



INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

Peace Palace, Carnegieplein 2, 2517 KJ The Hague, Netherlands

Tel.: +31 (0)70 302 2323 Fax: +31 (0)70 364 9928

Website: www.icj-cij.org

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Visit of the President of Ireland, Her Excellency Mrs. Mary McAleese to the International Court of Justice

THE HAGUE, 2 May 2011. Her Excellency Mrs. Mary McAleese, President of Ireland, paid a visit today to the seat of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, at the Peace Palace in The Hague.

Mrs. McAleese, who was accompanied by an official delegation which included her spouse, Dr. Martin McAleese, H.E. Ms Frances Fitzgerald TD, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, H.E. Mrs. Mary Whelan, Ambassador of Ireland to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and other high-ranking officials, was greeted upon her arrival by the President of the Court, Judge Hisashi Owada, his spouse Mrs. Yumiko Owada, and the Registrar, Mr. Philippe Couvreur.

President McAleese and principal members of the delegation were then escorted to the Ante-Chamber of the Great Hall of Justice, where they were introduced by President Owada to Members of the Court and their spouses, and by the Registrar to senior Registry officials.

Mrs. McAleese and her retinue participated in a short informal meeting with Members of the Court, at the end of which she signed the Visitors' Book and exchanged gifts with President Owada.

At a solemn sitting held afterwards in the Great Hall of Justice and attended by the Diplomatic Corps, representatives of the Dutch authorities, Eurojust, the International Criminal Court, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and other international institutions located in The Hague, speeches were made by President Owada and President McAleese.

President Owada observed that "Ireland ha[d] historically championed neutrality in its quest to promote dialogue over violence" noting that "Ireland's belief in the peaceful settlement of international disputes and the principles of international law ha[d] been the stated policy of successive Governments, dating back to the foundation of the Republic". He added that "since Ireland joined the United Nations on 14 December 1955, it [had] . . . provided unwavering support for the objectives of the Charter, in particular in terms of the maintenance of international peace and security, and the protection of human rights".

He spoke of Ireland's "attachment to the cause of international law and to the supreme values of peace and justice", recalling that it had "participated in the two most recent advisory proceedings on the questions asked by the General Assembly regarding the Legal Consequences of

the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in respect of Kosovo".

The President of the Court also spoke of the "significant transformation" in the quantity and the quality of cases that had come before the Court since the end of the 1980s, adding that "in the last two years, six new contentious cases and one request for an advisory opinion were submitted", bringing the current number of cases on the docket to 15. "These cases involved States from every continent of the world" and "the type of issues that [were] submitted [were] also wide-ranging".

In response, President McAleese referred to Ireland's "unshakeable desire to see international disputes resolved peacefully through the architecture of a globally agreed system of international structures and law", adding that "a commitment to the rule of law in international relations [was] the golden thread running through all aspects of Irish foreign policy".

She spoke of her country's emphatic belief "that international law, including global, regional and bilateral agreements, [could] and [did] play a key role in promoting democracy, human rights, peace and prosperity" and that "a key component of the rule of law . . . at the international level [was] the work of international courts and tribunals . . . , with of course the International Court of Justice, the world's highest court, at its centre".

She concluded that "as an indication of the Irish Government's commitment to the rule of law in international relations, it [had] recently taken the decision that Ireland [would] accept the compulsory jurisdiction of the Court and signalled its intention to lodge a declaration to that effect by the end of 2011", adding that "the number of Judgments and opinions issued by the Court in recent years [was] a notable and welcome development" and observing that it was "testimony to the increased recourse to the law in settling international disputes and the confidence which the international community place[d] in th[e] Court's integrity, independence and expertise".

Following the solemn sitting, a reception was held in the entrance hall of the Peace Palace, to which all those who attended the sitting were invited.

The texts of the speeches delivered by the President of the Court and by President McAleese can be found on the Court's website in English at: www.icj-cij.org. The French texts will follow in due course.

Information Department:

Mr. Andrey Poskakukhin, First Secretary of the Court, Head of Department (+31 (0)70 302 2336)

Mr. Boris Heim, Information Officer (+31 (0)70 302 2337)

Ms Joanne Moore, Associate Information Officer (+31 (0)70 302 2394)

Ms Genoveva Madurga, Administrative Assistant (+31 (0) 70 302 2396)