



Regional Course in International Law

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Bangkok, Thailand
19 November to 14 December 2018

Opening Statement

Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares

Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs
and United Nations Legal Counsel

19 November 2018

Ms Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific,

Your Excellency, Mr. Chirdchu Raktabutr, Director-General of the Department of Treaties and Legal Affairs,

Professor Mariko Kawano,

Dear participants of the 2018 United Nations Regional Course in International Law for Asia and the Pacific,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to be in Bangkok for the Opening Ceremony of the Regional Course in International Law.

In 1965, the General Assembly established the United Nations Programme of Assistance in the Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider Appreciation of International Law to provide a better knowledge of international law “as a means for strengthening international peace and security and promoting friendly relations and co-operation among States”. The Programme of Assistance has since that time provided the foundation for the efforts of the United Nations to promote international law for more than half a century.

The Regional Courses in International Law are a cornerstone of the Programme of Assistance. The Regional Course in International Law for Asia and the Pacific, and its sister courses – for Africa and for Latin America and the Pacific - provide a unique





opportunity for lawyers from different regions to study international law with an emphasis on legal issues that are of particular interest to their region. They also enable the participants to exchange views and gain a better understanding of how these issues are being addressed in the different countries of their region, as well as to explore common approaches to the global challenges of our time.

During the first five decades of the Programme of Assistance, the Regional Courses suffered from insufficient funding and the difficulties inherent in conducting the courses in different countries. Between 1965 and 2015, there were only nine Regional Courses for Asia and the Pacific. These courses were held in the Philippines in 1969, in Qatar and Bangladesh in 1976, in the Republic of Korea in 1982 and 2010, in Thailand in 1986, 2005 and 2012, and in the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1999.

When I joined the United Nations as Legal Counsel, I made the Programme of Assistance one of the priorities of the Office of Legal Affairs. With the support of Member States, we succeeded in obtaining regular budget funding in 2016 to ensure that the Regional Courses could be held every year and identified valuable partners in the Regional Commissions as venues to achieve greater efficiency. I am delighted that we have been able to conduct all three Regional Courses in International Law in the same calendar year since 2016.

Given the regional aspect of the courses, we have reached out to our colleagues in the United Nations Regional Commissions in Chile, Ethiopia, and Thailand for their cooperation in conducting the Regional Course for Latin American and the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia-Pacific, respectively. I would like to convey the deep gratitude of the Office of Legal Affairs to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific for its essential support and commitment to holding the Regional Course and for providing this wonderful venue.

I would also like to express sincere appreciation to the host country, the Kingdom of Thailand, for its generous contributions to the Regional Course and for the warm welcome that it has extended to all of us. Thailand has generously hosted the Regional Course in International Law for Asia-Pacific multiple times and we are very grateful. Thailand's strong engagement toward international law training has been repeatedly recognized by the General Assembly.

I am also very thankful to those Member States who have made voluntary contributions to the Regional Courses this year, namely China, Finland, Portugal, the Philippines and Qatar.

Finally, I would like to thank the lecturers, like Professor Mariko Kawano who is here with us today to deliver the inaugural lectures, for their generous contributions to the Regional Courses and their commitment to the Programme of Assistance. The





outstanding quality of the Regional Courses is attributable to the continuous cooperation of the most eminent international lawyers worldwide who accept to travel long distances for a short time to share their expertise with us all, and we are very grateful.

In conclusion, I would like to recall Article 1, paragraph 1, of the United Nations Charter which provides that one of the Purposes of the United Nations is “to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace”.

The Regional Courses in International Law constitute one vehicle toward the achievement of this core Purpose. The Regional Courses offer a unique platform for studying and disseminating the common language of international law that we all speak, and for an exchange of views among participants from different countries, legal cultures and professional backgrounds. Indeed, in the coming weeks, the 29 participants from 22 countries will not only learn from the lecturers but also from each other’s experiences and perspectives.

With these words, I am delighted to formally open the 2018 United Nations Regional Course in International Law for Asia and the Pacific.

We look forward to continuing this excellent partnership with the Kingdom of Thailand and ESCAP in the future.

Thank you very much.

