

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**  
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**REMARKS TO COMMEMORATE THE 80<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE**

**The Hague, 17 April 2026**

Your Majesty,

Mr. President,

Distinguished Judges,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Moments of crisis are moments of choice.

They reveal who we are – and what we stand for.

Today, we come together in the quiet dignity of a city that is synonymous with justice and international law.

But it is easy to forget the world of eighty years ago.

Europe – and far beyond – lay in ruins.

The Hague itself was scarred and shaken.

And yet, in that dark and difficult moment, world leaders made a defining choice.

A choice to reject a future ruled by coercion and violence – and to embrace a future rooted in the United Nations Charter and international law.

A choice to build a Court founded on one overriding conviction:

The force of law must always prevail over the law of force.

In doing so, they did more than create the principal judicial organ of the United Nations.

They laid down a cornerstone of a more peaceful world.

Excellencies,

As President of the General Assembly Paul-Henri Spaak said at the Inaugural sitting of this Court 80 years ago:

“There can be no civilized world nor any lasting peace, if there be not complete and absolute respect for international jurisdiction and its judgments.”

Over eight decades, the judgments and advisory opinions of the International Court of Justice have shaped the modern world.

Today, the Court’s docket has never been fuller – a clear sign of trust in its authority and independence.

The increased number of women on the bench is further strengthening the Court’s legitimacy. A sign of progress that needs to continue.

And the Court’s modernization of working methods is enhancing effectiveness and resilience.

To the Judges and the entire staff of the Court and its Registry, I extend my profound gratitude.

The Court continues to be a guarantor that sovereignty and equality are not mere words on paper.

It is also a reminder that even overwhelming strength cannot – and must not – replace legal obligation.

Excellencies,

We must be unequivocal:

The Court’s decisions, including provisional measures, are binding on the parties to a case.

Respect for those decisions is not optional.

It is a Charter obligation.

Yet today, violations of international law are unfolding before our eyes.

Military operations trample the basic rules that govern conflict.

Humanitarian obligations are ignored.

The rules of international law that protect the United Nations itself are violated.

The institutions created to provide justice – this one and others – are increasingly questioned and challenged.

And this erosion is not happening at the margins of the international system.

It is happening at its core – including by States entrusted with unique responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security.

When the law of force replaces the force of law, instability becomes contagious.

Conflicts spill across borders.

Economic shocks reverberate around the world.

And the most vulnerable always suffer first and suffer most.

Excellencies,

Today, we face our own moment of crisis – and our own moment of choice.

A choice between a future governed by the rule of law – or a future driven by raw power.

The choice is clear.

It is precisely because the international system is under such strain that adherence to international law matters more than ever – especially in this era of changing power relations.

Without that foundation, the risk of chaos will grow, as history has shown.

International law gives States the certainty of a common language – and the predictability of a common framework to resolve differences peacefully.

To weaken it is to erode the foundations of global stability.

To strengthen it is to invest in a world governed by justice, not fear.

Let us choose to strengthen it.

Let us recommit to the peaceful settlement of disputes.

To respect the judgments of this Court – and follow through on the Court's advisory opinions.

And to uphold the purposes and principles of the Charter that bind us together as a community of nations.

In this moment of crisis, that is the only right choice.

Let us have the courage to make it.

Thank you.

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