

**OPENING REMARKS OF H. E. JUDGE ABDULQAWI A. YUSUF,
PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE,
AT THE SECOND WORLD MEETING OF SOCIETIES
FOR INTERNATIONAL LAW,**

**THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS
2 SEPTEMBER 2019**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is a great pleasure for me to extend a warm welcome to you all and to the “world of international law”, which you represent, to the Peace Palace where the International Court of Justice and its predecessor the Permanent Court of International Justice have exercised their mandate of settling disputes among States in accordance with international law for almost a century now.

2. I wish to pay tribute at the outset to the organizers of the meeting, the French Society of international law and the Hague Academy of International law, and in particular to a man who has devoted a lot of energy, time and savoir-faire to bring together all societies and associations of international law for the second time in the last few years, Professor Alain Pellet, as well as to the team that assisted him in this task.

3. This is an initiative which deserves to be highly commended, and it is to be hoped that the success of this second meeting will encourage others to take up the torch and to ensure that this “mother of all networks of international law” will continue to be convened in different parts of the world to take forward the dialogue and exchange of views started in Strasbourg in 2015.

4. The dialogue among publicists, including those referred to in Article 38 (1) *(d)* of the Statute of our Court, in the scholarly societies which you represent, or at a venue like this one, is of great interest to the Members of our Court. That is why several Members of the Court have directly participated in the creation of national or regional associations of international law. I was, as a young international lawyer, involved in the establishment of the African Association of International Law, already in 1986, in Lusaka, Zambia, at a time when no other regional societies existed. Later, my colleagues, Judges Owada and Xue contributed a lot to the creation of the Asian Society of International Law; while Judge Cançado Trindade did the same with regard to the Latin-American Society of International Law. However, this dialogue cannot and should not be limited to a mapping of the contours of the existing rules of the law. It must encompass the extension of such rules to the emerging needs of society and the challenges facing it. I was therefore pleased to find in the brochure for this meeting a page entitled “An important caveat”, which calls on the participants “to reflect together on the serious challenges facing international law and the role that societies can play in addressing them”.

5. The challenges faced, by international law relate primarily, in my view, to its ability, its capacity to serve human society. We should indeed keep in mind that the rules of international law exist only because and for the benefit of the society that they serve. Thus, if the rules and institutions that have served humanity so well in the past seventy-five years are ignored, curtailed or set aside, it is the progress and well-being of humanity that will suffer. Some may think today

that such actions only affect others and do not directly concern them; but sooner or later, they will affect all of us. That is the first challenge.

6. A second challenge to the ability of international law to serve human society arises from its applicability or actual application to matters of common concern to humanity and to the commons. We have declared biological diversity to be of common concern to humanity, and we see it gradually disappearing before our eyes. We have declared climate change and the rising of the oceans a common concern of humanity, but we are struggling to have the law properly applied and extended to them. This is an area in which we need innovative and daring proposals and solutions by international lawyers. We no longer have the luxury of waiting to see how the practice of States evolves in these areas. We need *avant-garde* legal action. Above all, we need to put more meat on the bones and flesh out the rules governing matters of common concern.

7. A third challenge is the ability of international law to grapple with the impact of rapid technological advances on human rights and freedoms. Today, individual freedoms, individuality and independent thinking are at risk of being affected or even manipulated by technological tools in the hands of few major corporations in the most stealthy and Orwellian manner. Legal defenses need to be built against abusive behavior arising from the use of such technologies.

8. What is then the role of learned societies and associations in this context? I believe that in addition to scholarly research and its dissemination, such a role should extend to advocacy, promotion and awareness-raising with regard to the role of international law in the daily lives of all individuals and societies. There is no nation on earth that does not benefit from the rules-based multilateral system which governs all facets of international relations today, and it is in the interest of all to safeguard and protect those rules. As national and regional societies, you need to convey that message and publicize it as much as possible.

9. I wish you great success in your deliberations.
