



# 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](http://www.icj-cij.org) Twitter Account: @CIJ\_ICJ

## Press Release

Unofficial

No. 2016/12

20 April 2016

**To celebrate its seventieth anniversary, the International Court of Justice has held a solemn commemorative sitting at the Peace Palace, in the presence of His Majesty the King of the Netherlands and the Secretary-General of the United Nations**

THE HAGUE, 20 April 2016. Today, in the presence of His Majesty King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands, H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, H.E. Mr. Albert Gerard Koenders, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, and H.E. Mr. Antonio Guterres, Vice-President of the United Nations General Assembly, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, held a solemn sitting at the Peace Palace, The Hague, seat of the Court, to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of its inaugural sitting.

Also present were members of the Diplomatic Corps, representatives of the Dutch Government and other Dutch institutions, senior officials of international organizations based in The Hague and other distinguished guests.

In his address, the **Secretary-General of the United Nations** said that “[o]ver the years, the International Court of Justice, as the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, has made a central contribution to the rule of law. It has stepped in effectively where diplomatic or political measures have failed. It has helped countries to settle their disputes by peaceful means. And it has compiled a solid record of effective and impartial judgments, thereby building global trust in the Court’s work and faith in the power of law”. He further observed that United Nations “Member States are turning to the Court on some of their most complex matters” and that the Court’s “[j]udgments are delivered more swiftly, leading to increased certainty for the parties”. “The judges have repeatedly demonstrated their expertise in technically difficult and politically sensitive fields, including maritime and territorial disputes”, the Secretary-General added, stating that he “welcome[d] these advances and commend[ed] the judges and staff of the Court for their diligence and commitment”.

In his speech, the **Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands** said that “[t]hroughout its 70 years of existence, [the Court] has always defended its legal integrity”. He went on to say that “[t]he Court’s judgments are authoritative: it succeeds in ensuring that its decisions are complied with, even by those States that it has been obliged to disappoint. Not by despatching international bailiffs and police officers; but, above all, thanks to the quality of its decisions, of which it has already delivered over a hundred”. The Minister added that “[t]he Court has of course been able to ensure compliance with its judgments through its intellectual authority, but [that]

unfortunately that is no guarantee of lasting progress towards an international legal order”. “International law”, said Mr. Koenders, “can describe and prescribe, prosecute and condemn. However. . . it remains powerless if it is not reflected in action by the United Nations General Assembly and — particularly — by the Security Council. The Netherlands seeks to enhance the effectiveness of the Security Council and strengthen its legitimacy, to make it the sword of international law, alongside the Court, which is its shield”. “New times bring new challenges; the Court is no exception to this rule. Trends observed at the national level can also be seen in the international legal order: cases are more technical, more complex, and require new expertise. It is therefore essential to preserve the Court’s tradition by appointing qualified and competent judges, who are, and will remain, representative of the world in all its diversity and complexity”, he stated.

In a video message shown during the solemn sitting, the **President of the United Nations Security Council, H.E. Mr. Liu Jieyi**, observed that “[t]he Court in its 70-year journey has stood the test of time, as evidenced by over 120 judgments and nearly 30 advisory opinions on a wide range of important issues, thereby contributing to the peaceful settlement of disputes between States, and easing situations that might have otherwise escalated”. “The Court”, he added, “has continuously contributed to the development and authority of international law and the international rule of law. It has played an indispensable role in safeguarding the purposes and principles of the Charter”. Mr. Liu remarked that, in his view, “the Court stands at a new historical starting-point”. “The international community places high hopes in the Court. The Council expects the Court, as a key guardian of the international legal order, to keep abreast of the times and continue to contribute to the lofty goals of the United Nations. The Council, in discharging its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, will remain committed to safeguarding the authority and effectiveness of the international rule of law and will, as always, support the Court in fulfilling its responsibilities”, he continued. “A thousand miles journey starts with the first step”, concluded the President of the Security Council, calling for the Court and the Council to “work together for a world of lasting peace, common prosperity, fairness and justice”.

The **Vice-President of the United Nations General Assembly**, who was speaking on behalf of H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, President of the seventieth session of the General Assembly, said that “we can congratulate ourselves on 70 years of close collaboration between the General Assembly and the Court in the promotion of the ideals and aspirations of the United Nations”. “During the past seven decades, this Court has shown how much the title by which is popularly known is fully deserved: it is a world court, truly universal not only in its openness to all States, but also in terms of the enormous range of issues with which it deals: boundary disputes, diplomatic protection, genocide, use of force, and even the development of environmental law and human rights, among others”, Mr. Gumende continued. “[I]n clarifying international law through its advisory opinions[, the Court] has been fundamental for the United Nations and for the General Assembly in particular”, he added.

In his closing remarks, **Mr. Ronny Abraham, President of the Court**, stated that “the political and legal environment in which the Court operates has changed considerably since 1945. However, the need for a world court working for international peace and justice is as strong today as it was when the Charter was first signed. The Court’s judgments on the merits all represent disputes that have been settled, and situations that might otherwise have led to open conflict and that have found a peaceful outcome. Its advisory opinions also play a decisive role”.

“In seventy years, the face of the world has changed substantially”, the President observed, adding that “[t]hese changes are, of course, reflected in the Court’s work. They have, in particular, had an impact on the type of cases brought before it. Thus. . . [the Court] has of late had occasion to hear a number of disputes concerning relatively new areas, such as international environmental law. Such cases may involve the analysis of complex factual data, such as raw scientific data and reports by science experts. The Court has also heard a growing number of cases involving alleged violations of human rights and humanitarian law, through which it has been able to develop its

jurisprudence, at the same time taking care to consider that of the courts, tribunals and bodies which specialize in these areas, thus ensuring the coherence of international law”.

In conclusion, President Abraham stated that “[a]t 70, the International Court of Justice has reached a serene maturity. Conscious of the importance of the mission with which it has been entrusted by the Member States, it is ready to face the new challenges that might arise in the coming decade. It knows that in doing so it can rely on the dedicated work of all the members of its Registry, who I would like to take the opportunity to thank on this solemn occasion”.

\*

### Historical background

The Charter of the United Nations and the Statute of the International Court of Justice, which forms an integral part of the Charter, were signed in San Francisco on 26 June 1945 and 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 at the Peace Palace, The Hague, on 3 April 1946. On 6 April 1946, the new Court elected its President, Vice-President and Registrar. Its inaugural sitting took place on 18 April 1946.

\*

### Media advisory: downloadable media on the Court’s website

The Court has made a special 70th anniversary press pack available to the media on its website ([www.icj-cij.org/70/](http://www.icj-cij.org/70/)). This pack contains the **texts** of the speeches delivered at the sitting, audio and video recordings (**Flash** and **MPEG4**), photographs (**JPEG**) free of copyright for editorial use, and texts explaining the mission and functioning of the Court in several languages (English, French, Arabic, Chinese, Dutch, Russian and Spanish).

---

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 Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY, an ad hoc court created by the Security Council), the International Criminal Court (ICC, the first permanent international criminal court, established by treaty, which 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), 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).

---

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)