

**Statement of Dr. Henning Voscherau, First Lord Mayor of the Free and Hanseatic City of
Hamburg, on the occasion of the Ceremonial Inauguration of the Judges
18 October 1996**

It is a pleasure and privilege to welcome the distinguished guests who are gathered in Hamburg today to celebrate the inauguration of the 21 Judges of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

I would like to extend a special welcome to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who is honouring the Hanseatic City with his presence on this special occasion.

This is a great moment in the history of our city.

On August 21, 1981, the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg was elected as the seat of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. Today, 15 years of expectation and preparation are finally over. The tribunal has arrived in our city. It is a great honour for the Hanseatic City to play a part in pursuing the United Nations objective of preserving world peace.

I would like to thank the members of the Kuratorium, who did not hesitate to invest time and effort to convince the international community that Hamburg is the right choice as seat of the Tribunal, as well as the Federal Government in Bonn to sign the Convention.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Hamburg is a historic port city with a long tradition in international shipping and maritime trade. Ever since Emperor Barbarossa granted the City of Hamburg free access to the seas in the year 1189, the law of the sea has become an integral part of the jurisdiction in our city.

In the spirit of peace and understanding the Free and Hanseatic City has always been a mediator between the regions and peoples of the world. In former times foreign powers appealed to the Senate of Hamburg to serve as court of arbitration in maritime disputes. The contribution of Hamburg and the Hanseatic League to the development of maritime law was significant. In 1643, the "Hamburg Admiralty" was established, the first shipping court in Hamburg. Many of the documents in Hamburg's archives testify to the city's tradition of maritime law.

Today, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea has assumed responsibility for securing peace and justice in the seas and oceans. As the seat of the Tribunal, Hamburg is very proud to continue its tradition of maritime jurisdiction.

We are well prepared: International maritime law plays an important part in the sciences in the Hanseatic City. The law faculty at the university treats maritime law as a major aspect of research, an institute of maritime law has been founded and the administration of law as it affects maritime law holds an important position. It is the concern of the Marine Court (Seeamt), the Federal Supreme Marine Court (Bundesoberseeamt) and a special chamber of the local supreme state court (Oberlandes-gericht). Law firms specialized in the law of the sea are located in Hamburg.

Ladies and Gentlemen, today, we witness the beginning of a new era of the law of the sea, a new era of the peaceful resolution of maritime disputes. The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea will contribute to international peace and stability.

The Convention on the Law of the Sea entered into force almost 50 years after the United Nations was founded (November 16, 1994). Throughout the decades, the UN helped to end wars, to feed the hungry, to aid the poorest, to fight diseases; to promote peace, security and cooperation, to develop a new standard of international law and to foster democracy.

However, the international community is still helplessly looking upon unending regional conflicts. They have become the security dilemma of our times. The path from authoritarian regimes to democracy, freedom and human rights is full of obstacles; and - in many cases - appears to lead past nationalism or ethnocentrism; an inglorious heritage of a bipolar world.

Therefore, I believe our challenge today is to strengthen the course of law as a means of international relations, in order to develop a new architecture of preventing and resolving conflicts. This, of course, requires an international consensus that aggression (in the sense of the UN Charter) is unacceptable, no matter where it occurs, no matter what interests are involved.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea is based on this consensus: to prevent disputes and - if they occur - to settle them with a stipulated procedure. It constitutes a guide for behaviour by states in the world's oceans, defining maritime zones, laying down rules for drawing sea boundaries, assigning legal rights, duties and responsibilities to states, and providing machinery for the settlement of disputes.

The International Tribunal for the law of the Sea will be the most suitable and specialized judicial body to address in resolving differences regarding the law of the sea.

Together with the International Court of Justice at The Hague, it will serve the goals formulated by the United Nations 50 years ago.

Hamburg will render every possible support in this epochal task. We are very proud and full of joy to welcome the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea to our city.