

**MESSAGE OF PEACE FROM H.E. JUDGE ROSALYN HIGGINS,
PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE,
“DAY OF PEACE” IN THE HAGUE**

21 September 2008

On behalf of the International Court of Justice, I warmly welcome you to the Peace Palace on the occasion of the “International Day of Peace”.

The achievement of peace is a guiding principle of the United Nations. The very first article of the United Nations Charter sets out the purpose of “maintain[ing] international peace and security” and references to peace appear throughout the Charter. This emphasis on peace was due to the fearful experience of the Second World War. But it also reflects the profound hopes of most ordinary human beings, whatever their background, race or religion. Even though different leaders throughout the ages may have other priorities, I profoundly believe that there is a universally shared deep desire of humankind to live in peace.

The United Nations Charter realizes that certain conditions have to be in place for peace to be achieved. People must have decent standards of living, employment, and the capacity for economic and social progress and development. The better the economic and social conditions, the more likely it is that there will be a stable, peaceful environment.

The Charter also envisages the need for universal respect for human rights for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion. Even if you have material things, if you do not enjoy fundamental rights or possess the human dignity to which you are entitled, because of your race, sex, language, or religion, then that is not conducive to peace. It is wonderful to see that this year’s “Day of Peace” includes an Intercultural Parade, celebrating the diverse backgrounds of those who live in this international city.

Our role at the International Court of Justice is to contribute to peace through the judicial settlement of disputes between States. The existence of good economic and social conditions and of mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights should prevent disputes arising or escalating into armed conflict. But in the real world, these conditions do not exist in many areas, and sometimes even where they do, disputes still occur.

The International Court plays a very particular role in not allowing disputes between States to erupt into violence. Sometimes a case comes to the Court too late for it to assist in stopping the fighting on the ground, but in time for judicial input to contribute to the process of conflict resolution. Of course, States are entitled to use force to defend their citizens against certain unlawful uses of force by others. But who will decide if that is *really* the situation? Who will make sure a use of force in self-defence is not excessive? It is the ICJ who performs these tasks for international peace.

I have been speaking so far about how the United Nations— epitomised here in the Netherlands by the International Court, the United Nation’s principal judicial organ— sees the question of peace.

There are things that can be said at a much more personal level. Peace is not just a matter for the United Nations and Governments, nor indeed just for civil society and NGOs, who do so much to promote causes that underpin peace. We have — each and every one of us — a responsibility to create a climate in which we respect each other, refrain from acting aggressively, understand each other’s problems and try to help with them. How do we act in our families, with our neighbours, among our colleagues at work? Are we respectful to other drivers on the street? Are we pleasant

in restaurants and shops? Are we kind to those who come to us in need? In other words, peace is not just a top-down phenomenon. Each and every one in the audience today has a role to play on a personal level and through the elements of civil society in which you are involved. Think about these things not just today, but make this personal climate of peace part of your everyday life.

With these words, my colleagues and I send you our best wishes on this “International Day of Peace”!
