

Name Farwa Shamsher
Roll No: F22-1190
Section: B
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Submitted: Amina
Topic: International law and municipal law

Difference between international law and municipal law?

Introduction:

Law is a system of rules and guidelines which are enforced through institutions to govern behavior. There are various branches of law that serve different purposes and apply in different spheres. Among them**, International Law** and **Municipal Law** (also referred to as Domestic Law) are two fundamental categories of legal systems. Though both regulate human conduct, they operate at different levels and have different scopes of application.

Meaning and Definition:

1. **International Law:**
    - **Meaning:** International Law is a body of rules and principles that govern the relations between sovereign states, as well as international organizations, individuals, and other international actors. It regulates issues such as human rights, trade, the environment, and conflict.
    - **Definition:** International law can be defined as the set of rules that govern the relations between countries and other international entities. It primarily seeks to ensure peaceful coexistence, economic cooperation, and the protection of global values like human rights and environmental protection.
        - **Example:** The **United Nations (UN)** Charter, **Geneva Conventions**, **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** rulings.
2. **Municipal Law:**
    - **Meaning:** Municipal law (or domestic law) refers to the legal system that governs the behavior of individuals and entities within a specific country or state. This law is created and enforced by the domestic legislature and judiciary and is applicable within the territorial boundaries of the state.
    - **Definition:** Municipal law is the law that regulates conduct within a country and governs the legal relations of individuals and entities with each other, with the state, and with other organizations within that jurisdiction.
        - **Example:** Laws of countries like **the U.S. Constitution**, **Indian Penal Code**, or **UK's common law**.

Differences between International Law and Municipal Law:

Basis	International Law	Municipal Law
Scope	Deals with relations between states, international organizations, and individuals.	Deals with relations between individuals, and between individuals and the state within a specific country.
Jurisdiction	Operates globally, beyond national borders.	Operates within the territorial boundaries of a nation.
Sources	Treaties, international conventions, customary international law, judicial decisions (e.g., ICJ), and principles of law.	Statutes, regulations, judicial decisions, and common law.
Enforcement	Enforcement depends on the cooperation of states; no centralized enforcement mechanism (except through the UN, ICJ, etc.).	Enforced by national authorities (police, courts, etc.) within a country.
Examples	Geneva Conventions, UN Security Council Resolutions, World Trade Organization regulations.	U.S. Federal Law, UK Parliament Acts, Indian Constitution.
Sanctions	Sanctions are mostly diplomatic or economic and may involve international pressure or military intervention.	Sanctions involve domestic legal penalties such as imprisonment, fines, etc.

Key Differences:

- **International Law** regulates the relations between states and international organizations, whereas **Municipal Law** governs the legal conduct of individuals within a country.
- **International Law** often depends on the voluntary consent of states (treaties, conventions), and lacks a centralized enforcement mechanism, while **Municipal Law** is enforced by the state's internal mechanisms (police, judiciary).
- In cases where **international law** and **municipal law** conflict, there are debates about which one prevails. Some legal systems adopt a dualist approach (requiring international law to be incorporated into domestic law), while others use a monist approach (international law automatically becomes part of domestic law).

Examples of International Law and Municipal Law:

- **International Law Example:**
  - The **United Nations Charter** (1945) is a central piece of international law, governing the conduct of states in maintaining peace, security, and cooperation.
  - **Geneva Conventions**: These conventions regulate the conduct of armed forces in war, including the treatment of prisoners of war and the protection of civilians.
- **Municipal Law Example:**
  - **The U.S. Constitution** is the fundamental law of the United States, outlining the structure of government, rights of individuals, and the operation of federal law.
  - **Indian Penal Code** (IPC): This is the legal code in India that defines crimes and prescribes punishments for them.

Key Citations:

1. **International Law:**
   - **A.V. Dicey**, a renowned British constitutional theorist, defined international law as the "body of rules which regulate the conduct of states and of international organizations."
   - In **The North Sea Continental Shelf Case** (1969), the **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** highlighted the role of customary international law in binding state behavior, even when no treaty exists.
   - **Kelsen (1945)** in "General Theory of Law and State" described international law as a "system of norms that guide the interaction between states and govern matters like diplomacy and the use of force."
2. **Municipal Law:**
   - According to **Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England**, "Municipal law is the law of a particular nation, the body of rules which the state has prescribed for the regulation of its own inhabitants."
   - In **Marbury v. Madison** (1803), the U.S. Supreme Court established the principle of **judicial review**, confirming the supremacy of municipal law in constitutional matters.
   - **John Austin**, in his "Province of Jurisprudence Determined," argues that municipal law is a "command of the sovereign backed by the threat of a sanction."

Conclusion:

While **International Law** and **Municipal Law** both serve to regulate the actions of states, organizations, and individuals, they operate in distinct arenas—international law on a global scale and municipal law within the confines of a particular nation. International law is based on mutual agreements between states, whereas municipal law is enforceable by the legal authorities within a state. Their relationship is complex, with cases like **the Lockerbie bombing** (1988) showing how international and municipal laws can intersect and sometimes conflict. Both, however, are essential for maintaining order, peace, and justice in the world.