

**SPEECH BY THE NETHERLANDS MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, TOM BERENDSEN,
AT THE SOLEMN SITTING OF THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE
TO MARK ITS EIGHTIETH ANNIVERSARY,
THE HAGUE, 17 APRIL 2026**

[Spoken word counts]

Your Majesty,
Mr President,
Secretary-General,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me take you back to the year in which the International Court of Justice was founded: 1946.

On the 18th of April that year, this hall, with its beautiful stained-glass windows, was packed with distinguished guests for the Court's inauguration ceremony.

Among them were the Dutch Crown Princess Juliana and her husband, Prince Bernhard: the grandparents of King Willem-Alexander, who is with us here today.

As the Court's first President, José Gustavo Guerrero, generously remarked on that occasion, their presence was "a shining testimony of the desire for justice that drives, through generations, the Dutch nation".

And indeed, we have a long-standing tradition of contributing to the development and promotion of international law.

A tradition that stretches from the famous *Mare Liberum* by Hugo Grotius to our current role as host to numerous legal institutions.

As the self-proclaimed city of peace and justice, The Hague plays a key role in the international administration of justice, and the Court is a crucial institution in this regard.

Hosting the Court — and many other international legal institutions — here in The Hague comes with responsibilities.

For the Netherlands, it is a permanent reminder to live up to our reputation and tradition. *Noblesse oblige*.

This requires extra effort in a world in which international law continues to be tested and challenged.

And yet, it was precisely for such circumstances that the generations who came before us — and who lived through two devastating World Wars — created these institutions.

Not for easy times. But for difficult times.

International law is no guarantee of everlasting peace.

We all know the challenges associated with enforcing compliance.

But the fact that certain rules are challenged does not mean they cease to exist, or lose their value.

Around the world we hear the calls for justice.

These voices do not, *and will not*, go unheard.

International law continues to function across numerous domains: from regulating trade and maritime transport to facilitating the peaceful settlement of disputes between States.

An increasing number of States are turning to this Court, relying on it to resolve conflicts through legal means.

These cases reflect the most pressing global challenges, including climate change, human rights violations, territorial demarcation and allegations of genocide.

This underscores the Court's role as the highest judicial organ of the UN, working with authority, professionalism and independence.

And it highlights the enduring importance of international law, underpinned by widespread global confidence in its application.

Ladies and gentlemen,

One of the stained-glass windows in this Great Hall of Justice in the Peace Palace portrays the goddess of war, Bellona, dying in the arms of the goddess of peace.

Unfortunately, it's not a reflection of current reality.

Nor is it, I'm sorry to say, an accurate reflection of any point in time in the existence of this Court.

But we must *never* see that as a failure of the *Court*.

We must see it as a reflection of our own responsibility, as an international community.

The responsibility "to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained".

As some of you will know, that was a direct quote from the preamble of the UN Charter.

And like the Charter, this stained-glass window remains a powerful expression of this Court's aspiration.

Of our *collective* aspiration.

For a world based on the rule of law, with respect for fundamental human rights, social progress and better standards of living.

Each new judgment of the Court inflicts another blow on the goddess of war.

Each new judgment brings the dream captured in that image one step closer: peace through law.

So, there's every reason to uphold and defend international law and the international legal order.

And there's every reason to keep supporting the International Court of Justice.

The Netherlands, alongside many partners, will always be firmly committed to that cause.

We owe it to those who came before us: those who founded this Court and helped to shape it.

We owe it to those living today.

We owe it to future generations.

Thank you.
