

KWA GEOK CHOO DISTINGUISHED VISITORS LECTURE

THE CONSTITUTIONAL STATUS OF THE BOMB**Professor Devika Hovell**

Professor of International Law, London School of Economics

Chairperson: Dr Cheah W.L.
Associate Professor, NUS Law

THURSDAY, 27 AUGUST 2026

5.30 PM - 7.00 PM

YALE-NUS HALL, UNIVERSITY TOWN (KENT RIDGE CAMPUS)

SYNOPSIS

Nuclear disarmament is one of those phrases that can still sound faintly ridiculous - until it is used to justify a bombing campaign. Treated one moment as the residue of a naïve politics of peace, and the next as the legal-political rationale for disciplining dangerous states, nuclear disarmament has acquired two public faces: sentimental and muscular. The trouble is that neither captures its real significance. This lecture reflects on the idea of the bomb as a constitutional artefact: not simply a weapon of unique destructive force, but one that has helped to structure world order. It argues that the status of nuclear weapons has been sustained through two dominant routes of justification. The first shelters the bomb under the grammar of self-defence and protects it as a sovereign right. The second defers to the logic of deterrence, recognising the bomb as a form of strategic control. In different ways, both routes embed nuclear weapons within the structures of legal and political authority. Against both fatalism and nostalgia, the lecture revisits these justifications through legal and political theories of authority, fear, non-domination, and public reason. It asks how nuclear weapons shape the conditions of constitutional order, what forms of domination they sustain, and why disarmament should be understood not as utopian aspiration, but as a constitutional imperative.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Devika Hovell is Professor of Public International Law at the London School of Economics. She serves on the Editorial Board of the European Journal of International Law and is one of the Editors of the international law blog EJIL:Talk. Devika is a member of Matrix Chambers in London. Her current book project examines the future of collective security.

PROGRAMME

5.00PM: Registration
5.30PM: Lecture by Professor Devika Hovell
6.30PM: Q&A Session
7.00PM: Dinner Reception

REGISTRATION

There is no registration fee for this lecture.
Visit <https://bit.ly/KGCDH> or scan the QR Code to register.



Closing Date: 20 August 2026, 5.00 PM
Contact: law.events@nus.edu.sg

CPD POINTS

Public CPD Point: 1
Practice Area: International Law
Training Level: Foundation

Participants who wish to obtain CPD Points are reminded that they must comply strictly with the Attendance Policy set out in the CPD Guidelines. For this activity, this includes signing in on arrival and signing out at the conclusion of the activity in the manner required by the organiser, and not being absent from the entire activity for more than 15 minutes. Participants who do not comply with the Attendance Policy will not be able to obtain CPD Points for attending the activity. Please refer to <http://www.sileCPDcentre.sg> for more information.