



**57th Session of the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization
8-12 October 2018, Tokyo**

Keynote Address

By

Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares

Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and
United Nations Legal Counsel
8 October 2018

Excellencies,

Mr. Secretary-General,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to be invited to address this annual session of AALCO, building on its close partnership with the United Nations over the years.

In 2012, the world's Heads of State and Government adopted the Declaration of the High-level Meeting on the Rule of Law, reaffirming their commitment to the rule of law and its importance to the three main pillars upon which the United Nations is built: international peace and security, human rights and development. Promoting the rule of law has never been more critical to the work of the United Nations in fostering dialogue and cooperation among States. Regional bodies, including AALCO, are essential partners for the United Nations in promoting the development of, and respect for, international law, which is the foundation for peaceful relations among States.

Member States of the United Nations have found it difficult to agree a definition of "rule of law". Nevertheless, the rule of law, however defined, is perceived as a stabilizing influence in a world facing an increasingly complex and challenging set of realities: the scourge of war and its adverse impact on humanity – in particular, women, the young and the vulnerable; terrorism and growing extremism; climate change and natural disasters, including the recent tsunami in Indonesia, which caused horrific loss of life and suffering; growing inequality between the rich and poor; and sexual and gender-based violence exacerbated by inequalities across the globe.





Rule of law activities permeate the work of the United Nations, and the Office of Legal Affairs, which I head, is the lead in many of these areas. The various Divisions of my Office work “upstream” in assisting Member States in developing and negotiating international law instruments, as well as “downstream” in promoting awareness and implementation of international law. Our activities include: ensuring better knowledge and understanding of international law; encouraging greater accession to multilateral treaty regimes; assisting the General Assembly in progressively developing international law; assisting States in their national implementation of international law, through technical assistance and teaching; encouraging the peaceful settlement of disputes among States, through judicial and other means; and supporting the international and hybrid criminal tribunals in the prosecution of serious international crimes.

What I would like to focus on today is our work in promoting the rule of law through international law with several projects in Asia and Africa. In particular, my Office is responsible for implementing the Programme of Assistance in the Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider Appreciation of International Law, established by the General Assembly in 1965, to contribute to a better knowledge of international law so as to strengthen international peace and security and promote cooperation among States.

The implementation of the Programme of Assistance includes organizing three Regional Courses in International Law: for Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia-Pacific. The Regional Courses focus on core topics of international law as well as contemporary issues of interest to each region. The Regional Course for Africa, conducted in Addis Ababa earlier this year, was attended by 29 participants from 22 African countries. It included sessions to promote greater understanding of the work of the African Union and the African Union Commission on International Law (which will celebrate its 10th anniversary next year). The Regional Course for Asia-Pacific, conducted last November in Bangkok, had 29 participants from 21 countries from the region, and included sessions on international law in Asia-Pacific. That Course will be held again in November this year.

In addition, the United Nations Audiovisual Library of International Law, which is accessible online around the world free of charge, provides over 500 lectures on diverse topics of international law by eminent legal scholars and practitioners, including from Asia-Pacific and Africa. Continuous effort is made to enrich the geographical and linguistic content of the lectures.





Moreover, the progressive development of international law and its codification – embodied in Article 13 of the Charter of the United Nations – are key elements to the promotion of the rule of law. Since the General Assembly established the International Law Commission 70 years ago, the Commission has made far-reaching achievements in this regard. This would not have been possible without the support of regional bodies such as AALCO, which has made significant contributions on topics before the Commission, including identification of customary international law, provisional application of treaties and protection of the atmosphere. I can assure you that, in its capacity as Secretariat of the Commission, the Codification Division of my Office will continue to facilitate such cooperation.

The United Nations is far from alone in its endeavours. I am glad to witness the remarkable projects being undertaken at the regional level, including AALCO's work in organizing seminars and workshops, in partnership with States and international organizations, on international legal issues of importance to the region. AALCO's Centre for Research and Training is also undertaking in-depth research on the legal aspects of combating international terrorism, a subject that is of critical concern to the United Nations, and which remains before the Sixth (Legal) Committee of the General Assembly.

Governments in the region are making important contributions as well. I welcome in this regard the technical assistance programmes initiated by our hosts for this meeting, Japan, to strengthen the legal systems of developing Asian nations. The United Nations will continue to count on these collective efforts as we work towards our mutual objectives of promoting and ensuring respect for the rule of law around the world.

Thank you. I look forward to our discussion today.

