



INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

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Press Release

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Opening of the exhibition “The International Court of Justice: 65 years of serving peace”

The Court receives the first examples of three new postage stamps especially designed for it by the Dutch postal service

THE HAGUE, 1 April 2011. To celebrate the sixty-fifth anniversary of its inaugural sitting, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, unveiled an exhibition of photographs today, and its President officially received the first examples of three new postage stamps designed for the Court.

Both events took place in the Atrium of the City Hall in The Hague, at a ceremony organized by the Court’s Registry, with the help of the Municipality of The Hague, in the presence of Members of the Court, the Mayor of The Hague, Mr. Jozias van Aartsen, Aldermen, representatives of the Diplomatic Corps and senior officials from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and international organizations based in The Hague.

Exhibition

As its title indicates, the exhibition briefly traces the history of the Court and of its predecessor, the Permanent Court of International Justice. “[F]irst and foremost, the photos and other exhibits on display demonstrate how the International Court of Justice, the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, functions for the peace and order of the international community”, the President of the Court, H. E. Judge Hisashi Owada, explained as he opened the exhibition.

As well as the photographs, a number of authentic items from the Court are on display in two of the showcases. These include, among other things, a judge’s gown and jabot. The jabot is made entirely by hand, from genuine Brussels lace. Publications of the Court and an original sealed copy of one of its decisions complete the exhibition.

Judge Owada also stated in his address that he was “so gratified that the present exhibition is taking place in the City Hall of The Hague. This will help many people to become better acquainted with the ICJ and to learn more about the Court. The exhibition is intended for a general public.” “In my view, it will be interesting both for visitors who are familiar with the ICJ and for those who are so far unaware of what the Court is doing and what is its role”, he added.

In turn, the Registrar of the Court, Mr. Philippe Couvreur, noted that “[t]he record of the Court’s activity is altogether positive. Since its establishment in 1946, the Court has dealt with approximately 150 cases, 80 per cent of which have been disputes between States and 20 per cent

requests for advisory opinions submitted by organs of the United Nations or institutions of the United Nations system. It has rendered 108 judgments in contentious cases and given 26 advisory opinions; in doing so, it has helped to resolve a significant number of inter-State disputes and facilitated the work of various international organs and institutions, as well as contributing to the development of international law.”

For his part, the Mayor of The Hague, Mr. Jozias van Aartsen, declared that “if The Hague can pride itself on being the ‘United Nations’ second city’, it is only because the International Court of Justice has its seat here”. “It is therefore fitting that it is here, in the Atrium, where so many residents of The Hague gather every day, that we honour that institution, which is as unique as it is important”, he said.

The exhibition will be on display in the City Hall of The Hague for two weeks, until Friday 15 April 2011; it can then be seen for the following two weeks at the Peace Palace, the seat of the Court.

Stamps

After the speeches given to mark the opening of the exhibition, the Commercial Director of Dutch postal service TNT Post, Mr. Ger Jacobs, officially presented the first examples of the three new Court postage stamps to President Owada. Those stamps are intended for the exclusive use of the Court. They are, however, available for purchase by philatelists through the relevant department of TNT Post (<http://collectclub.tntpost.nl>), as from 1 April 2011.

The release of this new series of Court postage stamps was made possible thanks to a contribution from the city of The Hague. The first such release took place in 1934, when a special collection was created for the Permanent Court of International Justice. This philatelic tradition has continued ever since, and a total of 17 special stamps were issued between 1934 and 2004. Their value was expressed first in guilders, the Dutch currency, and later in euros.

The three new stamps are permanently valid: they bear the most common non-value indicators currently used for mail within the Netherlands (Nederland 1), to the rest of Europe (Europe 1) and to the rest of the world (Wereld 1). They were designed by a Dutch graphic artist, Mr. Roger Willems. The first stamp depicts the Peace Palace in The Hague, the seat of the Court; the second the emblem of the Court; and the third a flock of doves, a design inspired by a scene adorning one of the Palace walls.

Judge Owada pointed out in his speech that the International Court of Justice was the only institution in the Netherlands to have its own postage stamps.

“I am very pleased that TNT Post has been willing to continue that long tradition. The Court sees this willingness as a renewed expression of the high esteem in which the principal judicial organ of the United Nations is held, and of the importance attached to its presence in the Netherlands”, he concluded.

Historical background

The Charter of the United Nations and the Statute of the International Court of Justice, an integral part of the former, were signed in San Francisco on 26 June 1945. They came into force on 24 October 1945. The first Members of the Court were elected on 6 February 1946 at the First Session of the General Assembly, held in London. They convened for the first time in the Peace Palace, The Hague, on 3 April 1946. On 6 April 1946, the new Court elected its President, Vice-President and Registrar. It held its inaugural sitting on 18 April 1946.

Material available for downloading from the Court's website

The texts of the speeches given on 1 April 2011 are available on the Court's website, together with reproductions of the new Court stamps.

For a better appreciation of the Court and its work today, a documentary film (in English, French and Chinese), various publications and a large number of multimedia files relating to the cases recently entertained by the Court are available to the media. These are free to download on the Court's website (<http://www.icj-cij.org/presscom/multimedia>) and may be used without copyright restrictions for non-commercial purposes.

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Speech by the Mayor of The Hague, Mr Jozias van Aartsen

[Original text]

Monsieur le Président,
Monsieur le Greffier,
Vos Excellences,
Mesdames et Messieurs,

Soyez cordialement bienvenus ici dans l’Atrium !

Bienvenue en particulier au Président de la Cour internationale de Justice, monsieur Owada. C’est un grand honneur pour moi de vous recevoir ici à l’Hôtel de Ville. En même temps, je suis très conscient du fait que, tandis que nous fêtons le soixante-cinquième anniversaire de la Cour internationale de Justice, vos pensées doivent en ce moment se porter surtout sur les souffrances qu’endurent tant de vos compatriotes. Je vous assure que La Haye toute entière participe et compatit aux épreuves du Japon.

Bienvenue également au Greffier de la Cour internationale de Justice, monsieur Couvreur. La Municipalité de La Haye apprécie le grand honneur que vous nous faites par votre présence parmi nous aujourd’hui. Votre engagement, et celui du Greffe tout entier, ont été indispensables à la réalisation de l’exposition qui nous réunit aujourd’hui.

Cette exposition marque un anniversaire spécial : les soixante-cinq ans de la Cour internationale de Justice. «Soixante-cinq ans au service de la paix», comme le dit si justement son titre. Et j’attache une immense importance au fait que c’est ici que cette exposition a lieu, dans l’Atrium, au cœur même de notre ville. En effet, si La Haye peut s’enorgueillir du titre de «deuxième ville des Nations Unies», c’est uniquement parce que la Cour internationale de Justice y siège. Il est donc juste que ce soit ici, dans l’Atrium, où tant de Haguenois se retrouvent chaque jour, que nous mettons à l’honneur cette institution aussi unique qu’importante.

Veuillez me permettre maintenant, Vos Excellences, Mesdames et Messieurs, de poursuivre en anglais.

On the eighteenth of April, it will be sixty-five years since the International Court of Justice held its inaugural sitting here in The Hague. Allow me to briefly take you back to The Hague as it was at that time: a desolate and severely damaged city, as were so many others, in the wake of the terrible years of the war. Many people were mourning the loss of loved ones – those who had fallen at the front, those who had been murdered in the concentration camps, or those who had been killed in bombing raids. So many things were in short supply, with one exception: hope – hope that such an appalling world war would never happen again. Hope for a better, peaceful and worthy future.

Such hope was not born out of nothing. It took root during the dark years of the war, nourished by the scarce reports that people here had read or heard about in secret, from the BBC and underground newspapers. Papers such as “Je maintiendrai”, which had been stencilled in the Peace Palace earlier in the war by a Hague resistance group. This was how the starving citizens of The Hague, so desperate for peace and freedom, and with their ears pressed against their clandestine wirelasses, heard and read so quickly after the historic meeting in Dumbarton Oaks that a new world organisation would be formed, under the name “United Nations”. And this was how they also learned that an International Court of Justice would be a part of that new organisation.

Eighteen months later, it became reality: the International Court of Justice held its first public sitting. Camera teams travelled to The Hague in order to record this historic event in the Peace Palace. A new era was underway.

Now, sixty-five years on, the International Court of Justice has built up an outstanding record of service. Since nineteen forty-six it has dealt with more than one hundred and fifty cases. Apart from a few exceptions, every country has complied with and implemented every ruling by the Court.

This is not just to the credit of all the presidents, judges and registrars who have served the Court since that time, but also of all the support staff who assist them. When we talk about the countless people in The Hague who day in, day out, are working for a better, peaceful and just world, then I am especially thinking about them in particular.

Allow me to conclude, then, Mr. President, Mr. Registrar, Judges and support staff, by giving you all my heartfelt congratulations on this anniversary of the International Court of Justice. I sincerely hope that many people will come to view this exhibition in order to become even better acquainted with the important work of this institution, which has now been serving the cause of peace for sixty-five years. “La Paix par la Justice”, peace through justice, to quote the title of the painting by Albert Besnard, donated to the Peace Palace by France.

Or, to paraphrase the chorus of the Babylonians from “Susanna”, the oratorio by my favourite composer, Georg Friedrich Händel:

Let justice reign, and flourish thro' the lands¹,

Nor youth, nor charms divert her iron hand.

Pour terminer, je voudrais offrir, à vous Monsieur le Président, à vous Monsieur le Greffier, aux juges et aux collaboratrices et collaborateurs du tribunal, mes meilleurs vœux pour l'anniversaire de la Cour internationale de Justice. J'espère sincèrement qu'un grand nombre de visiteurs viendra voir cette exposition et faire connaissance avec l'important travail de cette institution, au service de la paix depuis soixante-cinq ans. «La Paix par la Justice», c'est à juste titre le nom de l'œuvre du peintre Albert Besnard offerte par la France au Palais de la Paix.

Ou, si je puis emprunter à mon compositeur préféré, George Frédéric Händel, une citation légèrement modifiée du chœur des Babyloniens dans son oratorio «Susanna» :

Let justice reign, and flourish thro' the lands¹,

Nor youth, nor charms divert her iron hand.

Que la justice règne et fleurisse dans tous les pays²,

Que ni la jeunesse, ni les charmes ne distraient sa main de fer.

¹It is “land” in the original.

²«[L]e pays» dans l'original.

Speech by H.E. Judge Hisashi Owada, President of the International Court of Justice

Thank you Mr. Mayor.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for coming to the opening of this exhibition about the International Court of Justice. It is my great pleasure as the President of the International Court of Justice to see so many people here who are interested in the work of the Court.

I should like to express my gratitude to the Mayor of The Hague, Mr. Jozias van Aartsen, to the Board of Mayor and Aldermen, and to all the staff of the municipality who have helped us organize this exhibition.

We usually celebrate so-called “round” jubilees of the ICJ, as we did for instance in 2006, when, to mark its 60th Anniversary, the Court held a solemn sitting attended by Her Majesty Queen Beatrix and other dignitaries. We expect that such celebrations will take place in 2016 as well.

This year, the ICJ decided to organize an exhibition which would inform its visitors about the Court’s contribution during the 65 years since its inaugural sitting in April 1946. A picture of that historic event, attended by Her Royal Highness Princess Juliana, is among those on display in this hall.

I am so gratified that the present exhibition is taking place in the City Hall of The Hague. This will help many people to become better acquainted with the ICJ and to learn more about the Court. The exhibition is intended for a general public. In my view, it will be interesting both for visitors who are familiar with the ICJ and for those who are so far unaware of what the Court is doing and what is its role.

The exhibition briefly tells the history of the Court, also referring to its predecessor, the Permanent Court of International Justice. However, first and foremost, the photos and other exhibits on display demonstrate how the International Court of Justice, the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, functions for the peace and order of the international community.

Following the blue line along the stands, visitors can learn how Members of the Court are elected, see how judges work during deliberations and hearings, and find out how the Registry performs its indispensable tasks.

It may also be instructive to see examples of ICJ judgments and advisory opinions, and to find out how these have helped to settle disputes between States.

Of course, the Court has been proud to receive so many visits by heads of State and Government and other dignitaries; this side of its everyday life is also reflected in the pictures.

It hardly needs to be added that the Court is open to everyone who is interested in it. Public hearings and the delivery of decisions of the Court attract large audiences. The Court also produces press releases, an annual report, a yearbook, and books and leaflets about its activities. The Court’s publications, together with photographs and other information about the Court, are available on its website. On a regular basis, the judges, the Registrar and Registry officials give a great many presentations about the Court to diplomats, university teachers and students.

As the Court has two official languages, English and French, I will continue my speech in French.

[Translation]

We also participate in the “International Day” organized each September in conjunction with the city of The Hague. On that day, the Court welcomes hundreds of Dutch citizens, as well as members of the expatriate community and other interested persons from all corners of the Netherlands and even further afield.

With a view to informing as many people as possible about the Court’s activities, the Registry has produced a documentary film, which you can watch now in English and French on the two screens set up in this room.

Some of the photographs reflect the high level of interest shown by the media in the Court’s work and its decisions. I am glad to see representatives of the media at this opening ceremony today, and the Court will continue to develop its working relations with members of the press.

As well as the photographs, a number of authentic items from the Court are on display in two of the showcases. These include, among other things, a judge’s gown and jabot. The jabot is made entirely by hand, from genuine Brussels lace. The Court’s publications, and an original sealed copy of one of its decisions, complete the exhibition.

These photographs and objects will be displayed in the City Hall for two weeks; they can then be seen for the following two weeks at the Peace Palace, the seat of the Court.

I would venture to hope that the presence of such a large number of heads and other representatives of diplomatic missions and international institutions at today’s ceremony demonstrates the importance attached to the Court by the international community. During recent years, the Court has seen a growth in State interest in its activities, reflected both in an increase in the number of cases on its List and also in further declarations recognizing the Court’s jurisdiction as compulsory.

At present, 66 of the 192 United Nations Member States have made such declarations. Moreover, there are numerous clauses in various treaties, known as compromissory clauses, providing for the Court’s compulsory jurisdiction.

Today, the future of the Court depends on how frequently States have recourse to it. Let me take this opportunity to express the hope that the States you represent, and all other nations, will continue to trust in the Court to resolve the legal disputes between them, a task which the Court will carry out with absolute impartiality and wholly in accordance with international law.

Let me now give the floor to the Registrar of the International Court of Justice, Mr. Philippe Couvreur.

Speech by H.E. Mr. Philippe Couvreur, Registrar of the International Court of Justice

Mr. Mayor,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I in turn thank you for giving up your valuable time to honour us with your presence at this, the official opening of the exhibition on the Court.

As a mark of friendship and respect for the city of The Hague, I should like to speak to you in Dutch.

[Translation]

I am extremely grateful to the Municipality of The Hague and the Mayor of the city for their invaluable help in arranging this exhibition on the International Court of Justice in record time. We first put the idea to Mr. van Aartsen a few weeks ago, and he immediately showed great interest in the project and asked his colleagues to help us make it a reality. Thanks to this support, the exhibition is opening today in one of the most visited public spaces in the city.

The Registry of the Court and the Municipality of The Hague have worked hard to prepare this exhibition, and in doing so have made contacts which we hope to develop and build on in the future. It is indeed my great hope that our co-operation will continue, to the benefit of The Hague and its inhabitants, as well as to the benefit of the Court and other international institutions in the city.

The International Court of Justice is the world's highest court, and the only court to be universally recognized and to have general jurisdiction. It has had its seat in The Hague since it began its activities in 1946.

The history of our Court goes back much further, however, as it succeeded the Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ), which was founded in the aftermath of the First World War by the League of Nations.

In the spring of 1919, it was decided, in agreement with the Dutch Government, that the PCIJ would have its seat at the Peace Palace. The Hague was chosen so as to illustrate the symbolic separation of powers, since Geneva was then home to the political organs of the League of Nations, namely the Council and the Assembly.

In 1920, the Council of the League of Nations appointed a group of ten eminent persons, the Advisory Committee of Jurists, and asked it to submit a report on the establishment of the PCIJ. The Committee met at the Peace Palace in June and July 1920 to carry out its noble mission, under the able chairmanship of Baron Descamps, a professor at the Catholic University of Louvain and a senator and Minister of State in Belgium. Together, these jurists drew up the Statute of the PCIJ.

Even in those days, the authorities in The Hague did their utmost to ensure the best possible working conditions for the members of the Committee.

The PCIJ helped States, very efficiently, to resolve a large number of disputes, in particular those arising from the implementation of the 1919 Peace Treaties. But the outbreak of World War Two brought an abrupt end to what had been, from 1922 to 1939, a story of success.

After World War Two, the San Francisco Conference, in which 50 States took part, gave birth to the United Nations and its principal judicial organ — the International Court of Justice, whose seat remained in The Hague.

In April 1946, the PCIJ was formally dissolved and the International Court of Justice held its inaugural session in the presence of Her Royal Highness Princess Juliana of the Netherlands.

A considerable degree of continuity was maintained between the two courts. In accordance with Article 92 of the United Nations Charter, the Statute of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) was drawn up on the basis of that of its predecessor. The ICJ's first Rules of Court were heavily influenced by those adopted by the PCIJ in 1936. Subsequent revisions of the ICJ's Rules, aimed at simplifying and speeding up the procedures, were likewise guided by the PCIJ's Rules of Court.

The record of the Court's activity is altogether positive. Since its establishment in 1946, the Court has dealt with approximately 150 cases, 80 per cent of which have been disputes between States and 20 per cent requests for advisory opinions submitted by organs of the United Nations or institutions of the United Nations system. It has rendered 108 judgments in contentious cases and given 26 advisory opinions; in doing so, it has helped to resolve a significant number of inter-State disputes and facilitated the work of various international organs and institutions, as well as contributing to the development of international law.

In order to carry out its mission successfully, the ICJ must offer good working and living conditions to Members of the Court and Registry staff members. In that respect, a great deal depends on its relationship with the Municipality of The Hague, and I am happy to report that this is developing most auspiciously.

This year, the city of The Hague has also contributed to the release of a new series of Court postage stamps. The first such release took place in 1934, when a special collection was created for the PCIJ. We are very glad that this tradition has continued over the years, and I should like to thank TNT Post for its invaluable support in this context. The new Court stamps are displayed alongside the older collections in one of the exhibition showcases.

So now, may I invite Mr. Ger Jacobs, the Commercial Director of TNT Post, to present the new Court postage stamps to President Owada.
