

**Opening Address of the 2026 Summer Session (Public International  
Law Session)**

**Hague Academy of International Law**

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Mr. Secretary-General,

Excellencies,

Dear colleagues,

Dear participants, from all corners of the world,

**I. Introduction**

In my capacity as President of the Curatorium of the Hague Academy of International Law, it is my honor and pleasure to welcome you to the opening ceremony of the 2026 Summer Session in Public International Law.

As tradition dictates, this ceremony is above all a chance to welcome you. It marks the start of a truly unique intellectual and human experience, bringing together, in one place, professors, practitioners, and students from extraordinarily diverse legal, cultural, and geographical backgrounds, all driven by the same ambition: to deepen their knowledge of international law and to contribute to its development.

But today's ceremony is also a moment of reflection.

The Academy does not exist apart from the world. Since its establishment, it has accompanied the great transformations of international society while remaining faithful to its original vocation: to offer a place of study, dialogue, and intellectual freedom in the service of international law.

The context in which our session opens today inevitably calls for such reflection.

Perhaps at no time in recent decades has international law been so invoked, so debated, and at times so contested. Crises are multiplying, international tensions are deepening, and expectations of international institutions

remain immense, while their capacity to respond effectively to contemporary challenges is often severely tested.

In such a context, it would be tempting to see international law as nothing more than a reflection of the balance of power among states. Yet it is precisely when the legal order is under the greatest strain that it reveals its full importance. International law is not designed only for periods of stability; it takes on its fullest meaning when peace is threatened, when cooperation becomes more difficult, and when the protection of human dignity demands renewed vigilance.

It is precisely in such moments that the mission of our Academy takes on its fullest meaning.

## **II. A Mission Born of an Ever-Present Conviction**

Since its establishment in 1923, the Academy has pursued an ambition that remains unchanged: to promote the study of international law at the highest level and to train those who will bear the responsibility of understanding it, interpreting it, teaching it, and implementing it in universities, courts, administrations, international organizations, or professional practice.

The choice of The Hague was no accident. As the city of the Peace Palace and of the first great conferences devoted to the peaceful settlement of disputes, it embodies a conviction that remains at the heart of our institution: that a rules-based international order is the indispensable condition for peaceful coexistence among states and for the effective protection of the human person.

This conviction has never exempted international law from the trials of history. The Academy has lived through the upheavals of the twentieth century—two world wars, the Cold War, movements of decolonization, the emergence of new international actors, and the profound transformations of international society. In every era, international law has been called upon to respond to unprecedented challenges, without ever abandoning its founding ambition: to replace the play of raw power with rules, and to let dialogue prevail over confrontation.

The generations who came before you witnessed major transformations in international law and often helped shape them. Yours, in turn, will face challenges of exceptional scale. You will have to grasp their legal

implications and, with rigor, discernment, and independence, help forge the responses that international law will be called upon to provide.

It is to these challenges that I would now like to devote a few moments.

### **III. Today's Challenges**

The first challenge facing international law today concerns, naturally, the **maintenance of international peace and security**. The prohibition on the use of force, enshrined in the United Nations Charter as one of the foundations of the contemporary international legal order, continues to be the subject of grave violations. At the same time, the mechanisms responsible for ensuring collective security face difficulties that limit their capacity to prevent or resolve crises with the effectiveness the international community is entitled to expect.

The second challenge concerns **international courts and tribunals**. Whether we look at the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, or the regional human rights courts, their role today seems more important than ever. They contribute to the peaceful settlement of disputes, to the clarification and development of the law, and to the protection of fundamental rights. At the same time, they sometimes face challenges, resistance, or difficulties in the enforcement of their decisions, signs which illustrate the tensions under which international law continues to operate.

The third challenge concerns **multilateralism** itself. The profound geopolitical shifts of recent years have altered the international balance of power and they have led states to redefine some of their priorities. Mechanisms of international cooperation are thus subject to growing expectations, even as the consensus needed for them to function becomes harder to achieve. This shift calls not for resignation, but for renewed reflection on the conditions for a multilateralism capable of effectively meeting the challenges of our time.

The fourth challenge stems from **scientific and technological progress**. Artificial intelligence, cyber operations, the use of large-scale data, new forms of conflict, and the challenges linked to outer space and global commons all raise unprecedented questions. International law is called upon to accompany these developments without abandoning the principles

that form its foundation. It must provide a normative framework solid enough to preserve legal certainty, while remaining flexible enough to respond to constantly evolving realities.

The fifth challenge is that of **climate change and environmental protection**. Climate disruption, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem degradation remind us that environmental issues now lie at the heart of the international community's concerns. In the face of these global challenges, states must, within the framework of international law, deepen their cooperation, assume their respective responsibilities, and safeguard the common heritage of humanity in a spirit of solidarity and shared responsibility.

Finally, I would like to mention a challenge that is particularly close to my heart: the **protection of the human person**. Armed conflicts, forced displacement, violations of fundamental rights, and the humanitarian consequences of contemporary crises all forcefully remind us that human dignity remains at the center of international law's concerns.

These challenges differ in nature, but they share a common thread: each and every one tests the capacity of international law to fulfill the function it has held since its origin, namely providing a legal framework that organizes states' coexistence, fosters international cooperation, and protects the fundamental values on which our international community rests.

#### **IV. What is at stake: Preserving confidence in International Law**

Faced with these challenges, it would be tempting to give in to either skepticism or discouragement, viewing international law as an ideal gradually overtaken by geopolitical realities. I do not share this view.

International law is, without question, going through a period of profound tension. But the difficulties it faces cannot call into question its very purpose. On the contrary, they remind us just how indispensable it remains. For no credible alternative exists today to organize international relations, prevent conflicts, protect the environment, or ensure the protection of fundamental rights with the same degree of legitimacy and universality.

The real issue lies elsewhere. It lies in the capacity of international law to continue inspiring confidence: confidence in the strength of its principles,

confidence in its institutions, confidence in its ability to provide a common language and a shared legal framework, beyond the diversity of interests and power relations.

This confidence, however, cannot be taken for granted. It is built and renewed every day. It rests on the quality of legal norms, on their rigorous interpretation, on their good-faith application, and on states' willingness to honor the commitments they have freely undertaken. It also depends on those who help keep international law alive through their teaching, research, practice, or judicial functions.

That is why your generation bears a particularly important responsibility.

You will go on to hold a variety of roles: judges, diplomats, academics, lawyers, arbitrators, international civil servants, legal advisers, or public officials. You will need to reconcile your commitment to general principles with a key grasp of reality, as well as rigor with a sense of responsibility.

The international lawyer cannot be satisfied with a reading of the law that ignores the realities of the world. But neither can they accept that those realities lead to relativizing the principles on which the international legal order rests.

The history of international law shows that its most significant advances have never been the product of favorable circumstances. They were born out of conviction, perseverance, and dialogue. The creation of international courts, the development of international human rights protection, and the codification of many branches of international law all testify to its capacity to evolve and strengthen itself, even in times of deep uncertainty.

It is this reasoned confidence in the strength of law that our Academy seeks to pass on; Not the certainty that law will always provide immediate or perfect answers, but the conviction that it remains the best instrument available to the international community for promoting peace, justice, cooperation among peoples, and respect for human dignity.

## **V. The Academy's Responsibilities**

In a context such as the one we face today, the Hague Academy of International Law bears, I believe, a particular responsibility.

For over a century, it has pursued a mission that has lost none of its relevance: to offer a place where international law can be studied rigorously, discussed openly, and passed on to future generations in keeping with its principles. Its mission is not to defend an abstract or idealized conception of international law. It is to promote a rigorous, critical, and open understanding of it—one aware, at once, of its achievements, its limitations, and its potential.

The Academy's first responsibility, then, is **scientific excellence**.

At a time when international law is sometimes invoked loosely, or even used in service of aims foreign to it, it is more important than ever to safeguard the rigor of legal reasoning. This demand for method, nuance, and intellectual independence is the first condition for the credibility of international law.

The Academy's second responsibility is **universality**.

International law can fully achieve its purpose only if it draws on the diversity of legal traditions, cultures, and experiences. Each year, the Academy brings together professors and participants from every region of the world. This diversity is not simply a reflection of the international community; it is one of its greatest strengths. It fosters dialogue, mutual listening, and the exchange of ideas, in respect for differences and around a shared legal language.

Finally, the Academy's third responsibility is to **train jurists who are conscious of their responsibility**.

Training is not simply about passing on knowledge. It also means developing critical thinking, cultivating critical thinking, and preparing each person to carry out their duties with competence, integrity, and a sense of responsibility. International lawyers are often called upon to act in contexts where pressures can be intense and where legal choices sometimes carry considerable consequences. More than ever, they must show discernment, intellectual courage, and unwavering commitment to the demands of the rule of law.

This is the ambition that has driven our Academy since its establishment. It explains the unique place the Academy occupies within the international

legal community, and the trust placed in it for over a century, by generations of professors, practitioners, and students.

**The Curatorium is the guardian of this ambition.** Composed of eighteen jurists from different traditions of international law, it oversees the scientific quality of the teaching, sets the Academy's academic direction, and selects the professors who will teach during the summer and winter sessions. It stands within a tradition of excellence, independence, and openness that is one of the distinguishing marks of our institution.

**The programme** we inaugurate today is faithful to that tradition.

Over the coming weeks, you will follow a general course and specialized courses devoted to the main branches of public international law. The teaching will address both classic subjects, such as sovereignty, state responsibility, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and human rights, as well as more recent issues linked to new technologies, international sports law, the transformation of economic relations, and migration.

These courses will be taught by some of the most eminent professors and practitioners of our time, representing diverse legal traditions and intellectual perspectives. This plurality of approaches is, I repeat, one of the Academy's greatest strengths.

I invite you to make the most of this exceptional experience. The knowledge you gain here will be invaluable. But the exchanges you will have with one another, the friendships you will form, and the bonds of trust you will build will be just as valuable. Beyond its courses, the Academy is also an intellectual and human community whose long tradition you will now join.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the coming weeks, you will study a law that is very much alive: constantly evolving, tested by considerable challenges, yet more indispensable than ever.

The Academy does not claim to offer you ready-made answers. It will give you something more: a method, a critical mind, a taste for intellectual rigor,

and the conviction that dialogue among legal traditions remains one of the greatest riches of our discipline.

I hope that your time at the Academy leaves you with far more than the memory of a summer session. I hope it will strengthen your confidence in the law's capacity to meet the challenges of our time; that it will nourish your commitment to rigor, your openness to dialogue, and your attachment to the values that underpin our international legal community.

For more than a century, the Academy has welcomed generations of jurists from around the world. Many have gone on to become judges, diplomats, arbitrators, academics, lawyers, or senior international officials. All have carried with them the same conviction: that international law, despite its imperfections and the difficulties of its implementation, remains one of the essential foundations of an international order built on peace, justice, cooperation, and respect for human dignity.

It is this conviction that we wish to share with you today.

I wish you a session filled with learning, new encounters, and rich exchange, worthy of your hopes and your ambitions.

Thank you.