

The Relevance of International Court of Justice Advisory Opinions: Nuclear Weapons, Climate Change and other Global Issues

On behalf of the municipality: a warm welcome to The Hague, International city of Peace and Justice. My name is Peter Kievot and I am the director of International Affairs of the Municipality of The Hague.

Thank you World Federalist Movement, for organizing this conference. And thank you Asser Institute for hosting it.

As you know, the International rule of law is under pressure. But the idea of Peace through Justice is still very much tangible in our city. We are after all the Legal capital of the world. Let me elaborate on that.

The city of The Hague has been at the heart of global legal progress for quite some time. I am sure you are aware of the famous peace conferences our city hosted in the 1899 and 1907. But maybe not everybody knows that the story began much earlier.

In the 17th century, it was here in The Hague that Hugo de Groot, or Grotius, lived, rather close to where we are sitting/ standing now. He developed a simple but powerful principle: that the sovereignty of a nation does not lie simply in a ruler through God's will, but originates in its people, who agree to confer such authority upon a ruler. Grotius was also one of the first to define expressly the idea of one society of states, governed not by force or warfare but by actual laws and mutual agreement to enforce those laws. This thinking was given concrete expression in the Peace of Westphalia (1648), and Grotius is often considered one of the intellectual fathers of this first general peace settlement of modern times.

A few decades after Grotius death, Baruch Spinoza, who also lived nearby in the centre of town, posed one of his famous assertions: "there is no peace without law, and without peace, no freedom." Of course throughout time many people have had similar thoughts, in different wordings like the prophet Jesaja or referent Martin Luther King ("There can be no justice without peace. And there can be no peace without justice"). A message that remains as relevant today as ever.

Upon principles like these, our current rule based world-order has been built. And the ICJ has played and plays a huge and essential part in it.

However, we are commemorating the 80th anniversary of the ICJ this year, in turbulent times. Around the world, many argue that the International rule of law and multilateral cooperation are under pressure. The number of conflicts is increasing, and conflicts themselves are often intensifying. Some even proclaim the bankruptcy of the system of international rule of law and that the ICJ is obsolete and irrelevant. And Grotius and Spinoza were wrong from the start, they say.

As you might expect, this kind of thinking touches our very identity as the city of The Hague. It makes us, Hagenaars en Hagenezen, angry.

I already mentioned the 1899 and 1907 Peaceconferences in the Hague. But the role of The Hague in international diplomacy and justice became more significant after the opening of the Peace Palace in

1913 and the establishment of the Permanent Court of Arbitration: the first global mechanism for the settlement of disputes between states. From the 1990's onwards in particular, numerous international organizations flocked to The Hague. The most known of course is the International Court of Justice. But think also of the International Criminal Court, the Yugoslavia Tribunal, Europol and Eurojust, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the Hague Conference on Private International Law, the International Commission on Missing Persons and many more.

Throughout the years all these organizations have shaped the profile of the city as the legal capital of the world. Which attracts many other organizations, from UN, EU or NATO agencies to NGO's, all working on peace and justice and making the world a better, safer and more just place. Today, The Hague is proud to host over 500 international organizations and knowledge institutes, big and small, contributing to peace and justice in their own way, providing over 40.000 jobs. We call it our 'ecosystem of peace and justice'.

And there is a tangible energy within this ecosystem, among those people working here: that disputes between states can be resolved through law, not force. That Grotius and Spinoza were right. That the rule of law is not dead, but a believe that really works. If you work it. And that action, that work is being done every day in organizations like the ICJ. By 40.000 other people who work in this ecosystem of peace and justice.

The ICJ embodies and carries the promise and message of hope not only to people in The Hague, but throughout the world. Because of its work on conflict resolution and because of its Advisory Opinions. Today we are discussing the relevance of an institution like the ICJ and its work. But what can be more relevant than giving people hope? We think that if there was ever a time an organization like the ICJ is needed, it is now.

Article 90 of the Dutch Constitution states that the promotion of international law is not merely a policy goal, but a legal obligation for the Dutch government. As a city, as legal capital of the world, we feel a profound responsibility for this and are honored to contribute. Our commitment is hundreds of years old. It is part of our city's DNA.

We will therefore continue to facilitate opportunities for the world to convene in institutions and meetings to advance peace and justice through law. And support people and organizations who carry that message, the message of hope. Grotius and Spinoza were and are right.

Again: congratulations to the International Court of Justice for its 80th anniversary and its 30th anniversary of the historic ICJ Advisory Opinion on the Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons. If it were up to us, the ICJ will celebrate many, many more anniversaries.

I wish you a fruitful conference. Thank you.

Before you leave:

This coming November, we are organizing the Hague Justice Week, where the 80th anniversary of the ICJ will be the central theme to our programming. We're organizing this week with many partners in

the city and around the world. I'd like to extend a call for participation should you or your organization wish to contribute to the programming. Let us know.