



INTERNATIONAL LAW
JOURNAL

**WHITE BLACK
LEGAL LAW
JOURNAL
ISSN: 2581-
8503**

Peer - Reviewed & Refereed Journal

The Law Journal strives to provide a platform for discussion of International as well as National Developments in the Field of Law.

WWW.WHITEBLACKLEGAL.CO.IN

DISCLAIMER

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, transmitted, translated, or distributed in any form or by any means—whether electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise—without the prior written permission of the Editor-in-Chief of *White Black Legal – The Law Journal*.

All copyrights in the articles published in this journal vest with *White Black Legal – The Law Journal*, unless otherwise expressly stated. Authors are solely responsible for the originality, authenticity, accuracy, and legality of the content submitted and published.

The views, opinions, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in the articles are exclusively those of the respective authors. They do not represent or reflect the views of the Editorial Board, Editors, Reviewers, Advisors, Publisher, or Management of *White Black Legal*.

While reasonable efforts are made to ensure academic quality and accuracy through editorial and peer-review processes, *White Black Legal* makes no representations or warranties, express or implied, regarding the completeness, accuracy, reliability, or suitability of the content published. The journal shall not be liable for any errors, omissions, inaccuracies, or consequences arising from the use, interpretation, or reliance upon the information contained in this publication.

The content published in this journal is intended solely for academic and informational purposes and shall not be construed as legal advice, professional advice, or legal opinion. *White Black Legal* expressly disclaims all liability for any loss, damage, claim, or legal consequence arising directly or indirectly from the use of any material published herein.

ABOUT WHITE BLACK LEGAL

White Black Legal – The Law Journal is an open-access, peer-reviewed, and refereed legal journal established to provide a scholarly platform for the examination and discussion of contemporary legal issues. The journal is dedicated to encouraging rigorous legal research, critical analysis, and informed academic discourse across diverse fields of law.

The journal invites contributions from law students, researchers, academicians, legal practitioners, and policy scholars. By facilitating engagement between emerging scholars and experienced legal professionals, *White Black Legal* seeks to bridge theoretical legal research with practical, institutional, and societal perspectives.

In a rapidly evolving social, economic, and technological environment, the journal endeavours to examine the changing role of law and its impact on governance, justice systems, and society. *White Black Legal* remains committed to academic integrity, ethical research practices, and the dissemination of accessible legal scholarship to a global readership.

AIM & SCOPE

The aim of *White Black Legal – The Law Journal* is to promote excellence in legal research and to provide a credible academic forum for the analysis, discussion, and advancement of contemporary legal issues. The journal encourages original, analytical, and well-researched contributions that add substantive value to legal scholarship.

The journal publishes scholarly works examining doctrinal, theoretical, empirical, and interdisciplinary perspectives of law. Submissions are welcomed from academicians, legal professionals, researchers, scholars, and students who demonstrate intellectual rigour, analytical clarity, and relevance to current legal and policy developments.

The scope of the journal includes, but is not limited to:

- Constitutional and Administrative Law
- Criminal Law and Criminal Justice
- Corporate, Commercial, and Business Laws
- Intellectual Property and Technology Law
- International Law and Human Rights
- Environmental and Sustainable Development Law
- Cyber Law, Artificial Intelligence, and Emerging Technologies
- Family Law, Labour Law, and Social Justice Studies

The journal accepts original research articles, case comments, legislative and policy analyses, book reviews, and interdisciplinary studies addressing legal issues at national and international levels. All submissions are subject to a rigorous double-blind peer-review process to ensure academic quality, originality, and relevance.

Through its publications, *White Black Legal – The Law Journal* seeks to foster critical legal thinking and contribute to the development of law as an instrument of justice, governance, and social progress, while expressly disclaiming responsibility for the application or misuse of published content.

WEALTH, POWER, AND IMPUNITY:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE EPSTEIN CASE AND ITS
REVELATIONS THROUGH THE LENS OF
INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

AUTHORED BY - KARTIK VIVEK RANGA

ABSTRACT

The Jeffrey Epstein case stands as one of the clearest modern examples of a criminal justice system failing to protect victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking. Over more than two decades, numerous allegations and substantial evidence pointed to a systematic pattern of abuse involving women and underage girls. Yet despite the gravity of these accusations, a combination of prosecutorial decisions, institutional failures, and the extraordinary influence of wealth and social power allowed Epstein to avoid meaningful accountability for years. For many survivors, this prolonged failure of the legal system resulted in the denial of basic rights to justice, recognition, and effective remedy under both domestic and international law.

*Recent developments have renewed global scrutiny of the case. The enactment of the **Epstein Files Transparency Act** in November 2025 and the subsequent release by the **U.S. Department of Justice** of more than 3.5 million pages of investigative material in January 2026 have brought previously concealed information into public view. In response, several United Nations independent human rights experts have suggested that the documented conduct surrounding the Epstein network may rise to the level of serious international crimes, including sexual slavery, torture, and enforced disappearance.*

Against this backdrop, this paper examines a central question: how did systemic weaknesses in legal accountability mechanisms, combined with the structural advantages associated with wealth and elite networks, enable the sustained violation of international human rights norms in the Epstein case? The study also considers what legal and institutional reforms may be necessary to prevent comparable failures in the future. To address these issues, the research adopts a doctrinal and critical legal analysis of relevant treaty obligations, domestic statutes, and judicial decisions. In particular, it situates the Epstein case within the broader framework

*of international human rights law, the **Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000**, and the **Crime Victims' Rights Act of 2004**, examining how these legal instruments were applied, interpreted, or neglected in practice.*

Keywords: Jeffrey Epstein; human trafficking; sex trafficking; crimes against humanity; Crime Victims' Rights Act; prosecutorial misconduct; Trafficking Victims Protection Act; impunity; human rights law; Epstein Files Transparency Act.

I. INTRODUCTION

The story of **Jeffrey Epstein**, an American financier, a convicted sex offender, and accused global sex trafficker is not merely a tale of individual criminality. It is, at its core, a story about the systematic failure of legal institutions to protect the most vulnerable from abuse perpetrated by the most powerful. Epstein's crimes, which spanned at least two decades and three continents, were known to law enforcement as early as 2005 when Palm Beach Police opened a criminal investigation after the parents of a fourteen-year-old girl reported that he had paid her for a massage.¹

Yet despite this early knowledge, and despite evidence compiled by investigators revealing that Epstein's trafficking network preyed upon dozens of underage women and girls, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, **Alexander Acosta**, concluded a secret **Non-Prosecution Agreement (NPA) with Epstein's defense team in 2007**. This agreement conferred sweeping federal immunity upon Epstein, four named co-conspirators, and 'any potential co-conspirators,' while deliberately concealing its existence from victims.²

Epstein's death by apparent suicide in August 2019, while in federal custody awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges in the Southern District of New York, foreclosed a full judicial reckoning. However, **the subsequent conviction of his principal associate Ghislaine Maxwell in 2021 for sex trafficking and related offenses, and the release of millions of pages of investigative material under the Epstein Files Transparency Act of 2025**, have reignited urgent questions about accountability, the reach of international human rights law,

¹ Jeffrey Epstein: Tracing the Legal Cases That Led to Sex-Trafficking Charges, NAT'L PUB. RADIO (Jul. 25, 2025), <https://www.npr.org/2025/07/25/nx-s1-5478620/jeffrey-epstein-crimes-timeline-legal-case>.

² Dep't of Justice Office of Prof'l Responsibility, Investigation of the U.S. Dep't of Justice's Resolution of Its 2006–2008 Federal Criminal Investigation of Jeffrey Epstein and Its Interactions with Victims During the Investigation (2020), <https://www.justice.gov/opr/page/file/1336471/dl>; In re Wild, 955 F.3d 1196 (11th Cir. 2020) (en banc).

and the structural conditions that permit powerful individuals to operate trafficking networks with near-total impunity.³

This paper undertakes a critical legal analysis of the Epstein case through the framework of international human rights law and domestic legal instruments. **Part II** sets out the conceptual and doctrinal context, locating the case within the global architecture of anti-trafficking law and human rights obligations. **Part III** conducts a legal and critical legal analysis of the key failures in prosecutorial accountability, victim rights, and state obligations. **Part IV** identifies the legal and practical outputs of this analysis. **Part V** concludes with recommendations for reform.

II. CONCEPTUAL CONTEXT: TRAFFICKING, STATE OBLIGATIONS, AND ELITE IMPUNITY

A. DEFINING THE PROBLEM: SEX TRAFFICKING AS A HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION

Human trafficking, and sexual trafficking in particular, represents one of the most severe violations of fundamental human rights. **The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA)**, the United States' first comprehensive federal anti-trafficking statute, defines sex trafficking as the recruitment, harbouring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or where the person has not attained eighteen years of age.⁴

Internationally, the **Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol)**, supplementing the **United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000**, defines trafficking as encompassing recruitment, transportation, or receipt of persons by means of threat, force, coercion, deception, or abuse of power for the purpose of exploitation, which includes sexual exploitation.⁵

The intersection of international human rights law and domestic criminal enforcement

³ Epstein Files Transparency Act, Pub. L. No. 119-38, 139 Stat. 656 (2025).

⁴ Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, Pub. L. No. 106-386, § 103(9), 114 Stat. 1464, 1470 (2000) (codified as amended at 22 U.S.C. § 7102(9)).

⁵ Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children art. 3(a), Nov. 15, 2000, 2237 U.N.T.S. 319 [hereinafter Palermo Protocol].

brings into focus a central tension in the Epstein case. On one hand, states are bound by international obligations under instruments such as the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)** and the **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** to prevent, investigate, and punish violence against women and girls, including acts committed by private individuals. On the other, the record in Epstein's case reflects a clear failure on the part of institutions to effectively carry out these responsibilities.⁶

B. THE STRUCTURAL PROBLEM: WEALTH, POWER, AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF IMPUNITY

The Epstein case cannot be understood merely as an instance of prosecutorial lapse; it points to a deeper structural concern in which wealth and social influence shape the functioning of legal institutions. As noted in critical legal scholarship, the criminal justice process does not operate in isolation from existing power structures, but often reflects and reinforces them. In this context, Epstein's considerable financial resources allowed him to engage prominent legal representation, cultivate influential connections, and negotiate outcomes that would be far beyond the reach of an ordinary accused person. These factors contributed to a level of insulation from accountability that raises serious questions about equality before the law.⁷

This structural imbalance is also evident in the manner in which victims were identified and exploited. Investigations indicate that recruiters associated with Epstein targeted young women in financially vulnerable circumstances, often using promises of education or employment as a means of coercion. The convergence of economic hardship, gender, and age created conditions in which victims were significantly less able to resist or report abuse. Such vulnerabilities were not incidental, but appear to have been deliberately identified and exploited.⁸

Observations by United Nations independent human rights experts, following the release of the Epstein Files in January 2026, further underscore the gravity of the conduct involved. They described the pattern of abuse as occurring within a broader context marked by discrimination, misogyny, and systemic inequality, alongside the commodification of women

⁶ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women art. 2, Dec. 18, 1979, 1249 U.N.T.S. 13 [hereinafter CEDAW]; Convention on the Rights of the Child art. 34, Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3.

⁷ Zanita E. Fenton, Jeffrey Epstein: Pedophiles, Prosecutors, and Power, 26 J. GENDER RACE & JUST. 313, 316–20 (2023), https://jgrj.law.uiowa.edu/sites/jgrj.law.uiowa.edu/files/2023-05/JGRJ%2026.2_Cook_1_0.pdf.

⁸ Epstein's Shadows Loom Large, N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 2019); see also Prosecution of Sex Trafficking, 78 LA. L. REV. 1025, 1036 (2017).

and girls. The materials released also suggest that victims were trafficked across national borders, including from countries such as Turkey, the Czech Republic, and several parts of Asia, highlighting the transnational nature of the network and the corresponding challenges for legal accountability.⁹

III. LEGAL ANALYSIS

A. THE 2008 NON-PROSECUTION AGREEMENT AND VIOLATIONS OF THE CRIME VICTIMS' RIGHTS ACT

The Crime Victims' Rights Act of 2004 (CVRA), codified at 18 U.S.C. § 3771, establishes an enumerated set of rights for victims of federal crimes, including the right to be reasonably heard at public proceedings, the right to confer with the government's attorneys, and the right to be treated with fairness and respect.¹⁰

In 2008, a victim identified as 'Jane Doe' filed an emergency petition in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida, alleging that federal prosecutors had violated the CVRA by secretly negotiating and executing the Non-Prosecution Agreement with Epstein without notifying or consulting with victims. The petition, styled as an emergency pleading, revealed that Courtney Wild and more than thirty other victims had been affirmatively misled by government attorneys regarding the status of the federal investigation during the period of NPA negotiations.¹¹

In 2019, United States District Judge **Kenneth Marra** ruled that federal prosecutors had violated the **Crime Victims' Rights Act** by secretly reaching the non-prosecution agreement without informing victims. The ruling confirmed what victims and their advocates had long argued: that the deliberate concealment of the agreement from those most directly harmed represented a systemic denial of their statutory rights.¹²

Notwithstanding this finding, the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals, in its 2020 panel

⁹ U.N. Office of the High Comm'r for Hum. Rts., Flawed 'Epstein Files' Disclosures Undermine Accountability for Grave Crimes (Feb. 2026), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/02/flawed-epstein-files-disclosures-undermine-accountability-grave-crimes>.

¹⁰ Crime Victims' Rights Act, 18 U.S.C. § 3771 (2004).

¹¹ Doe v. United States, No. 9:08-cv-80736-KAM, Emergency Victim's Petition for Enforcement of Crime Victims' Rights Act (S.D. Fla. July 7, 2008); Legal Momentum, Jeffrey Epstein and the Crime Victims Rights Act (CVRA), <https://www.legalmomentum.org/newsletters/jeffrey-epstein-and-crime-victims-rights-act-cvra>.

¹² Two Jane Does v. United States, No. 9:08-cv-80736-KAM (S.D. Fla. Feb. 21, 2019); Epstein Accusers Denied Compensation in Victims' Rights Case, PBS NEWSHOUR (Sep. 2019), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/epstein-accusers-denied-compensation-in-victims-rights-case>.

decision in *In re Wild*, held that the CVRA was not triggered because the government had never filed federal charges against Epstein. The panel, while acknowledging that victims had 'suffered unspeakable horror,' concluded that rights under the Act do not attach until criminal proceedings have been formally initiated. This interpretation, that prosecutorial manipulation of pre-charging procedures could deprive victims of any statutory protection was widely criticised by scholars and victim advocates as enabling precisely the prosecutorial abuse the CVRA was designed to prevent.¹³

The Department of Justice's own Office of Professional Responsibility subsequently examined the conduct of the prosecutors and confirmed that the prosecutors had misled victims regarding the status of the federal investigation after the NPA was signed, sending letters to victims advising them of their victim rights while simultaneously concealing the very agreement that would terminate any possibility of federal prosecution. This documented pattern of institutional bad faith underscores the severity of the rights violation and the inadequacy of the eventual legal remedy afforded to survivors.¹⁴

B. INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS AND STATE RESPONSIBILITY

Under international human rights law, states bear a positive obligation to exercise due diligence in preventing, investigating, prosecuting, and punishing acts of violence against women and girls, including trafficking. This obligation derives from **Article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women**, which requires states parties to take all appropriate measures to ensure the practical realisation of the principle of equality between men and women, and to eliminate practices which constitute discrimination against women.¹⁵

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Committee) has elaborated in **General Recommendation No. 35 (2017)** that gender-based violence against women is a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights on a basis of equality with men, and that states may be responsible for private actors' conduct where they fail to act with due diligence to prevent and respond to such acts.

¹³ *In re Wild*, 955 F.3d 1196, 1201 (11th Cir. 2020); Paul G. Cassell & James R. Marsh, Circumventing the Crime Victims' Rights Act: A Critical Analysis of the Eleventh Circuit's Decision Upholding Jeffrey Epstein's Secret Non-Prosecution Agreement, 2021 UTAH L. REV. ONLINE 249, <https://dc.law.utah.edu/scholarship/249/>.

¹⁴ Dep't of Justice Office of Prof'l Responsibility, *supra* note 2, at 5–7.

¹⁵ CEDAW, *supra* note 6, art. 2(e).

The systematic failure of the United States to prosecute Epstein's trafficking network from 2007 to 2019 falls within the scope of this due diligence obligation.¹⁶

In February 2026, the **United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights** published a statement by a group of independent human rights experts appointed under the UN Human Rights Council, concluding that the Epstein Files contain 'disturbing and credible evidence of systematic and large-scale sexual abuse, trafficking and exploitation of women and girls.' The experts further warned that the documented conduct may meet the legal threshold for crimes against humanity under international criminal law, where such conduct constitutes part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population.¹⁷

Under the **Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 7** defines crimes against humanity to include rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, and other acts of a similar character causing great suffering, when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population. The experts noted that Epstein's network demonstrated systematic organisation, transnational reach, and structural design specifically targeting vulnerable women and girls, characteristics that suggest the threshold requirements of **Article 7** may be satisfied.¹⁸

C. CRITICAL LEGAL ANALYSIS: PROSECUTORIAL COMPLICITY AND STRUCTURAL BIAS

A critical legal analysis of the Epstein case reveals that the failures of the justice system were not merely technical or procedural but reflected deeper structural biases in favour of the wealthy and powerful. The Non-Prosecution Agreement negotiated by **U.S. Attorney Alexander Acosta** was, as legal scholars have argued, extraordinarily generous even by the standards of white-collar prosecutions. The agreement granted Epstein federal immunity, conferred immunity upon unnamed co-conspirators, allowed him to plead guilty to far lesser state charges of solicitation of prostitution, and permitted him to serve what amounted to an eighteen-month sentence with a daily work-release provision enabling him to leave jail for twelve hours per day.¹⁹

This result cannot be explained by evidentiary weakness alone. Federal prosecutors had

¹⁶ Comm. on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Gen. Recommendation No. 35 on Gender-Based Violence Against Women, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/35 (July 26, 2017).

¹⁷ U.N. Office of the High Comm'r for Hum. Rts., *supra* note 9.

¹⁸ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court art. 7, July 17, 1998, 2187 U.N.T.S. 90.

¹⁹ Fenton, *supra* note 7, at 327–36; Dep't of Justice Office of Prof'l Responsibility, *supra* note 2, at 3–9.

assembled evidence of systematic trafficking involving dozens of victims across multiple states and multiple countries. **The Trafficking Victims Protection Act**, in its original form and as reauthorised through 2008, provided statutory tools fully adequate to the prosecution of Epstein's conduct. The deliberate choice to foreclose federal prosecution in favour of a minimal state plea, against the interests of identified victims and over the objections of the investigating officers of the Palm Beach Police Department, was a product not of legal necessity but of prosecutorial abdication facilitated by Epstein's wealth, social connections, and legal power.²⁰

Furthermore, the role of financial institutions in facilitating Epstein's network has received scrutiny through civil litigation. The United States government sued **JPMorgan Chase Bank** in 2022, alleging that the bank had facilitated, sustained, and concealed Epstein's human trafficking network through financial services, including by assisting in the structuring of large cash withdrawals that Epstein used to pay his victims.²¹

The Epstein Files released in 2025 and 2026 further revealed that the tentacles of the network extended to internationally prominent figures: politicians, academics, royalty, and business elites across multiple jurisdictions. Whether or not criminal liability can be established against those individuals, the disclosure itself raises profound questions about how wealth-mediated social networks can generate collective structures of complicity and silence that insulate traffickers from accountability at the expense of their victims' rights.²²

D. THE EPSTEIN FILES TRANSPARENCY ACT AND VICTIM-CENTRED DISCLOSURE

The Epstein Files Transparency Act, signed into law on 19 November 2025 following a bipartisan vote of 427 to 1 in the House of Representatives and unanimous Senate approval, required the Attorney General to publicly release all unclassified records, documents, communications, and investigative materials relating to Jeffrey Epstein within 30 days.²³

The Act's implementation has itself become a site of human rights concern. On 30

²⁰ Lynette A. Dalley & Katherine F. Erickson, Prosecuting Human Trafficking in the Wake of Epstein: A Proposal for the Implementation of Aggravated Human Trafficking Statutes, 34 *BYU PRELAW REV.* 135, 137–40 (2020), <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byuplr/vol34/iss1/14>.

²¹ Julie K. Brown, How a Future Trump Cabinet Member Gave a Serial Sex Abuser the Deal of a Lifetime, *MIAMI HERALD* (Nov. 28, 2018), <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/article220097825.html>; Gov't of the U.S. v. JPMorgan Chase Bank, N.A., No. 1:22-cv-10904 (S.D.N.Y. 2022).

²² Massive Trove of Epstein Files Released by DOJ, *CBS NEWS* (Feb. 2026), <https://www.cbsnews.com/live-updates/epstein-files-released-doj-2026/>; U.S. Dep't of Justice, Epstein Case Disclosures (2026), <https://www.justice.gov/epstein/doj-disclosures>.

²³ Epstein Files Transparency Act, *supra* note 3.

January 2026, the Department of Justice released over three million pages of material together with approximately 2,000 videos and 180,000 images. However, UN independent human rights experts noted 'grave errors in the release process,' including botched redactions that exposed the identities of victims including those victimised as children, before documents were withdrawn. Attorneys for a group of survivors reported that the Justice Department had failed to redact the identities of at least thirty-one individuals who had been victimised as minors. The victims' families described this as 'incredibly insensitive and retraumatizing.'²⁴

These failures underscored a fundamental human rights principle that disclosure processes must be designed and executed in a victim-centred manner. The UN experts called on US authorities to urgently remedy these failures, to ensure full disclosure that enables an understanding of the methods of the criminal enterprise, and to provide full remedy and reparation to victims for all harms sustained.²⁵

IV. LEGAL AND PRACTICAL OUTPUT OF THE ANALYSIS

The foregoing analysis yields several important legal and practical conclusions.

First, the Epstein case provides a paradigmatic example of how deficiencies in domestic implementation of international human rights obligations, particularly the due diligence obligation to investigate and prosecute trafficking can produce systemic impunity for powerful offenders. The failure of the United States to comply with its obligations under CEDAW and the Palermo Protocol in the 2007–2008 period was not merely a legal technicality but resulted in concrete and severe harm to dozens of victims who were denied justice for over a decade.

Second, the interpretation of the **Crime Victims' Rights Act** adopted by the Eleventh Circuit in *In re Wild*, that pre-charging conduct is beyond the Act's reach exposes a structural gap in victim protection that facilitated prosecutorial manipulation of the justice system. Legislative reform is required to extend CVRA protections explicitly to the pre-charging phase of investigations in order to prevent the deliberate weaponisation of procedural technicalities against victims' interests. Several legal scholars have argued, persuasively, that the CVRA's text and purpose support a pre-charging interpretation, and the legislative history of the statute

²⁴ U.N. Office of the High Comm'r for Hum. Rts., *supra* note 9; CBS News, *supra* note 22; Dep't of Justice, DOJ Disclosures (Jan. 30, 2026), <https://www.justice.gov/epstein/doj-disclosures>.

²⁵ U.N. Office of the High Comm'r for Hum. Rts., *supra* note 9.

reinforces this view.²⁶

Third, the UN experts' assessment that the documented conduct in the Epstein Files may satisfy the threshold for crimes against humanity under the **Rome Statute** represents a significant development in the international legal characterisation of elite trafficking networks. While the **International Criminal Court's jurisdiction** over crimes committed predominantly on US territory remains practically limited by the United States' non-ratification of the **Rome Statute**, the articulation of this legal standard is important for at least two reasons: it reinforces the normative severity of the conduct and creates political and legal pressure on competent national jurisdictions including the US and the multiple countries whose nationals figure in the files to exercise universal or active personality jurisdiction over surviving perpetrators.²⁷

Fourth, the call by UN experts for the lifting of statutes of limitations preventing prosecution of grave crimes attributed to the Epstein enterprise reflects an emerging principle in international human rights law that for the most serious violations of human rights, those potentially meeting the threshold of crimes against humanity the passage of time cannot extinguish the obligation of states to investigate and punish. This principle, recognised in the practice of international human rights bodies and in the jurisprudence of regional human rights courts, ought to inform US legislative and prosecutorial policy in ongoing investigations arising from the Epstein Files disclosure.²⁸

Fifth, the involvement of financial institutions in facilitating the Epstein network, as revealed in civil litigation and the released files, indicates the need for enhanced anti-money laundering obligations specifically calibrated to identify and report financial flows consistent with the funding and payment patterns of trafficking operations. The allegation that **JPMorgan Chase** facilitated large structured cash withdrawals that financed payments to victims over many years, if established, would also raise questions of institutional liability under existing

²⁶ Cassell & Marsh, *supra* note 13, at 249–60; see also 18 U.S.C. § 3771(a)(8) (right to be treated with fairness and respect for the victim's dignity and privacy).

²⁷ Rome Statute, *supra* note 18, art. 7; 'No One Is Too Wealthy or Too Powerful to Be Above the Law'; Rights Experts Demand Accountability, U.N. NEWS (Feb. 2026), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/02/1166980>.

²⁸ Inter-Am. Ct. H.R., *Barrios Altos v. Peru*, Merits, Reparations and Costs, Judgment (Mar. 14, 2001); U.N. Office of the High Comm'r for Hum. Rts., *supra* note 9 (calling on states to lift statutes of limitations preventing prosecution of grave crimes).

banking regulations and human rights due diligence frameworks.²⁹

V. CONCLUSION

The Jeffrey Epstein case, together with the disclosures contained in the **Epstein Files**, presents the international legal community and national legislatures with a troubling case study in how concentrated wealth and entrenched power can undermine the protection of human rights. The Files document a sustained pattern of sexual trafficking and exploitation of women and girls across several jurisdictions over a period of more than two decades. Crucially, these activities were not entirely hidden from law enforcement authorities. What the record increasingly suggests is not merely a failure to discover the crimes, but a failure to pursue them with the seriousness and persistence that such allegations required. In part, this reflects the capacity of individuals with immense financial resources and influential networks to shape the legal processes that are meant to hold them accountable.

Existing international human rights law already provides a framework capable of addressing conduct of this nature. The due diligence obligations articulated under the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**, the standards established by the Palermo Protocol on trafficking in persons, and the evolving jurisprudence surrounding crimes against humanity together offer a vocabulary and legal structure commensurate with the gravity of what the Epstein Files reveal. The real difficulty lies not in the absence of legal norms, but in their enforcement. States must now demonstrate the political and institutional commitment required to translate these principles into meaningful investigation, prosecution, and redress for victims. As several **United Nations** independent experts have cautioned, procedural barriers such as restrictive statutes of limitations, excessive redactions in released records, and opaque prosecutorial decision-making risk shielding serious wrongdoing from scrutiny and accountability.

At the same time, the continuing disclosures made possible by the **Epstein Files Transparency Act** represent a rare moment of legal and historical reckoning. Even with evident procedural shortcomings, the release of this material creates an opportunity to scrutinize the operation of a trafficking network that spanned borders, institutions, and social elites. More importantly, it

²⁹ Gov't of the U.S. v. JPMorgan Chase Bank, N.A., *supra* note 21; U.N. Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/17/31 (June 16, 2011) (Ruggie Principles).

offers a chance to restore, however imperfectly, some measure of recognition and justice to those who endured years of exploitation. Whether governments, particularly that of the United States, ultimately act on this opportunity will serve as a significant test of how effective international human rights law can be when confronted with the entrenched power of wealth and influence.

