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2010 IALL Conference Report: The 29th Annual Course on International Law Librarianship

LIU MING*

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to show my deep appreciation to the IALL Immediate Past President, Jules Winterton, IALL Secretary, Jennefer Aston, the IALL Scholarship Committee and the entire IALL membership, who offered me this unique opportunity and support to attend the 29th IALL Annual Course. And I am also extremely grateful to the members of Local Organizing Committee, especially to the director and librarian of Peace Palace Library, Jeroen Vervliet and Ingrid Kost, for their patience and hospitality. Additionally, many thanks go out to the director of my library, Zeng Ershu, and other colleagues for their strong support of my professional development.

Conference Overview

The conference was held in the Netherlands between 5-9 September 2010. The venues included the Peace Palace at The Hague, Erasmus University at Rotterdam, and Leiden University. The conference theme was *Dutch Gateways to International Law*.

About 200 delegates attended the conference from the USA, UK, India, Korea, Malawi, Canada, Ireland, Germany, and other countries. These included law librarians, scholars, jurists and members of the legal community. The speakers were from the Netherlands and other countries, and most of them were highly regarded in their fields.

Academic Program

There were three main themes in the conference program:

- The broad reach of international law
- The role of The Hague as the world capital of international law, and the evolution of international law
- Tolerance in legal systems as demonstrated in Dutch law

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The first theme began with the topic “*International Law in Relation to the Dutch Constitution*”. Other topics, like “*Transport Law in General*,” “*Developments in International and European Water Law*,” “*The Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Heritage*,” considered the globalization of the economy and how that changed legal systems, how the international rules were taken into the domestic legislations and to what extent the bodies of international law made the agreements in some transnational disputes. All of these lectures gave the participants the latest well-founded and the most authoritative information about the sweeping influence of international law.

As the world capital of international law, the role of The Hague is crucial in the development of international law. This year's conference invited many famous experts in this field. They presented wonderful lectures, including The Hague Conference's efforts to coordinate among different legal systems and its drive for the unification and codification of private international law, some new cases, legal problems and challenges in its world renowned courts, such as the ICJ, the ICC, the ICTY and the Permanent Court of Arbitration. These lectures were fascinating and thought-provoking. They made me feel deep respect for the great contributions of The Hague. And I also felt a kind of responsibility and urgency to further consider the complexity of international law.

The conference also had a focus on more controversial and topical legal themes, including euthanasia practices and drugs policy in the Netherlands. From these lectures, we gained a sense of the Dutch cultural of tolerance in legal affairs. The conference continued with some other interesting speeches, such as the *General Introduction to the Dutch Water Law, Harbor and Transport Law, and Air Law*. Additionally, the academic program also mentioned legal education in the Netherlands. It provided an overview of The Dutch Association of Law Libraries, Difficulties and reform in current legal education, Collected Courses of the Hague Academy of International Law, and Changes in the publication of Grotius' works.

In the academic program, we also learned more about legal information, its challenges, problems and development. The challenges come from the globalized legal environment and information technology. Some other problems appeared in bilingual legal dictionaries. On the positive side, we saw the latest developments in legal information, such as the new products demonstration by major sponsors. In addition, we are making joint efforts for international legal cooperation. For example, the attempt to create a global, up-to-date database containing English translations of legislation in different

jurisdictions. As an overview, the academic program was outstanding, topical and relevant to the diverse world of international law and offered some valuable information about the legal system in Dutch.

Social Events

Along with the academic program, the conference provided us a glimpse of the Dutch culture and history. There was a dinner party, a boat cruise, a heritage walking tour, and the IALL Annual Dinner. The dinner party was held in Kurhaus in Scheveningen, with a beautiful view of the coast outside of the window. The boat cruised around the Rotterdam harbor and gave the conference delegates a vivid view of how the largest port in Europe manages its huge volume of international trade. The heritage walking tour began at the historic university town, Leiden. It allowed us to wander around the city and experience the strong academic atmosphere. We then traveled to Delft, past windmills and grazing cattle, which brought us so close to nature, peaceful and unforgettable. The Annual Dinner took place at the prestigious Sociëteit De Witte in the heart of The Hague, which made us feel the generosity of our Dutch hosts.

In addition, the delegates also had the opportunity to visit several libraries: the Peace Palace library (a public law library), University Library at Erasmus University (a research library), The Library of Parliament, and the Delft University of Technology Library. As treasure troves of recorded knowledge, each library was truly unique in its features and focus, and each formed an indivisible, harmonious part of its surroundings. I was particularly fascinated by the comprehensive collections about international law and the librarian's dedication to their work in the Peace Palace library.

Also the Delft University of Technology Library made me pleasantly surprised by its design. It was founded on a huge platform, a high, white tower rooted on the platform. When I opened the library door, the first sight that caught my eyes was a five-story open shelf, transparent and robust. It housed the most popular books for the students. It made me feel an urge to sit down and learn something, and reminded me somewhat of a sailboat with literature heading for the endless truth.

In the social activities, the conference also enabled the participants have enough time to look around the Museum of the Book, the Historical Museum of The Hague and the Grave of Hugo Grotius.

Experiences and Gains

I was so pleased and proud of to be one of the bursary recipients of the 29th IALL Annul Course. Exposure to this event gave me great confidence and encouraged me to continue my professional career. And I thought this was not only the first time for me to attend an international law librarians' conference outside of China, but also (perhaps) the first time in the history of Chinese law libraries. Further, my experience with IALL was a great joy to my library, its parent university and the newly formed Beijing Association of Law Libraries and Legal Information (founded in April 2010).

After the conference, I wrote an article about the Course for my library's internal newsletter, and a colleague reported on my trip in the 2010 issue 19 of the library newsletter. Furthermore, I gave a brief introduction about the Peace Palace Library to the colleagues of my library. I collected some information about international law at the conference, and used it to prepare for the Liaison librarian class. I shared this unique experience with members of the Beijing Association of Law Libraries and Legal Information through an informal meeting. All these activities were very popular among the faculty and the students, and very much welcomed by the association members.

The most exciting experience was encountering some old friends from America, Germany and England, and forming some new friends from around the world. As a platform, the conference provided us a unique opportunity to learn from each other, to discuss the challenges we are facing and to share information about the developments in legal information. I hope to see the IALL conference held in China in the near future. I was sure that some delegates had already witnessed the first China-US Conference on Legal Information and Law Libraries, 27-30 May 2009, in Beijing. And they also got to experience Chinese law librarians' enthusiasm and hospitality.

Conclusion

The 29th IALL Annul Course on International Law Librarianship was a very successful event, well-balanced between its academic program and social activities. The academic program offered us opportunities to learn from the most distinguished speakers from the diverse world of international law, to explore its current development and complexities, to learn about new products and challenges about legal information. It also provided an authentic view of the Dutch legal system, topical issues, legal education and Dutch law librarianship. The social activities gave delegates the chance to experience

the unique culture and history in the host country, which were simply not available in any book. Moreover, the conference provided us with a very good way to network with colleagues from every corner of the world, which is especially important in our increasingly globalized community. I think the IALL conference is worthy of your sustained attention and believe it will become better and better in the years ahead.