

AN INTRODUCTION: A JUST WORLD UNDER LAW

By Hilary Charlesworth* and Donald Francis Donovan†

One hundred years after the creation of the American Society of International Law, the Society's Centennial Meeting was organized around the theme "A Just World Under Law," in order to consider fundamental questions about the world we live in and the role of international law in shaping that world. The 2006 Centennial Meeting allowed both retrospection and initiative, by inviting participants to consider our own responsibility as lawyers and advocates working in the international arena to bring about a just world. In the words of Elihu Root, the Society's first president, "The increase of popular control over national conduct, which marks the political development of our time, makes it constantly more important that the great body of the people in each country should have a just conception of their international rights and duties."

Although it is hard to argue with the objective of a just world under law, there is much less agreement on what it would look like, how it would be best achieved, and, indeed, whether international law has a role in the enterprise. From one view, a just world results from state actors using international law to balance public order with human dignity. From another, it would require increasing the participation of individuals and other non-state actors in international lawmaking and making them more accountable under that law. From yet another, justice should be substantive rather than procedural, and international law must address inequalities of power and resources between participants in the international system. From still another, a just world requires the creation of a broad, shared cultural commitment to the rule of law and to neutral international dispute resolution mechanisms.

These visions implicate some of the most basic, and difficult, questions confronting the international legal system today. What are the attributes of justice that international law should promote? What is the right balance of concern between individuals, states, and other international actors? How should international law address disparities of power and wealth among states and among individuals within states? What roles do private actors and nongovernmental organizations have in achieving a just world? By what methods do norms generated by international law contribute to a just world?

As you will find in these pages, the Centennial Meeting pursued these questions by provoking debate among a wide range of viewpoints and a diversity of voices—old and new. We tried to ensure the presentation of dissident and unsettling voices, along with those of leaders in the field. We were very fortunate in being able to work with a marvelous Program Committee: Catherine Amirfar, Anthony Anghie, Karima Bennouna, Laurence Boisson de Chazournes, Alex Boraine, Curtis Bradley, Rosa Ehrenreich Brooks, Charles Hunnicutt, Benedict Kingsbury, Karen Knop, Dino Kritsiotis, Carolyn Lamm, Jenny Martinez, Stephen Mathias, Anne Orford, Joost Pauwelyn, Anthea Roberts, and Carlos Vázquez. Members of the Committee devised panels of great richness and also introduced new formats for the discussion. We warmly thank all the Committee members for their energy and imagination, particularly Catherine Amirfar and Anthea Roberts, whose involvement at every step of the

* Professor of Law, Australian National University.

† Partner, Debevoise & Plimpton LLP.

organization was invaluable. As a group, the Program Committee had tremendous collaboration and guidance from Executive Director Charlotte Ku. We were conscious that this was Charlotte's final Annual Meeting as Executive Director and these Proceedings are a form of homage to her wonderful leadership. Maria Staunton provided valuable logistical support. We are also extremely grateful to Cara Smith, who has worked tirelessly to bring these *Proceedings* to publication.