



INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

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Press Release

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Tribute to José Gustavo Guerrero, first President of the International Court of Justice

THE HAGUE, 23 October 2018. On Tuesday 16 October, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, in collaboration with the Embassy of the Republic of El Salvador in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, held an event to commemorate the life of the eminent Salvadorian jurist, José Gustavo Guerrero, last President of the Permanent Court of International Justice and first President of the International Court of Justice.

Speeches were given by Judge Abdulqawi Ahmed Yusuf, President of the Court, Mr. Agustín Vázquez Gómez, Ambassador of El Salvador to the Netherlands, Mr. Philippe Couvreur, Registrar of the Court, Judge Antônio Augusto Cançado Trindade, and Mr. José Miguel Arévalo Rengifo, the great-great-grandson of Judge Guerrero.

Speaking on behalf of the Court, President Yusuf observed that José Gustavo Guerrero and others had “built the foundations of what has now become one of the most important methods of dispute settlement at the international level”. He also drew attention to President Guerrero’s “integrity, outstanding leadership qualities and exceptional capacity to bring together the Members of the Court”. President Yusuf concluded by stating that Judge Guerrero “will forever be remembered as an icon of international justice and a pioneer figure of the peaceful settlement of disputes among nations”.

On the behalf of the Salvadorian Government, Mr. Vázquez Gómez presented the Court with the “Doctor José Gustavo Guerrero” Medal of Diplomatic Merit, and expressed the appreciation of the Salvadorian nation “for an institution that allowed one of its most beloved sons to fulfil his greatest intellectual aspirations of justice, peace and international law”.

For his part, Mr. Couvreur remarked that “President and Judge Guerrero personified the continuity between the Permanent Court . . . and the International Court of Justice”, and recalled his “direct and vital role” in preserving the integrity of the Permanent Court during the Second World War. He also noted that, after the war, President Guerrero had overseen “the practical measures intended to facilitate the transition between the Permanent Court and its successor”. Mr. Couvreur concluded by observing that “Judge Guerrero occupies a special place in the history of the World Court” and that he had “shaped the course of that history at the most difficult moments”.

In his address, Judge Cançado Trindade emphasized the “invaluable contribution of Latin American jurists in the codification and progressive development of international law, and the achievement of justice”. He noted Judge Guerrero’s view that “the common and interdependent interests of all States, and respect for international norms, stand above the ‘free will’ of individual

States”, and recalled his important role on the League of Nations’ Committee of Experts for the Progressive Codification of International Law. Judge Cançado Trindade concluded by stating that “among the Latin American jurists who have contributed to the law of nations over the course of its history, the Salvadoran jurist José Gustavo Guerrero stands at the forefront, faithful to the Latin American internationalist line of thought which advocates unity and the universality of international law”.

Mr. Arévalo Rengifo thanked the Court on behalf of his family for organizing the event.

Note: The Court’s press releases are prepared by its Registry for information purposes only and do not constitute official documents.

José Gustavo Guerrero was born in San Salvador on 26 June 1876. He began his studies at the University of El Salvador and went on to obtain a Doctor of Law degree from the National University of Guatemala in 1898. Judge Guerrero served as Minister for Foreign Affairs of El Salvador from 1927 to 1928, and as President of the Assembly of the League of Nations from 1929 to 1930. He was elected as a Member of the Permanent Court of International Justice in 1931, and acted as its President from 1936 until its dissolution. Its successor, the International Court of Justice, was created in 1945 and Judge Guerrero served as its first President from 1946 to 1949. He remained a judge at the Court until his death in 1958. President Guerrero was twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, in 1948 and 1949.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. It was established by the United Nations Charter in June 1945 and began its activities in April 1946. The seat of the Court is at the Peace Palace in The Hague (Netherlands). Of the six principal organs of the United Nations, it is the only one not located in New York. The Court has a twofold role: first, to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States (its judgments have binding force and are without appeal for the parties concerned); and, second, to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by duly authorized United Nations organs and agencies of the system. The Court is composed of 15 judges elected for a nine-year term by the General Assembly and the Security Council of the United Nations. Independent of the United Nations Secretariat, it is assisted by a Registry, its own international secretariat, whose activities are both judicial and diplomatic, as well as administrative. The official languages of the Court are French and English. Also known as the “World Court”, it is the only court of a universal character with general jurisdiction.

The ICJ, a court open only to States for contentious proceedings, and to certain organs and institutions of the United Nations system for advisory proceedings, should not be confused with the other — mostly criminal — judicial institutions based in The Hague and adjacent areas, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC, the only permanent international criminal court, which was established by treaty and does not belong to the United Nations system), the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL, an international judicial body with an independent legal personality, established by the United Nations Security Council upon the request of the Lebanese Government and composed of Lebanese and international judges), the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal

Tribunals (IRMCT, mandated to take over residual functions from the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and from the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda), the Kosovo Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor's Office (an ad hoc judicial institution which has its seat in The Hague), or the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA, an independent institution which assists in the establishment of arbitral tribunals and facilitates their work, in accordance with the Hague Convention of 1899).

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