

Presentation of Oppenheim's International Law: The United Nations
Statement by the President of the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly
24 October 2017 delivered at the United Nations

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and privilege to be part of the launch of the new volume of *Oppenheim's International Law*, which focuses on the United Nations. I want to join my colleague, Mr. Nasser, in welcoming Dame Rosalyn Higgins and Lord Terrence Higgins, who travelled to New York for this special occasion. I am pleased to see several members of the authors' team also here with us.

As a law student, I learned very quickly to appreciate the significance of *Oppenheim's International Law*. It is the essential reference work for this discipline. It has contributed to the development and the knowledge of international law for generations. New editions, like the one we are celebrating today, have allowed this resource to adapt to the ongoing evolution of international law.

Something else I took away from law school was the leading role played by the United Nations in shaping modern international law.

Since then, I have seen that this role is twofold:

First, the United Nations has contributed to a rules-based international order.

Before the United Nations was established in 1945, we had a system based on power and wealth alone. There were no checks or balances. If governments turned their militaries, or indeed their laws, against their people, nothing was there to stop them. We all know the horrors that resulted from this system. The United Nations was born from the determination of people to save future generations from experiencing these horrors again.

In this way, the international community crafted a system based on universal norms and standards. It created various options for the peaceful settlement of disputes, including through the International Court of Justice. It established the United Nations Security Council, charged with making binding decisions to preserve international peace and security. It told every person that he or she is born with rights, which cannot be taken away or suspended. 72 years later, dozens of conventions, treaties or other legal instruments have come from the United Nations to form the core of the modern architecture of international law.

The United Nation's contribution to the international legal order goes far beyond its law-making functions, however. This brings me to focus on the second, important role for the United Nations, which is played out through its work on the ground.

Over the decades, the range of the UN's activities has considerably increased. Through its specialized agencies, funds and programmes, the United Nations is working to advance the rule of law around the world. This means building the capacity of national institutions and actors. It also means engaging in preventive diplomacy and mediation. Additionally, it means ensuring that international law does not represent an academic ideal, but rather results in everyday benefits for people.

And, we couldn't have asked for a more qualified author to develop a leading resource on international law from the perspective of the United Nations. As we heard, Dame Higgins has prestigious academic credentials. Moreover, she has brought to this work firsthand experience from the highest levels of responsibility within the international justice system. This book has therefore been endowed with exceptional authority. It gives a unique insight into the organs, responsibilities, procedures and legal practices associated with the United Nations. Among the many resources and writings dealing with the United Nation's role in international law, I am confident that this work will take a place of primacy.

Dame Higgins, I want to thank you for what you have given to the international community through this book. And I also want to thank you for what you have given to people around the world.

We must remember that the United Nation's work in developing and strengthening international law was never meant to be a theoretical exercise. It was intended to improve the lives of people around the world. This book further advances this purpose. It will act as an indispensable tool for many people – including scholars, researchers, diplomats and lawyers. It will open the UN's doors wider. It will provide inspiration, while ensuring that we learn from past mistakes. It will empower people to use the landmark achievements reached in New York, Geneva or the Hague - even if they are in the field, thousands of miles from any of these cities.

As it was said earlier today, we are celebrating the launch of *Oppenheim's International Law: The United Nations*. But it is important to note that today also marks the United Nation's 72nd anniversary. We can therefore welcome this book as a birthday gift to the UN.

Thank you again.