rights and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. It also assesses the viability of *actio popularis* before international courts by examining supporting legal principles and case law.

The central inquiry is whether *actio popularis*, grounded in international obligations *erga omnes* and *erga omnes partes*, can serve as a legal basis for holding the UAE accountable for arbitrary nationality deprivation. This research contributes to broader discussions on international accountability and human rights enforcement, advocating for stronger protections against politically motivated statelessness.

B. Discussion

1. Understanding *Actio Popularis* in International Law

a. Concept and Origins of *Actio Popularis*

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[1] Bloom, Tendayi, and Lindsey N. Kingston, eds. *Statelessness, Governance, and the Problem of Citizenship*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, (2021), pp. 216–217; Siegelberg, Mira L., *Statelessness: A Modern History*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, (2020), p. 230; UNHCR, *Handbook on Protection of Stateless Persons under the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons* (Geneva: UNHCR, (2014)), p. 25; Riccardo Vecellio Segate, "Biometric Technology at the Borders of Citizenship: Identifying Technical Standards for Introducer-Based Remote Onboarding in Global Contexts of Statelessness, Nomadism, Displacement, and Refuge," *International Journal of Digital Law and Governance*, (2024): 21. https://doi.org/10.1515/ijdlg-2024-0010.

[2] Al-Marzooqi, Jenan, Estelle Allemann, and Alexandra Tarzikhan. "How the UAE Crushes Dissent by Arbitrarily Revoking Citizenship." *Middle East Eye*, 26 August 2024. Available online: https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uae-crushes-dissent-arbitrarily-revoking-citizenship.

[3] Arena, Valentina. "*Actiones Populares*, Popular Sovereignty, and the People." *A Global Perspective* 253 (2022): 40-41. https://doi.org/10.5871/bacad/9780197267127.001.0001.

[4] Alexander, Heather. "The Nationality and Statelessness of Nomads Under International Law." *Drukkerij Studio*, 2020: 8–9. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3762178; UNHCR, *Handbook on Protection of Stateless Persons*, p. 25.

[5] *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel), Application Instituting Proceedings and Request for Provisional Measures*, filed 29 December 2023, ¶¶2, 629.

Actio popularis is a concept from Roman law, refers to the right of any member of the community to initiate legal action in defense of the public interest, without the need to prove personal injury.[6] Recognized as an exceptional remedy in cases lacking a direct victim, Roman law permitted such actions to protect collective welfare.[7] As illustrated in Justinian's Institutes, if an object posed a danger in a public space, any citizen could seek penalties against the responsible party—emphasizing the preventive and public-oriented nature of *actio popularis*.

Though initially confined to municipal law, the core principle of *actio popularis*—the protection of collective interests—has since transcended national boundaries. It now features prominently in both domestic and international legal systems, especially in the context of human rights and public interest litigation.

Modern legal frameworks have adapted *actio popularis* to allow claims aimed at preventing harm to diffuse or collective interests, rather than remedying individual injuries.[8] These actions may be initiated by ordinary citizens or designated representatives and are often grounded in statutory mandates or judicial interpretations that expand traditional standing rules.[9] In this way, the doctrine continues to serve as a legal mechanism for promoting the public good.

In international law, *actio popularis* has gained broader relevance as a mechanism for invoking state responsibility in matters of collective interest. It underpins principles such as universal jurisdiction, allowing states to prosecute grave international crimes irrespective of territorial or national links, and supports institutional efforts to protect global public goods, including the environment, human rights, and international peace and security.[10]

At the core of *actio popularis* in this context is the notion of public interest, which aligns with the normative development of *erga omnes* and *erga omnes partes* obligations—duties owed respectively to the international community at large and to a defined group of states.[11] These obligations reflect a shift from traditional bilateralism toward a collective enforcement model, enabling states to act as custodians of shared legal and moral norms. This evolution affirms *actio popularis* as a critical tool for reinforcing collective responsibility and safeguarding the integrity of international law.

b. Legal Standing Before the International Court of Justice

Legal standing before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) denotes the recognized capacity of a state to initiate proceedings against another state. According to Article 34(1)

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[6] Chubrikj, Slavica, and Neda Chalovska-Dimovska, *Use of Actio Popularis in Cases of Discrimination*, Skopje: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, (2016), p. 7.

[7] Ahmadov, *Right of Actio Popularis*, 13-15; James E. Pfander, "Standing to Sue: Lessons from Scotland's Actio Popularis," *Duke Law Journal* 66 (2017): 1500–1502. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2750550.

[8] William J. Aceves, "Actio Popularis - The Class Action in International Law," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 2003, no. 1 (2003): 398–399. https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol2003/iss1/9.

[9] Kálmán Pócza, Gábor Dobos, and Attila Gyulai, "The Hungarian Constitutional Court: A Constructive Partner in Constitutional Dialogue" (June 1, 2018): 6. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3509893; Vicente F. Benítez-R, "With a Little Help from the People": Actio Popularis and the Politics of Judicial Review of Constitutional Amendments in Colombia 1955–90," *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 19, no. 3 (July 2021): 1022–24. https://doi.org/10.1093/icon/moab075; Muhammad Reza Syariffudin Zaki, *Hukum Perdagangan Internasional*, Penerbit Prenadamedia: Divisi Kencana: 152.

[10] Ahmadov, *Right of Actio Popularis*, 16-20; Moise Jean, "Customary International Law and the Challenge of Climate Change: How to Deal with the Stagnation of the Paris Agreement?" *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics* 54 (2021): 95–96. https://ssrn.com/abstract=3942517; Marco Longobardo, "The Legality of Closure on Land and Safe Passage between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank," *Asian Journal of International Law* 11 (2021): 41–42. https://ssrn.com/abstract=3761026.

[11] Abdul Ghafur Hamid, "The Rohingya Genocide Case (The Gambia v Myanmar): Breach of Obligations Erga Omnes Partes and the Issue of Standing," *IIUMLJ* 29 (2021): 38–41.

of the ICJ Statute, only states may appear as parties before the Court[12], thereby excluding individuals, corporations, and non-state actors from direct access. However, standing is not merely a procedural requirement; it is substantively linked to the claimant state's legal interest in the dispute.[13] Traditionally, this necessitates the demonstration of direct injury resulting from an internationally wrongful act committed by another state, a principle further reinforced by Article 42 of the International Law Commission's (ILC) Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts.[14]

This conventional framework of state responsibility is grounded in the bilateral nature of most international legal obligations, where one state owes specific duties to another. In such cases, the injured state is entitled to invoke the responsibility of the state in breach, and legal consequences ensue from that dyadic relationship.[15] The ICJ has historically adhered to this model, requiring a tangible nexus between the alleged wrongful act and the legal interest of the claimant state. This approach ensures clarity and restraint in international adjudication but can prove inadequate in addressing breaches that implicate broader communal values.

To address such limitations, international law has witnessed a gradual shift toward recognizing *actio popularis,* a doctrine allowing states to bring claims in the interest of the international community as a whole. While the ICJ has not fully embraced *actio popularis* in explicit terms[16], its underlying principles are discernible in cases concerning obligations *erga omnes*—duties owed by states to the global community. This development signifies a broader conceptualization of legal standing, permitting states to seek redress for violations of collective interests even in the absence of direct harm.[17] Consequently, the evolution of standing reflects a growing commitment to safeguarding universal norms and promoting international legal order beyond the confines of bilateral disputes.

c. Obligations *Erga omnes* and Their Role in *Actio Popularis*

The principle of *erga omnes* represents a key development in international law, closely tied to the procedural doctrine of *actio popularis*. These obligations are owed by states to the international community as a whole, not merely to individual states. They encompass fundamental norms—such as prohibitions against genocide, slavery, and racial discrimination—whose breach affects all states collectively. As such, *erga omnes* norms transcend bilateral concerns, reinforcing the idea that certain legal interests are shared universally.[18]

What sets *erga omnes* obligations apart is the collective harm resulting from their violation and their non-reciprocal nature. States must uphold these norms regardless of others' compliance, highlighting a shared responsibility to protect global values such as peace, security, and human dignity.[19] This universality elevates *erga omnes* obligations

[12] Muhammad Reza Syariffudin Zaki, dkk, *Pengantar Hukum Transaksi Bisnis Transnasiona*l, Penerbit, Refika: 125-126

[13] Urs, Priya. "Obligations Erga Omnes and the Question of Standing before the International Court of Justice." *Leiden Journal of International Law* 34, no. 2 (2021): 2–3. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0922156521000091.

[14] McGarr, B. K. "A Rush to Judgment? The Wobbly Bridge from Judicial Standing to Intervention in ICJ Proceedings." (2023): 10–12.

[15] Longobardo, Marco, "The Standing of Indirectly Injured States in the Litigation of Community Interests before the ICJ: Lessons Learned and Future Implications in Light of *The Gambia v. Myanmar* and Beyond," *International Community Law Review* 24 (2022): 4–5. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3774942.

[16] *South West Africa (Ethiopia v. South Africa; Liberia v. South Africa), Second Phase, Judgment* [1966] ICJ Rep 6, ¶88.

[17] *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (The Gambia v. Myanmar), Provisional Measures, Order* [2020] ICJ Rep 3, ¶¶41–42.

[18] Memeti, Ardit, and Bekim Nuhija. "The Concept of Erga Omnes Obligations in International Law." *New Balkan Politics 14* (2013): 32-33. https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3502662.

[19] Yoshifumi Tanaka, "The Legal Consequences of Obligations Erga Omnes in International Law," *Netherlands International Law Review* 68, no. 1 (2021): 3-5. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40802-021-00184-9.

beyond conventional international duties[20], framing them as essential to the integrity of the international legal system.[21]

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has played a central role in recognizing and shaping *erga omnes* obligations, most notably in its 1970 Barcelona Traction judgment. There, the Court distinguished between obligations owed to individual states and those owed to the global community, affirming that all states have a legal interest in the observance of fundamental norms. This laid the foundation for broader legal standing and supported the emergence of *actio popularis* as a tool for upholding universal principles. [22]

"An essential distinction should be drawn between the obligations of a State towards the international community as a whole, and those arising vis-à-vis another State in the field of diplomatic protection. By their very nature, the former are the concern of all States. In view of the importance of the rights involved, all States can be held to have a legal interest in their protection; they are obligations erga omnes."

The ICJ has identified several key *erga omnes* obligations, including the prohibition of acts of aggression, genocide, slavery, racial discrimination, and the right to self-determination.[23] These obligations are foundational to international law and extend beyond the traditional bilateral framework of state relations. When violated, these norms grant any state the right to hold the offending state accountable, reflecting the collective responsibility of the international community to protect human rights and maintain international peace.[24]

The *erga omnes* principle has been central in several landmark ICJ cases. In East Timor (1995), the Court recognized the right to self-determination as an *erga omnes* obligation[25], and in its Palestine Wall Advisory Opinion (2004), it reaffirmed the *erga omnes* nature of obligations related to self-determination.[26] These cases highlight that all states have a legal interest in ensuring the observance of such obligations, emphasizing their universal significance.[27]

While early ICJ jurisprudence, particularly in South West Africa, imposed limitations on the use of *erga omnes* as a basis for legal standing, recent decisions have seen a shift.[28] The increasing recognition of collective rights and global interests has led to a broader acceptance of states' legal standing to invoke responsibility for violations of *erga omnes* obligations.[29] Notably, in East Timor, Judge Weeramantry affirmed that Portugal had standing to rely on *erga omnes* obligations, and in Nuclear Tests, Judge ad hoc Barwick suggested that if the prohibition on nuclear testing were an *erga omnes* obligation, the applicants would have

[20] Tanaka, "The Legal Consequences of Obligations Erga Omnes," 1-8.

[21] Isabel Feichtner, "Community Interest," *Max Planck Encyclopedia of Public International Law*, 2007, ¶¶43–46.

[22] *Barcelona Traction, Light and Power Company, Limited (Belgium v. Spain), Second Phase, Judgment* [1970] ICJ Rep 3, ¶¶33–34.

[23] *Barcelona Traction,* ¶34.

[24] Longobardo, Marco. "The Contribution of International Humanitarian Law to the Development of the Law of International Responsibility Regarding Obligations Erga Omnes and Erga Omnes Partes." *Journal of Conflict and Security Law* 23 (2018): 4–6. https://ssrn.com/abstract=3332046.

[25] *East Timor (Portugal v. Australia), Judgment* [1995] ICJ Rep 90, ¶29.

[26] *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Advisory Opinion* [2004] ICJ Rep 136, ¶¶155–156.

[27] Zdravkovic, Ana. "Obligations Erga Omnes - Jus Cogens in Statu Nascendi? A Theory Inspired by the Nature of International Law." *Union University Law School Review* 12, no. 2 (2021): 584–585. https://ssrn.com/abstract=3994735; Erika de Wet, "Invoking Obligations Erga Omnes in the Twenty-First Century: Progressive Developments Since *Barcelona Traction*," *South African Yearbook of International Law* 37 (2013): 13–14. https://ssrn.com/abstract=2629560.

[28] *South West Africa (Ethiopia v. South Africa; Liberia v. South Africa),* ¶88.

[29] *Nuclear Tests (Australia v. France), Dissenting Opinion of Judge Barwick* [1974] ICJ Rep 253, 437.

standing.[30] These cases underline that the enforcement of *erga omnes* obligations requires corresponding legal standing for states to address violations effectively.[31]

d. *Erga omnes partes*: Treaty-Based Collective Responsibility

Building on the principle of *erga omnes*, which encompasses obligations owed to the international community as a whole, *erga omnes partes* narrows the focus to obligations owed specifically to states bound by a multilateral treaty. While *erga omnes* obligations are universal, *erga omnes partes* obligations arise from treaties that reflect collective commitments to safeguard fundamental values.[32]

Erga omnes partes allows states to invoke responsibility in the name of collective interest, without demonstrating direct injury, provided they are parties to the relevant treaty.[33] This strengthens legal mechanisms for enforcing treaty-based obligations protecting fundamental rights and humanitarian principles.

The distinction between *erga omnes* and *erga omnes partes* is particularly significant in international litigation, where states seek to ensure compliance with multilateral treaties. The practical relevance of *erga omnes partes* has been demonstrated in key cases before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), where states have sought to hold others accountable under treaties protecting fundamental norms.

The ICJ first articulated the concept of *erga omnes partes* in Belgium v. Senegal (2012), concerning Senegal's obligations under the Convention Against Torture. The Court stated[34]:

"The common interest in compliance with these obligations underscores their erga omnes partes character. Each State party has a legal interest in the protection of the rights involved and in the performance of every other State party's obligations."

This explanation highlights two key elements of *erga omnes partes*: (1) the existence of a treaty reflecting collective interest and (2) the legal obligation of each party to ensure compliance, irrespective of direct harm. As a result, any state party to the treaty can invoke responsibility for its breach, reinforcing the collective enforcement of international norms.

The concept was further applied in Gambia v. Myanmar (2019), a case under the Genocide Convention. In its provisional measures order, the ICJ reaffirmed the *erga omnes partes* nature of the Convention's obligations, emphasizing that all parties share a collective interest in preventing and punishing genocide.[35] The Gambia invoked Myanmar's responsibility without demonstrating direct injury, relying on its shared interest as a state party in upholding the Convention.[36]

Another significant case is South Africa v. Israel, brought to the ICJ under the Fourth Geneva Convention. South Africa challenged Israel's settlement policy in the occupied Palestinian territories, arguing it violated provisions universally applicable to all state parties.[37] Although the ICJ has not fully adjudicated the case, South Africa's invocation of

[30] *East Timor (Portugal v. Australia), Dissenting Opinion of Judge Weeramantry [1995] ICJ Rep 90, 215.*

[31] Tams, Christian J. *Enforcement of Erga Omnes Obligations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. p. 164-165, 179, 181.

[32] Oona A. Hathaway, Alaa Hachem, and Justin Cole, "A New Tool for Enforcing Human Rights: Erga Omnes Partes Standing," *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law* 61, no. 2 (forthcoming 2023): 297–298. Yale Law School, Public Law Research Paper; Yale Law & Economics Research Paper. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4569497.

[33] Hathaway, Hachem, and Cole, "A New Tool for Enforcing Human Rights," 302.

[34] *Questions Relating to the Obligation to Prosecute or Extradite (Belgium v. Senegal), Judgment* [2012] ICJ Rep 422, ¶¶68–69.

[35] *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (The Gambia v. Myanmar), Provisional Measures, Order* [2020] ICJ Rep 3, ¶¶41–42.

[36] Chow, Pok Yin Stephenson. "On Obligations Erga Omnes Partes." *Georgetown Journal of International Law* 52, no. 2 (2021): 5-7. City University of Hong Kong School of Law Legal Studies Research Paper No. 2021(1)-003. https://ssrn.com/abstract=3831693.

[37] *South Africa v. Israel*, ¶¶2, 629.

erga omnes partes underscores reliance on the shared legal interest of all parties to ensure compliance with the Geneva Conventions' humanitarian principles.

The practical application of *erga omnes partes* has been pivotal in several ICJ cases. In Belgium v. Senegal, Belgium successfully invoked Senegal's obligation to prosecute or extradite former President Hissène Habré under the Convention Against Torture. Similarly, in The Gambia v. Myanmar, The Gambia acted on behalf of all state parties to the Genocide Convention to address serious breaches of international law.[38] The invocation of *erga omnes partes* in South Africa v. Israel further illustrates how states can pursue collective enforcement of human rights and humanitarian law obligations.[39]

Through *erga omnes partes*, international law provides a powerful tool for states to ensure the protection of shared treaty-based obligations. This mechanism strengthens the enforceability of fundamental norms and reinforces the collective responsibility of states to uphold the values embedded in multilateral treaties, bridging the gap between legal theory and the practical enforcement of international commitments.

2. The Practice of Nationality Deprivation in the UAE

The deprivation of nationality is a controversial practice often used as a political tool to suppress dissent and silence opposition. In the UAE, it has gained prominence as a mechanism of control and punishment, particularly since 2011.[40] This practice operates within both international and domestic legal frameworks but is frequently criticized for its disregard of these boundaries.

Domestically, the UAE's Federal Law No. 17 of 1972 governs nationality matters, outlining conditions under which nationality can be revoked. These include actions deemed harmful to national security, acquiring another nationality without approval, or engaging in foreign service without consent.[41] However, the application of these laws has been criticized for lacking transparency and due process, raising concerns about their adherence to principles of justice and fairness.[42]

Under international law, the right to nationality is a fundamental human right, enshrined in key documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).[43] The UAE is also a party to the Arab Charter on Human Rights[44], which explicitly prohibits the arbitrary deprivation of nationality. Article 29 of the Arab Charter on Human Rights specifically prohibits such actions.

"Every individual has the right to a nationality. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality, nor denied the right to change it."

Despite the UAE's international obligations, concerns persist that its nationality deprivation policies violate human rights norms. The lack of due process and the use of nationality deprivation to punish political dissidents reveal a gap between legal principles and their implementation.

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[38] *Belgium v. Senegal*, ¶¶69-70.

[39] *Gambia v Myanmar*, ¶¶100, 112, 114.

[40] MENA Rights Group, *Citizenship Stripping in the United Arab Emirates: Statelessness as a Tool of Crackdown*, July 2024, p. 11–13.

[41] *Federal Law No. (17) of 1972*, Art. 15 (United Arab Emirates, 1972).

[42] MENA Statelessness Network and the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion, *Joint Submission to the Human Rights Council at the 43rd Session of the Universal Periodic Review: United Arab Emirates*, para. 27 (Universal Periodic Review, 43rd Session, 4th Cycle, May 1–12, 2023).

[43] United Nations. 1948. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. General Assembly Resolution 217A (December 10), Article 15; United Nations. 1966. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. Adopted December 16, entered into force March 23, 1976, Article 24.

[44] League of Arab States. "Arab Charter on Human Rights." September 15, 1994. Available online: https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38540.html

The UAE's legal framework for nationality provides structure, but its application often reflects political repression. Nationality deprivation is frequently used against dissidents and activists, raising concerns about arbitrariness and human rights violations.[45] Cases like those of Ahmed Ghaith al-Suwaidi and the UAE7 highlight how these laws are used to silence opposition without clear evidence or justification.

Nationality deprivation is often carried out without fair legal process or judicial review, denying individuals the chance to defend themselves. The lack of appeal mechanisms underscores the arbitrariness of the practice.[46]

Furthermore, many affected individuals are rendered stateless, stripped of basic rights such as education, healthcare, and employment.[47] The lack of transparency in these cases makes it difficult to challenge nationality deprivation, effectively silencing dissent and opposition.

Many individuals subjected to nationality deprivation in the UAE are left stateless, unable to access basic rights such as education, healthcare, and employment.[48] The lack of transparency in these cases makes challenging nationality deprivation difficult, silencing political dissent and opposition.

Beyond domestic implications, the practice of nationality deprivation has significant consequences under international law. Stripping individuals of nationality, particularly when it results in statelessness, violates global human rights treaties. This breach underscores the need for increased scrutiny and accountability in the UAE's nationality policies.

As a party to the Arab Charter on Human Rights, the UAE is bound by provisions that prohibit arbitrary nationality deprivation. Article 29 guarantees the right to nationality and explicitly prohibits its arbitrary removal. However, the UAE's use of nationality deprivation as a political tool violates these commitments, breaching its legal obligations under the Charter.

International human rights bodies have criticized the UAE for failing to uphold fundamental rights, especially when nationality deprivation targets political opponents. These violations suggest a pattern of state-sanctioned repression that undermines the UAE's credibility in honoring international legal commitments.[49]

The issue of statelessness is central to the debate on nationality deprivation. While the UAE is not a party to the Statelessness Convention, its principles remain relevant in assessing the country's obligations under customary international law. By depriving individuals of nationality without alternative legal protections, the UAE risks creating statelessness, violating core tenets of international human rights law. Stateless individuals face severe limitations on travel, employment, and legal protections, highlighting the UAE's failure to align with internationally recognized human rights standards.

3. Third-State Legal Standing to Invoke UAE's Responsibility under *actio popularis*

a. Treaty-Based Obligations and *Erga omnes partes* in the Context of Statelessness

[45] FIDH, *Exile and Civil Death: Serious Impacts of Arbitrary Deprivation of Nationality*, para. 8–10 (Universal Periodic Review, 47th Session, 4th Cycle, 2024).

[46] MENA Statelessness Network and Institute on Statelessness, *Joint Submission*, para. 16–17.

[47] MENA Rights Group, *Citizenship Stripping*, 18–19.

[48] Human Rights Watch. "UAE: Unrelenting Harassment of Dissidents' Families." December 22, 2019. Available online: https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/12/22/uae-unrelenting-harassment-dissidents-families; William Thomas Worster, "The Obligation to Grant Nationality to Stateless Children Under Customary International Law," *Michigan State International Law Review* 27 (2019): 442–443. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3073653.

[49] United Nations. 1961. *Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness*. Adopted August 30, 1961, Article 8; Lepoutre, Jules. "Citizenship Loss and Deprivation in the European Union (27 + 1)." *Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies Research Paper* No. RSCAS 2020/29 (May 2020): 17. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3657076; De Groot, Gerard-René. "Survey on Rules on Loss of Nationality in International Treaties and Case Law." *Centre for European Policy Studies Liberty and Security in Europe Paper*, no. 57 (August 30, 2013): 6–7. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2329935; Audrey Macklin, "Citizenship Revocation, the Privilege to Have Rights and the Production of the Alien," *Queen's Law Journal* 40, no. 1 (2014): 13–14. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2507786.

The principle of obligations *erga omnes partes* asserts that human rights treaties impose obligations that protect collective interests, allowing any State party to hold another accountable for breaches.[50] The Arab Charter on Human Rights, to which the UAE is a party, exemplifies this collective purpose by promoting values such as dignity, equality, and justice for all individuals.[51] Within this framework, the right to nationality is a fundamental guarantee, and its arbitrary deprivation violates the Charter's commitment to human rights protection.

While the UAE is not a party to the Statelessness Convention, it is still bound by analogous provisions in the Arab Charter, including the prohibition of arbitrary nationality deprivation. The use of nationality deprivation as a political tool against dissenters and their families directly contravenes Article 29 of the Arab Charter, which guarantees the right to nationality and prohibits arbitrary deprivation. This provision reflects a broader human rights commitment to preventing statelessness.[52] The lack of due process and reliance on vague national security justifications exacerbate the severity of these violations, leaving individuals vulnerable to further rights abuses.

Given the collective nature of human rights treaties, the enforcement of nationality-related obligations extends beyond the directly affected State or individual.[53] The Arab Charter aligns with broader frameworks such as the ICCPR and the Statelessness Convention, reflecting a universal commitment to protecting fundamental rights.[54] Violations of these commitments not only harm the immediate victims but also undermine the collective human rights framework that the Charter seeks to uphold.[55]

International court jurisprudence further supports the standing of non-injured States to bring claims based on obligations *erga omnes partes*.[56] The ICJ has affirmed this principle in cases like Belgium v. Senegal and The Gambia v. Myanmar, establishing that human rights treaty obligations confer a shared legal interest among all States parties.[57] Similarly, the Arab Charter's human rights protections imply that all Contracting States have an interest in ensuring compliance.

b. The Role of *Erga omnes* Obligations in Safeguarding Nationality Rights

In addition to invoking responsibility through *erga omnes partes*, a non-injured State may hold another State accountable for breaches of *erga omnes* obligations. A key example of this is arbitrary nationality deprivation, particularly when it results in statelessness.

[50] Nawi Ukabiala, Duncan Pickard, and Alyssa Yamamoto. "Erga Omnes Partes before the International Court of Justice: From Standing to Judgment on the Merits." *ILSA Journal of International and Comparative Law* 27, no. 2 (Winter 2021): 234-236. https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/ilsaic27&i=257; Cecily Rose, "Enforcing the 'Community Interest' in Combating Transnational Crimes: The Potential for Public Interest Litigation," *Netherlands International Law Review* 69, no. 1 (2022): 73–75.

[51] League of Arab States. 2004. "Arab Charter on Human Rights." Adopted May 22, 2004, entered into force March 15, 2008. Reprinted in *12 International Human Rights Reports* 893 (2005): Preamble.

[52] EB (Ethiopia) v Secretary of State for the Home Department, [2007] EWCA Civ 809, ¶68; Koroitamana v Commonwealth of Australia, [2006] HCA 28, ¶66; Xuncax v Gramajo, [1995] 886 F Supp 162, ¶69; UN General Assembly Resolution 50/152, "*The Situation of Human Rights in East Timor*," A/RES/50/152 (9 February 1996), ¶16. Available from undocs.org/A/RES/50/152.

[53] Hofbauer, Jane. "Erga Omnes (Partes)." In *Elgar Encyclopedia of Human Rights*, 7–8, edited by Christina Binder, Manfred Nowak, Jane A. Hofbauer, and Philipp Janig. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022 (forthcoming). https://ssrn.com/abstract=4084697.

[54] United Nations, *Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness*, preamble; United Nations, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, preamble.

[55] *Belgium v. Senegal*, ¶¶68-69*; Gambia v Myanmar*, ¶¶100, 112.

[56] *Arab Charter on Human Rights*, Article 3.

[57] Organization of American States. 1969. *Pact of San José, Costa Rica (American Convention on Human Rights).* Treaty Series No. 36, Article 20; Council of Europe. 1997. *European Convention on Nationality.* ETS No. 166, Article 4; Organization of African Unity. 1981. *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.* Treaty Series, Article 5; Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). 2012. *ASEAN Human Rights Declaration.* Article 18.

Nationality is a fundamental human right, essential for accessing other rights protected by instruments like the ICCPR and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.[58] Arbitrary deprivation strips individuals of legal identity and exposes them to further human rights abuses[59], making it a breach of obligations owed *erga omnes*.[60]

The obligation to prevent statelessness is non-reciprocal, requiring States to harmonize domestic laws and cooperate internationally.[61] Unlike bilateral obligations, *erga omnes* obligations protect fundamental rights and collective interests. This shared responsibility compels States to act when nationality rights are threatened, ensuring protection against statelessness.[62]

Arbitrary deprivation of nationality is a severe violation, as stateless individuals face heightened risks of discrimination, exclusion, and persecution. This practice affects not only the individuals involved but also undermines the broader international legal order, meeting the threshold for *erga omnes* obligations.[63]

States have a duty under international law to prevent statelessness and ensure due process in nationality decisions. This obligation extends beyond treaty law to customary norms, prohibiting arbitrary nationality deprivation as a core human rights principle. Violations disrupt the international legal system, warranting intervention from the global community.[64]

Any State can invoke responsibility for violations of *erga omnes* obligations, ensuring effective enforcement. The *erga omnes* nature of nationality rights makes their violation a concern for all States, underscoring the importance of nationality protection for international order and human rights.[65]

The ICJ has recognized the importance of standing in cases involving community interests, affirming *erga omnes* obligations under treaty law. States should be granted standing to enforce these obligations, ensuring effective accountability for arbitrary nationality deprivation.

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[58] Hélène Lambert, "Refugee Status, Arbitrary Deprivation of Nationality, and Statelessness within the Context of Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and Its 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees," *UNHCR Paper, Legal and Protection Policy Research Series*, Division of International Protection 2014/01 (October 1, 2014): 10. https://ssrn.com/abstract=2521076; David Baluarte, "The Risk of Statelessness: Reasserting a Rule for the Protection of the Right to Nationality," *Yale Human Rights and Development Law Journal* 19 (2017): 49–50. https://ssrn.com/abstract=3111529.

[59] *The Girls Yean and Bosico v. Dominican Republic*, 2005 *IACtHR* Series C No. 130, ¶142 (September 8, 2005); Siegelberg, *Statelessness*, 230; Al-Marzooqi, Allemann, and Tarzikhan, "How the UAE Crushes Dissent."

[60] *Barcelona Traction*, ¶34; Tams, *Enforcement of Erga Omnes Obligations*, 138; Laura Van Waas, *Nationality Matters: Statelessness under International Law*, para. 102 (Intersentia, Antwerp, 2008).

[61] UN General Assembly. 1974. *Resolution 61/137, Adopted December 19, 1974.* A/RES/61/137. ¶7. Available from undocs.org/A/RES/61/137; UN General Assembly. 2012. *Resolution 67/149, Adopted December 20, 2012.* A/RES/67/149. ¶7. Available from undocs.org/A/RES/67/149; UN General Assembly. 2013. *Resolution 68/141, Adopted December 18, 2013.* A/RES/68/141. ¶9. Available from undocs.org/A/RES/68/141; UN General Assembly. 2015. *Resolution 70/135, Adopted December 17, 2015.* A/RES/70/135. ¶12. Available from undocs.org/A/RES/70/135; UN General Assembly. 1996. *Resolution 50/152, Adopted February 9, 1996.* A/RES/50/152. ¶16. Available from undocs.org/A/RES/50/152; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *#IBelong Campaign Update, April 2021 – June 2021*.July 9, 2021. 7–10.

[62] UNHCR. "Decade of Action Against Statelessness Brings Big Gains but Further Action Needed." *Press Releases*, 11 October 2024. Available online: https://www.unhcr.org/news/press-releases/unhcr-decade-action-against-statelessness-brings-big-gains-further-action.

[63] Rossi, Pierfrancesco, and Massimo Iovane. "International Fundamental Values and Obligations Erga Omnes." In *The Protection of General Interests in Contemporary International Law*, 2–3, 9–10. Oxford University Press, 2021. https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4887115; Laura Galloro and Martina Guida, "The Limits of UN Security Council Action in Imposing Economic Sanctions under UN Charter and International Law: The Subtle Balance Between International Security and Human Rights Compliance," *Charles University in Prague Faculty of Law Research Paper* No. 2024/III/4 (2024): 14. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5026499.

[64] Nathanael Tilahun, "The EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime: Between Self-Help and Global Governance," *International Community Law Review* (Advance Article, published online December 20, 2021): 10–12. https://ssrn.com/abstract=3990934.

[65] *Belgium v. Senegal*, ¶¶ 68-69*; Gambia v Myanmar*, ¶¶100, 112.

Recognizing the standing of non-injured States ensures *erga omnes* obligations are upheld. Holding States accountable strengthens the rule of law and reinforces the collective commitment to protecting human rights.

C. Conclusion

This research demonstrates that the UAE's nationality deprivation practices violate core principles of international law, particularly the prohibition of arbitrary nationality deprivation. By situating nationality deprivation within the broader framework of international accountability, this research introduces a new perspective on the role of *actio popularis* in enforcing collective obligations. The analysis of *erga omnes* and *erga omnes partes* obligations highlights how third States can invoke responsibility for such violations, emphasizing the growing role of international litigation in safeguarding human rights. Recognizing *actio popularis* as a viable mechanism for challenging nationality deprivation contributes to the development of international legal norms that prioritize the protection of stateless individuals and prevent the abuse of citizenship laws for political repression. Strengthening these legal frameworks is essential to ensuring enforceability of human rights obligations and fostering greater accountability in the global legal order.

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