

# Advancing justice and international law

Promotion of justice and international law

## What we do

- Settlement of legal disputes submitted by States and provision of advisory opinions on legal questions
- Legal services for the United Nations as a whole
- Legal services for United Nations organs and funds and programmes
- International accountability mechanisms
- Custody, registration and publication of treaties
- Development and codification of international law
- Law of the sea and ocean affairs
- International trade

## Our team

- Office of Legal Affairs

The International Court of Justice holds a hearing at the Peace Palace in The Hague, Kingdom of the Netherlands.



Winning photo for the “Underwater Sea Scapes” category in the 2023 World Oceans Day photo competition.

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## Context

The **principles of justice and international law, as well as of the peaceful settlement of disputes, are enshrined in the first two Articles of the Charter** of the United Nations. Those principles therefore constitute the very foundation upon which the international community cooperates.

## Our goals

The United Nations **promotes justice and international law through its actions and mandates**, such as those related to international trade, oceans and the law of the sea, treaties and international agreements, peace operations, international tribunals and other international accountability mechanisms, and sanctions. In addition, **the International Court of Justice, the principal judicial organ of the United Nations**, settles legal disputes submitted by States and provides advisory opinions on legal questions.

## Achievements

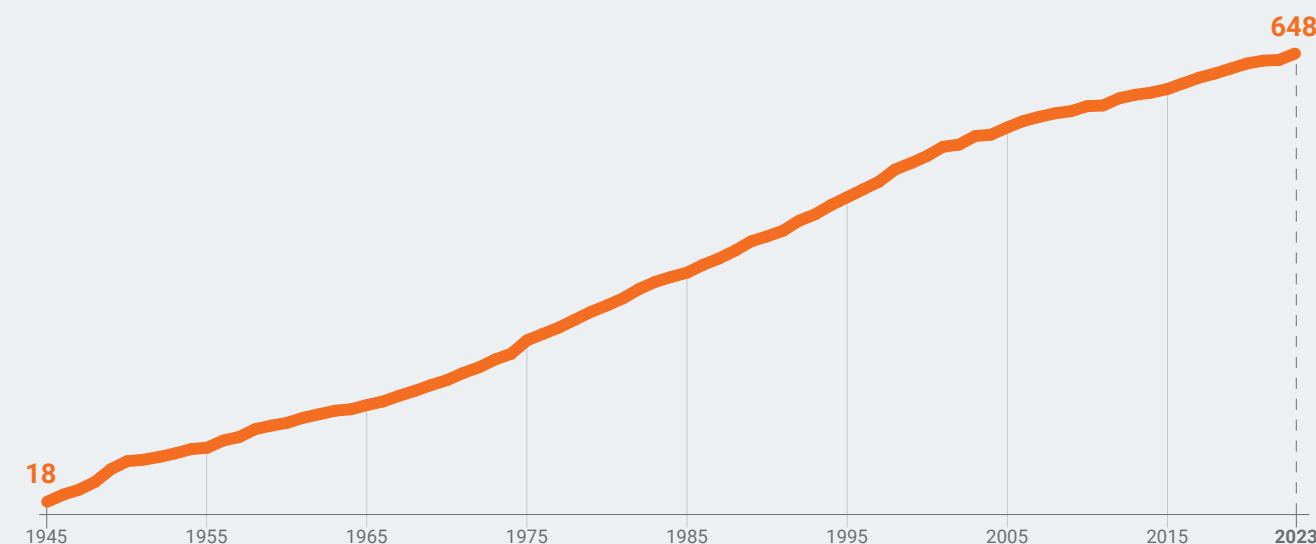
The International Court of Justice **considered high-profile cases and delivered judgments on the merits in the proceedings** concerning the following: *Question of the Delimitation of the Continental Shelf between Nicaragua and Colombia beyond 200 Nautical Miles from the Nicaraguan Coast (Nicaragua v. Colombia)*; *Certain Iranian Assets (Islamic Republic of Iran v. United States of America)*; and *Application of the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Ukraine v. Russian Federation)*. The Court was also seized of five new contentious cases, including the proceedings concerning the following: *Application of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Canada and the Netherlands v. Syrian Arab Republic)* and *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)*, in both of which **the Court indicated provisional measures**.



“We are the ‘succeeding generations’ that the Charter promised to save from the scourge of war. Respect for international law is the cornerstone of that promise.”

**Miguel de Serpa Soares**,  
Under-Secretary-General for  
Legal Affairs

## Rising number of multilateral treaties deposited with the Secretary-General





The former Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Alatoi Ishmael Kalsakau, briefs reporters on the draft resolution requesting an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the obligations of States in respect of climate change.

(New York; March 2023)  
© UN Photo/Manuel Elías

The Secretariat transmitted to the Court documentation likely to assist with the questions posed by the General Assembly in its requests for advisory opinions on the legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and on the obligations of States in respect of climate change.

With the indefinite stay of proceedings in the case of *Prosecutor v. Félicien Kabuga* in September 2023, the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals concluded its core crimes proceedings and continued to implement its other residual functions. Following the completion of its non-judicial residual functions, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon closed on 31 December 2023.

In a major display of support for the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction, **80 countries and the European Union signed the Agreement** upon its opening for signature during the annual treaty event, organized during the high-level week of the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session.

In addition, the United Nations Convention on the International Effects of Judicial Sales of Ships opened for signature at a ceremony in Beijing on 5 September 2023. The Convention establishes a harmonized regime for giving international effect to judicial sales, while preserving national law governing the procedure of judicial sales and the circumstances in which judicial sales confer clean title.

### Multilateral treaties deposited with the Secretary-General address matters of worldwide importance

Multilateral treaties deposited with the Secretary-General, proportion by Chapter (as of March 2024)

