



***Inaugural Address  
ILA 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference  
Prof Christine Chinkin (ILA Executive Chair)  
12<sup>th</sup> January 2023***

This is a special year for the ILA – the celebration of 150 years since our founding in Brussels in 1873. And it is being celebrated in a very special way thanks to the extraordinary efforts and hard work of the French Branch and in particular those of Professor Catherine Kessedjian. The Association owes an enormous debt of thanks to Catherine and her team and on its behalf I both give those thanks as well as congratulating her on the amazing programme she has compiled.

The ILA is an offshoot from the movement for peace through international law that flourished in the USA and Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This idea – that international law has an important role in securing and maintaining peace between nations was spurred on by the success of the *Alabama* arbitration between the US and Great Britain. The award delivered in September 1872 convinced those whom Martii Koskenniemi has called the ‘gentle civilisers of nations’ that the time was ripe for what we now call a non-governmental organisation dedicated to the pursuit of peace and justice through the study, clarification, and development of international law and the Association for the Reform and Codification of International Law, subsequently the renamed ILA was founded.

The Association was conceived of as an open body drawing its members from among peace activists, diplomats, practising lawyers, academics, politicians, economists and others committed to the benefits of international arbitration and other legal mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of international disputes and thus promotion of international peace. The professional diversity of the members of the over 60 branches of the ILA remains one of its defining characteristics. As we ‘build for tomorrow’ we are committed to greater diversity in branch membership and in ILA activities and events to ensure the widest possible range of perspectives and opinions, as indeed exemplified by the participants in anniversary webinar series of which the event today is the first.

As the Association reaches its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I think its longevity can be attributed at least in part to three of its core features: its federal structure, comprising an international headquarters and national branches, its international committees that work on preparing substantive reports on important contemporary issues of public and private international law and its biennial conferences that bring its members together to enjoy the wider whole, to share ideas and to contribute to committee reports before endorsing their recommendations through the adoption of carefully worded resolutions.

The 2023 celebratory programme draws on and adapts all three of these features to highlight the continuing relevance of the vision of peace through an international rule of law – indeed a vision that is ever more vital in light of the current global crises. I have already referred to the importance of the work of the national branches which is exemplified by the commitment of the French branch to the anniversary programme and activities. The branches are autonomous within the framework of the ILA’s constitution thus allowing for flexibility and

promotion of local priorities. Second, the ILA's reputation as both a scholarly and practical institution is built around the quality of the research and analysis in the reports of its committees under the careful guidance of the Director of Studies that can be – and are – drawn upon and used by international institutions, international and national policy makers and NGOs. The white papers that form the intellectual starting point for the webinar series are similarly designed to make a positive contribution to the development of public and private international law. They do not – cannot - replace the ongoing and long term work of the committees but rather sit alongside it, providing in this anniversary year an intensive in-depth body of work on a range of topics that will define and challenge international lawyers in the years to come, enriched through the webinar discussions that will take place regularly throughout the year. And these frequent on-line opportunities for serious engagement will be supplemented by the conference in Paris in June which in the tradition of ILA conferences will provide the space for further exchanges of views and for in-person reunions between members, as well as an occasion for non-members to be welcomed and hopefully become enthused to join the ILA.

But to end on a more cautious note. While celebrating the 150 years of the ILA, we would be naïve if we thought that everything can continue in the same ways in the coming months and years. We are also only too aware that international law appears to many people, including some of those holding national positions of power, to be an irrelevance or an unwarranted restriction on their policy options. We have an uphill battle ahead in not just reiterating the importance of international law for orderly global regulation, but in demonstrating that importance through practical and innovative proposals. This is why in 'Building Tomorrow' on the foundations of the past and the present, the final recommendations for the Association's future work and direction to be drawn up in December and which will bring together the year-long activities will be a fitting finale to this year-long celebration. I look forward to the many events especially this inaugural conference.

***Prof Christine Chinkin***

***Executive Chair***

***International Law Association***

***12<sup>th</sup> January 2023***