

An aerial photograph of a frozen river or stream. The water is mostly frozen into large, irregular blocks of ice and snow, with some open water visible. The scene is captured in a high-angle, top-down perspective, showing the intricate patterns of the ice and the surrounding landscape. The colors are predominantly white, grey, and blue, with some darker patches of water or shadow.

Public international law

FRESHFIELDS

A first-class public international law practice

Freshfields acts as counsel for and advisor to States, State entities, corporations, international organisations, non-governmental organisations and individuals across the full spectrum of public international law.

We serve as counsel in cases before all major international courts and tribunals, including the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, inter-State arbitral tribunals, the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights.

We also have an active advisory practice, evaluating risks and opportunities presented by issues of public international law to help our clients determine their best course of action.

We are also regularly called upon to lead work on sophisticated human rights mandates, often on a pro bono basis, where the issues at stake can be particularly sensitive.

We are experienced in working collaboratively with government officials, eminent professors and independent practitioners of international law, as well as with technical experts such as hydrographers and cartographers, to formulate and implement coherent and co-ordinated strategies.

Issues on which members of our team have in-depth experience include:

- sovereignty over territory, including islands
- boundary disputes

- the law of the sea
- international human rights law
- rights to natural resources, including hydrocarbons, minerals, fisheries, rivers and other fresh water
- inter-State arrangements for sharing resources
- the formation, dissolution and secession of States, and recognition of governments
- the law of treaties: drafting, reservations, interpretation, application, modification, succession and termination
- international environmental law
- trans-boundary pollution
- control over airspace
- State immunity and diplomatic immunity
- issues of public international law arising before national or regional courts or regulatory authorities
- business and human rights issues
- international sanctions
- international humanitarian law
- trade-related disputes

Members of our public international law practice come from both common law and civil law backgrounds, and between them work in many languages. They regularly teach at leading universities and deliver and publish academic and practical papers on international law and its application.

We are thought-leaders in the international law community. Since 2016, Freshfields has hosted the Freshfields Annual Public International Law Seminar, bringing together States, international law practitioners and academics to participate in thought-provoking discussions on topical issues of public international law.



They are extremely talented, very smart and experienced, very thorough in their work, have exceptional commitment and, most importantly, are very kind and excellent human beings.

Chambers Global – Public International Law, 2024

Freshfields has been ranked as 'Band 1' every year for public international law by Chambers Global.

Our extensive experience representing States

States ask us to serve as their counsel and to advise them because we work collaboratively with them to define and implement the best available strategy.

Our experience spans across a wide variety of mandates, involving inter-State disputes and advisory work on public international law issues. Our experience notably includes:

- representing **Gabon** in its dispute against Equatorial Guinea before the ICJ regarding the determination of the legal titles applicable between the parties regarding their common maritime and territorial boundaries and the sovereignty over several uninhabited islands
- advising a **Gulf State** on public international law issues as part of that State's legal panel
- advising a **Gulf State** on the establishment of an international organisation
- representing a **European State** in a potential BIT claim in the telecoms sector
- representing **Chile** in a dispute with Bolivia before the ICJ concerning Bolivia's claim to sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean
- representing **Chile** before the ICJ in its case with Peru concerning their maritime boundary
- representing **Italy** in a dispute with India before an arbitral tribunal constituted under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

concerning which of them could exercise criminal jurisdiction over two Italian marines

- representing **Slovenia** in proceedings against Croatia before the European Court of Human Rights
- representing **Belize** in advisory opinion proceedings before the ICJ on whether the decolonisation of Mauritius was lawfully completed under international law
- representing **Belize** in a case before the ICJ concerning Guatemala's claims over Belize and delimitation of their maritime boundary
- representing **Bahrain** against Qatar before the ICJ in their dispute concerning sovereignty over territory and maritime boundaries
- representing **Cambodia** on its overlapping maritime claims with Thailand, including on the negotiation of a joint development treaty
- representing **Liechtenstein** in its case against Germany before the ICJ concerning assets taken from Liechtenstein at the end of the Second World War
- advising **Slovenia** on a standing basis on issues of State succession
- counsel for the **Republic of South Africa** when foreign investors claimed that implementation of its black economic empowerment policies in its mining sector contravened investment protection treaties



Freshfields combine great intellectual heft, perfect professionalism and true personal concern

Chambers UK – Public International Law, 2025



Substantial expertise in boundary delimitation, sovereignty disputes, state immunity, international sanctions and human rights.

Chambers Global – Public International Law, 2022



I have worked with several lawyers throughout my career and the Freshfields team is by far the best team I have encountered.

Chambers Global – Public International Law, 2024

Advising private-sector clients on complex public international law issues

International law reaches beyond States. We advise businesses on their rights, obligations, risks and opportunities arising in respect of international law.

Natural resources in disputed areas, international sanctions, environmental obligations, business and human rights concerns, trade disputes — these and other issues have put public international law on the agendas of businesses across the globe.

Selected examples of our experience include advising:

- a **multinational company** before the European Court of Human Rights in complaints regarding freedom of expression, property rights and fair trial rights
- a **chemical manufacturer** on the right to self-determination, indigenous peoples' rights and permanent sovereignty over natural resources with respect to a project in Asia
- **extractives companies** in respect of transboundary hydrocarbon resources, including as regards both cross-border and disputed border deposits
- **IOCs and NOCs** as regards joint development zones and unitization agreements, and associated treaty arrangements
- an **international telecommunications company** on issues related to State secession, including questions of acquired rights
- **private and public entities** as regards questions of State immunity, including before domestic courts

- **multinational banks** on the immunities of States and State-owned entities relevant to financial transactions, including the taking and enforcement of security
- **maritime security companies** on the rights and jurisdiction of coastal States in various maritime zones
- a **major energy company** concerning rights in a disputed maritime area administered by an international organisation created to manage the relevant resources
- **international businesses** on business and human rights issues, including in the energy, transportation, manufacturing and technology sectors
- **multinationals** on sanctions-related issues, including as regards the purported extraterritorial effect of secondary sanctions regimes
- **extractives, telecoms and projects companies** in respect of legitimate statehood and government, including questions concerning *de jure versus de facto* governments
- a **major multinational trading company** on the compatibility of amendments introduced to the domestic law of an Asian State with the international law of the sea
- **private and public entities** as regards questions of legitimate exercise of governmental authority, as a function of both international and domestic law



They are always eager to go the extra mile in order to deliver quality work.

Chambers Global – Public International Law, 2024



Freshfields has extraordinary resources. Their service levels and responsiveness are of an exceptionally high standard.

Chambers UK – Public International Law, 2025



I would not hesitate to call upon Freshfields once again for any future matters.

Chambers Global – Public International Law, 2024

Unparalleled public international law advice to international organisations, NGOs and individuals

We work on some of the most important international law issues affecting international organisations, NGOs and individuals.

Recent examples of our work include:

- representing the **American Bar Association (ABA)** (Center for Human Rights) relating to international human rights violations in Uzbekistan
- advising an **international inter-governmental organisation** in consolidated commercial arbitrations concerning disputes arising under contracts for the provision of goods and services
- advising **Independent International Legal Advocates** (IILA, an NGO founded to work with the public international law departments of small and developing States), at every round of negotiations of a United Nations treaty on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) since the first Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) in September 2018, culminating in the signing of the final text of the treaty in September 2023, and on the draft exploitation regulations for deep-sea mining in the Area
- advising **IILA** regarding the impact of sea-level rise on statehood under international law
- working with **ABA** to pass Resolution 101C urging States to pass an international convention on animal protection to protect public health, animal wellbeing and address pandemic origins
- advising **REDRESS** on drafting UK legislation to permit the confiscation and sale of assets owned by sanctioned individuals or organisations that are proven to have engaged in or to have facilitated serious human rights and international humanitarian law abuses
- assisting **REDRESS** with three amicus curiae submissions before the International Criminal Court concerning the charging of rape and sexual slavery as torture, and reparations for international crimes committed in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic
- representing in proceedings before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, together with **REDRESS** and Chadian counsel, 7,000 of the victims of widespread human rights violations committed by the Republic of Chad during the regime of Hissène Habré from 1982 to 1990
- filing complaints with the **United Nations Human Rights Committee** on behalf of human rights defenders concerning violations of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- representing a coalition of NGOs focused on freedom of speech, led by the **International Press Institute**, in an intervention before the European Court of Human Rights
- advising **development banks** on their immunities and privileges in non-member States
- advising the **International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies** on issues of public international law, including assisting with preparing 'The Legal Framework for Migrants & Refugees – An Introduction for Red Cross & Red Crescent Staff & Volunteers'
- assisting the **Human Dignity Trust** regarding claims before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
- advising **international NGOs** on the negotiation of multilateral treaties



The team handled international issues in the proceedings excellently, partly because the team is very international and is able to use experts from different countries.

Chambers Global – Public International Law, 2022



They have top lawyers around the world, who are experts in their jurisdiction and form a multi-functional team that advises you seamlessly.

Chambers Global – Public International Law, 2022

Our extensive experience acting in disputes between States and foreign investors

We are well-known for representing both host-States and claimant investors in complex investor-State disputes.

Selected examples of our experience include:

- counsel for the **Republic of Kenya** in an arbitration concerning the withdrawal of a licence to exploit geothermal energy
- counsel for the **Republic of Turkey** in three arbitrations commenced by a foreign investor under the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT), and in related proceedings before the European Court of Human Rights
- counsel for the **Government of Romania** in an arbitration concerning the interaction between the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and the bilateral investment treaty (BIT) between Romania and Sweden, and, separately, in a case arising in the petrochemical industry involving allegations of breach of the ECT
- counsel for the **Government of Grenada** in an arbitration concerning oil and gas exploration in the region of a disputed maritime boundary
- counsel for **a leading energy group and their subsidiaries** on their politically-sensitive investment treaty arbitration against the Republic of Turkey under the Turkey-Singapore BIT and the Turkey-Netherlands BIT regarding expropriation of the largest private natural gas importer in Turkey
- counsel for **ConocoPhillips (through Burlington Resources)**, in an ICSID contractual and investment treaty arbitration against Ecuador and EP Petroecuador, under the United States-Ecuador BIT, concerning the imposition of royalties on extraordinary revenues
- counsel for **Sunflower, Eurus and Portigon** against the Kingdom of Spain in three separate arbitrations brought by those investors relating to changes to Spain's regulatory regime affecting investments in the renewable energy sector
- counsel for the Canadian mining company **Rusoro Mining Ltd.** in its dispute against the Government of Venezuela arising out of the expropriation of its gold mining assets in 2011, including the largest operating gold mine in the country
- counsel for **a private equity-backed special purpose vehicle and its subsidiary** in relation to a high-stakes arbitration against the Government of India under the India-Mauritius BIT concerning unlawful termination of licences for ground handling services at seven airports in India
- counsel for **numerous investors** in claims against different Latin American States including Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela, Uruguay, Bolivia and Ecuador concerning the international responsibility of those States for breaches of treaties on the protection of foreign investments



Freshfields has significant depth of resources in major arbitration [...] as well as a wealth of experience handling disputes across the globe [...].

Chambers Global – Public International Law, 2024



Expertise in handling investment treaty disputes, representing both sovereign states and investors.

Chambers Global – Public International Law, 2024



A top-tier firm with a stellar reputation in both the arbitration and public international law spheres.

Chambers Global – Public International Law, 2023

Key contacts

Will Thomas KC



Partner, London/Paris
Head of Public International Law
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Will specialises in public international law, investment arbitration and international commercial arbitration involving States and State-owned entities. He has advised parties in respect of proceedings before the ICJ, the Iran-US Claims Tribunal, the ECtHR and numerous international arbitral tribunals. Will also has an active advisory practice assisting States, businesses, NGOs and individuals on a wide range of international law matters. He is a visiting lecturer at King's College, London and Sciences Po, Paris, and has published extensively on matters of international law. Will is an English Solicitor-Advocate and King's Counsel.

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Will is an experienced and astute PIL practitioner. Clients love working with him. He is very focused and an excellent advocate.

[He] is devastating as a cross-examiner. He is extremely forensic; he manages the detailed evidence and the big picture.

Chambers UK – Public International Law, 2025

Nigel Blackaby KC



Partner, Washington DC
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Nigel has specialised in public international law for over twenty years with a focus on international investment law where he has represented investors and States in over forty investment arbitrations. He also advises on public international law issues affecting international investors such as cross border hydrocarbon reserves. He has been counsel for a broad range of States including Pakistan, Guatemala and Bahrain before ICSID and the ICJ. He teaches international investment law at the American University Washington College of Law and has published widely on issues of international law. He is currently part of an ABA working group that obtained a resolution supporting the passage of an international treaty on animal protection, public health and the environment to address pandemic origins.

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Nigel Blackaby is measured and responsive, and effective in developing ideas and strategies.

Nigel always contributes a lot with his experience and his character. He knows how to explain complicated things to the client.

Chambers Global – Public International Law, 2024

Key contacts

Alexandra van der Meulen



Partner, Paris

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Alexandra specialises in public international law, investment arbitration, and international commercial arbitration. Alexandra has acted as counsel for States before the ICJ, including for Chile in its maritime boundary dispute against Peru and in a dispute with Bolivia concerning Bolivia's claim to sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean. In 2020, she appeared as advocate for Bahrain in two parallel appeals from decisions of the ICAO Council in cases brought by Qatar against Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain.

“

Peers and clients say Alexandra is “One of the very best lawyers of the next generation” and “Extremely bright and focused”

Who's Who Legal, 2021

Caroline Richard



Partner, Washington DC

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Caroline is a partner in Freshfields' Washington DC office. Caroline has acted for investors and States in some of the world's largest investment arbitrations. Both common and civil law trained, Caroline conducts arbitrations in English, Spanish and French. She is an Adjunct Professor at American University's Washington College of Law, a member of the Executive Council of the American Society of International Law (ASIL) and a member of the Academic Council and Advisory Board of the Institute for Transnational Arbitration (ITA). Prior to joining Freshfields, she clerked at the Supreme Court of Canada, and obtained law degrees from Harvard Law School (LLM), Cambridge University (LLM, first class) and Université de Montreal (LLB/DESS).

“

She has seen most of the issues that arise, which is very reassuring for us.

Chambers USA, 2024

Key contacts

Lee Rovinescu



Partner, New York

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Lee has significant experience advising and representing clients in complex international disputes. He represents clients in commercial and foreign investment arbitrations involving States, State entities and international organisations. Alongside his disputes work, Lee also regularly advises clients on matters of public international law. In 2020, Lee advised Independent International Legal Advocates, with regard to negotiating a new legally binding instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. He also previously advised a State on submissions before an independent international commission of inquiry on the State's compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law.



Best in class for his years of experience and has tremendous gravitas. Engenders a great deal of trust, is highly skilled and works tirelessly. Excellent in mining/energy and natural resources. Has a great deal of technical knowledge in these areas and is a damages expert.

Legal 500 LATAM

FRESHFIELDS

Lluís Paradell



Counsel, Madrid/Rome

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Lluís specialises in advising on commercial and investor-state arbitration, investment protection and management of political risk, as well as on the public international law aspects of transnational infrastructure projects, boundary and territorial disputes, treaty law and international environmental law. Lluís speaks Spanish, English, French, Italian and Catalan.



Lluís Paradell Trius is based in Rome and offers expertise in investor-state disputes and commercial arbitration across Latin America. He has experience in disputes arising from the energy and natural resources, telecoms and financial services industries.

Chambers Global, 2020

Key contacts

Lorand Bartels



Counsel, London

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Lorand is an internationally recognised expert in international law, focusing on the law of the WTO and free trade agreements, having taught, published and worked in these areas for two decades. In private practice, Lorand has advised governments, international organisations, and private clients on matters including treaty law, dispute settlement, customs duties, product regulation, subsidies, human rights, investment law, EU law and national security.



Professor of International Law.

University of Cambridge

Joshua Kelly



Senior Associate, London

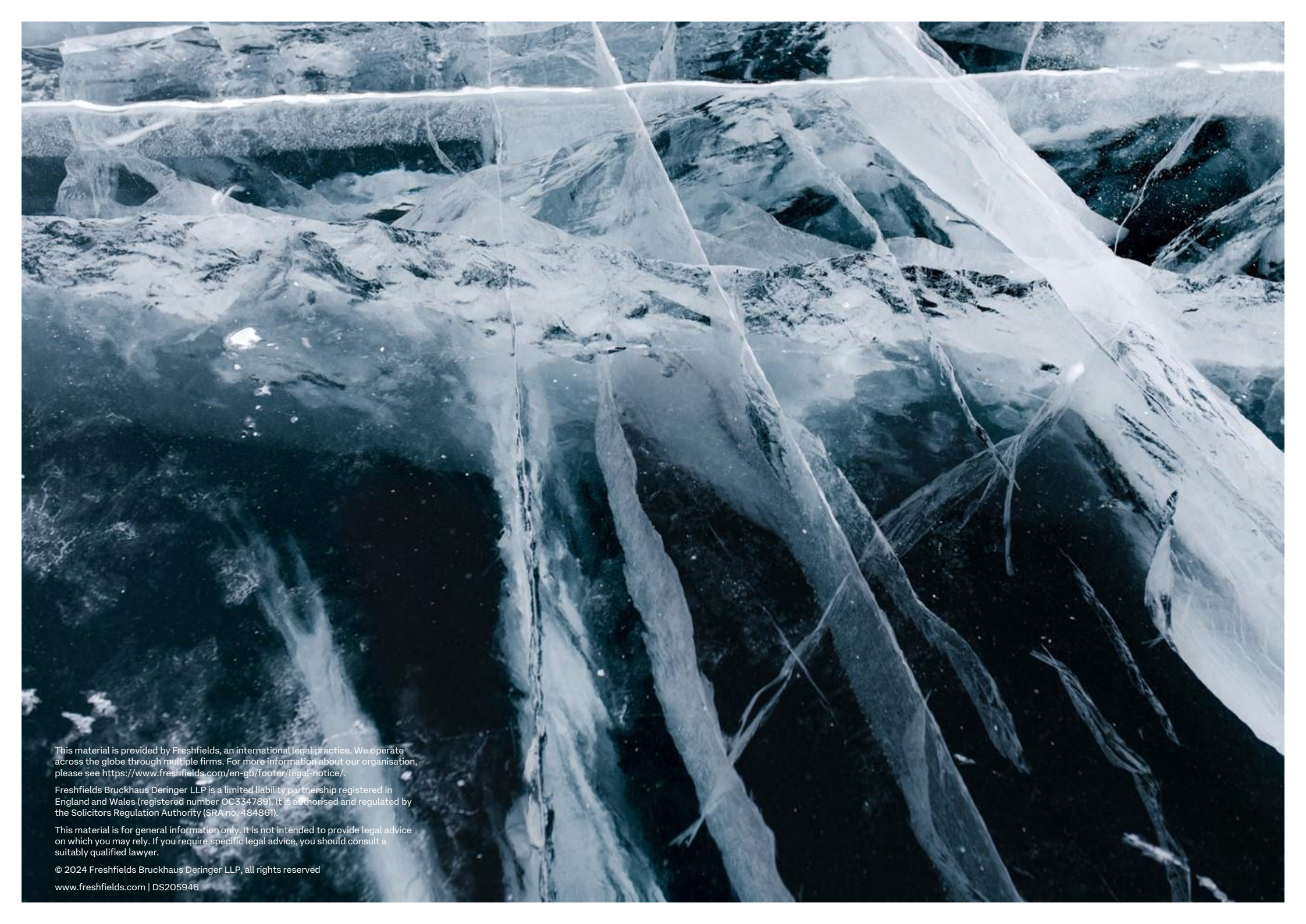
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Joshua is a Senior Associate in our international arbitration group and public international law practice in London. He routinely represents and advises clients in matters involving issues of public international law, including inter-State arbitration and litigation. Prior to joining Freshfields, Joshua was a government lawyer in Australia, advising on issues of international law. He is a visiting lecturer at King's College, London on maritime boundary and territorial disputes.



Josh is impressively clear in his advice and measured in his response to emergencies. He is a reassuring presence on a case.

Chambers UK – Public International Law, 2025

An aerial photograph of a frozen river or stream. The water is mostly covered in ice, with large, irregular floes of ice floating in the darker, open water. The ice floes vary in size and shape, some appearing as thin sheets and others as thicker, more solid blocks. The overall scene is a complex, textured landscape of ice and water.

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