



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS

Authors' Meeting

The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Treaties

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Greentree Estate, Manhasset NY

Keynote

by

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Dear colleagues and friends,

I am very pleased to be here with you on the opening evening of this Meeting and to share this dinner with so many friends. I would like to thank the Co-editors of the Oxford Handbook of United Nations Treaties for their kind invitation, as well as the United Nations University and the National University of Singapore for this initiative.

In the next couple of days, you will have many opportunities to exchange views and debate thoroughly on a theme that is very close to me and my Office: the contribution of United Nations treaties to international relations.

The relevance of the theme of the Handbook and of your Meeting is undoubted. From the very first lines of its preamble, the Charter of the United Nations emphasizes the role that treaties are called to play in the attainment of the objectives of the Organization, where the Peoples of the United Nations affirm their determination “to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained”.

The establishment of a solid multilateral treaty framework, and the respect for the obligations that derive from it, were cornerstones of the edifice that was being built by the founding fathers of the United Nations at San Francisco.



And the history of the United Nations has confirmed the crucial importance of treaties for the work of the Organization, even if sometimes in unexpected ways. Seventy years after the adoption of the Charter, the United Nations treaty framework has surpassed even the wildest expectations of the negotiators at San Francisco. United Nations treaties cover an impressive array of areas of international relations, including human rights, disarmament, terrorism, drugs and crime, trade and development, international criminal justice or the law of the sea, to name just a few. Hundreds of multilateral treaties have been concluded under the auspices of the Organization, which constitute the backbone of inter-State relations in the 21st century.

Since the adoption of the Charter, Member States have consistently reiterated their commitment to supporting this multilateral treaty framework. It was recently underlined, for example, by the General Assembly, in its consideration of an item on the rule of law at the national and international levels, by recognizing the central role played by multilateral treaty processes in promoting and advancing the rule of law.

It is, therefore, not surprising that treaties constitute a central aspect of the work of my Office, to the point that I would argue that every single unit of the Office of Legal Affairs is, in one way or the other, involved in treaty matters. In different capacities, divisions in my Office work “upstream” in assisting Member States in developing normative instruments in various negotiating processes, as well as “downstream” in promoting awareness and implementation of international law.

The Office of Legal Affairs plays an important role in promoting a better knowledge of treaties, for example through the regional courses and the Audiovisual Library of International Law, which it implements in the framework of its Programme of Assistance, and to which - I am pleased to say - many of you have contributed.

OLA also ensures greater access of Member States to the multilateral treaty framework, for example through the discharge of the depositary functions of the Secretary-General under more than 560 multilateral treaties and the registration and publication of treaties pursuant to Article 102 of the Charter.

OLA further supports many negotiating processes which may lead to the adoption of multilateral treaties, such as the current Preparatory Committee for the development of an international legally binding instrument under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.



And lastly, OLA handles treaties in its daily work, when it provides advice and assistance in a wide variety of topics, such as the law applicable to war, the legal aspects of peacekeeping operations, international criminal justice, or privileges and immunities.

In light of all this, it is quite surprising to note - together with the co-Editors of this Handbook - that, despite the rich legal literature covering so many aspects of the United Nations activity, international treaty law and the various treaty regimes that have been negotiated since the Second World War, no detailed cross-cutting study has ever been undertaken on how the United Nations has contributed, through its multilateral treaty making activity, to the evolution of global relations and international law.

I very much look forward to reading the Handbook you are working on, which – judging from looking at its outline - will offer a unique perspective on the evolution, practice and technique of United Nations treaty making. I am particularly encouraged by the Co-Editors' choice of contributors for this volume, which include established authors and younger voices, professors who will offer an academic perspective on a topic and practitioners with first-hand experience in international negotiations. I am sure that the Handbook will constitute a major contribution to legal scholarship in this longstanding, but still promising, area of international law.

Unfortunately, due to other pressing commitments, I will not be able to stay with you for the entire two days of your Meeting, and I regret not being able to participate in your discussions. However, I would like to take this opportunity to salute the United Nations University's initiative in arranging this meeting.

The United Nations University was established back in 1972 as a global think tank and postgraduate teaching entity to contribute, through collaborative research and education, to resolve the pressing global problems that are the concern of the United Nations.

Under David Malone's able leadership, the United Nations University has, in the past few years, intensified its efforts to maximize its usefulness to the United Nations system as a whole. And I have to say that these efforts have paid off, as shown not only by this meeting, which reunites so many authoritative voices of international law, but also by the many other initiatives that the University has undertaken.



I wish you therefore two fruitful days of debate and exchanges, and the best of luck in the preparation of this valuable Handbook.

Thank you very much for your attention.