

New York State Bar Association – International Section
Cocktail Reception in honour of the 56th Session of the UNCITRAL
Working Group II (Arbitration and Conciliation)

Remarks by Ms. Patricia O'Brien,
Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs
The Legal Counsel

Tuesday, 7 February 2012
Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler LLP (6th Ave btwn. 43th and 44th)
6:00pm - 6:30pm

Mr. Bloomsbury,
Colleagues and friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening.

I would like to begin by thanking the organizers of this wonderful reception - the New York State Bar Association, and the Co-Chair of its Committee on International Contract and Commercial Law, Mr. Albert Bloomsbury - for their very kind invitation. We are also grateful to the firm of Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler for graciously hosting this evening's event. Let me extend a warm welcome, to delegates from around the world, to New York and to the 56th session of UNCITRAL's Working Group II, which currently deals with the legal issues of Arbitration and Conciliation.

Since UNCITRAL decided to resume its standard-making work in those areas of law and since Working Group II took on these subjects in 2000, twenty-five working group sessions have been held, and twelve of those meetings have been here in New York.

UNCITRAL has been holding its Working Group and Commission sessions in New York - on a rotating basis first with Geneva and then with Vienna - for well over forty years, and so New York is in effect a second home to UNCITRAL.

As many of you know, budgetary constraints have been felt throughout the United Nations this past year, and there was the distinct possibility that meetings of UNCITRAL in New York would be discontinued as a cost-saving measure.

However, for all those – representatives of member States and non-governmental observers alike – for whom New York is not only a convenient and efficient venue for meetings, but an agreeable one as well, I am happy to report that the Fifth Committee and the General Assembly have agreed to maintain the alternating pattern of UNCITRAL meetings in New York and Vienna.

Many of you will appreciate the significance of holding meetings here. For delegates from North, Central and South America and the Caribbean, New York offers quick and easy access. For the many smaller states and developing countries attending UNCITRAL, a large number of whom maintain a diplomatic presence in New York but not in Vienna, this venue offers them a wider opportunity to take part in the decision-making of this important body. Indeed, much of the authority of UNCITRAL's texts rests on a process of deliberation which is as global and inclusive as possible.

As the core legal body of the United Nations system in the field of international trade law, it is of course a very positive thing that UNCITRAL maintains its strong connection with New York – not only because UN Headquarters are here but just as importantly because of its status as a foremost commercial and legal centre of the world.

New York is home to a very dynamic international commercial arbitration community, with many leading practitioners. Integration of the work of UNCITRAL with other initiatives of the United Nations is becoming increasingly important – Matters such as rule of law, development programmes and post-conflict reconstruction come to mind. Here again, the importance of the link to the United Nations Secretariat can be seen.

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Last but not least, I would mention that the UNCITRAL Secretariat – the International Trade Law Division – is part of my Office, the Office of Legal Affairs.

I would like to close by acknowledging the cooperation and active participation of the New York State Bar and its members in many areas of the work of UNCITRAL. I hope that we can look forward to this co-operation and participation continuing, and indeed increasing, in the years to come. It is a working partnership we value very highly.

Please accept my best wishes for a successful outcome of your meetings this week.

Thank you.