PREFACE

This book grew out of the monograph I wrote for my PhD in law at the University of Lucerne. When I began this project in 2019, the right to science was scarcely known – even within the field of international human rights law. I was curious, perhaps even compelled, to explore what it might mean in both theory and practice. At the same time, in Switzerland, where I was trained as a lawyer, the prevailing view is still that the rights enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – including the right to science – are non-justiciable. The more I examined this assumption, the more untenable it appeared.

The years that followed confirmed this intuition. The COVID-19 pandemic, alongside growing scepticism towards scientific expertise, deliberate disinformation campaigns and reductions in research funding, demonstrated how urgent and necessary the right to science truly is. Against this backdrop, the assumption that it could not be subject to judicial review or legal enforcement seemed not only outdated but also dangerous. This realisation became the spark that guided my research and, ultimately, this book.

Since then, attention to the right to science has grown significantly. What was once a forgotten right has begun to attract serious engagement from both scholars and international institutions. The contributions of academics across disciplines have been invaluable. By building on the foundations laid by earlier scholarship, I have been able to write this book and carry the research further. UN bodies, such as the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and successive UN Special Rapporteurs, have likewise played a central role in clarifying its normative content and pressing for its effective implementation. This book seeks to build on those collective efforts and to contribute to the evolving conversation. Although the manuscript was formally completed in March 2024, I have endeavoured to include and reflect on developments up to August 2025.

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Finally, the right to science has always been a legally binding human right under international law, yet for too long it has remained overlooked and forgotten. Over the five years I spent writing this book, I came to see the right to science not only as a legal entitlement but also as a profoundly human and transformative idea – one that challenges us to reconsider the relationship between knowledge, power and justice. Ultimately, this book sets the stage for the right to science to be invoked by rights holders before courts, tribunals and other competent authorities. It argues that the right to science is ready for adjudication: not as an aspirational goal but as a justiciable and actionable right within the international human rights system.

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