

Statement of Mr Ole von Beust, First Mayor of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Tribunal

The seas and oceans give us nourishment and energy and are used as a means of transporting the goods with which we trade. They are also home to countless creatures and maintain the equilibrium of our planet's climate.

The importance of the seas and oceans for humanity cannot be overestimated. However, not all the resources found in the sea are renewable. And increasing numbers of people are competing to use them.

This results in conflicts which people can solve only by taking account of common interests, regardless of national boundaries.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea is the expression of people's awareness of the responsibility which they hold towards creation – and that it is a responsibility held jointly, in concert not in conflict.

For 10 years now the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea has been at the centre of the Convention, as guarantor for the peaceful settlement of disputes relating to the law of the sea. This is a reason for celebration – for the United Nations, for Germany and for Hamburg.

I should like to congratulate you most warmly on this occasion.

Hamburg is very proud to be the home of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

It is precisely 25 years since the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea chose the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg as the seat of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

Ten years ago, on 18 October 1996, the 21 judges were sworn in during a solemn ceremony at Hamburg Town Hall. On the same day, the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, laid the foundation stone of this wonderful court building which was officially opened, just four years later, by the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan.

From these amazing premises, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea watches over the seas and oceans of the world.

Its siting is symbolic: From up here, we look out onto the river Elbe, Hamburg's lifeline and trading link. Just as the Elbe connects the city to the seas throughout the world, so it connects the judges at the Tribunal to the locations where the maritime conflicts which are to be decided take place.

After 10 years it is true to say that the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea has not only dropped anchor in Hamburg, it has also found its home port here.

It stands out as the international centre for law of the sea, which has continued to grow here in Hamburg and has in part been renewed.

The expertise that is concentrated in our Hanseatic city is based on a centuries-old maritime tradition, embracing all areas: shipping companies, ship-building, maritime technology, coastal protection, oceanographic research. Hamburg is home to internationally recognized maritime law experts both in specialized law firms and at Hamburg University and the Bucerius Law School.

I would like to highlight the successful work carried out by the International Foundation for the Law of the Sea, which promotes dialogue between scientists, the judges at the International Tribunal and practitioners in the maritime economy. From 2007, the new International Academy of the Law of the Sea will also contribute to knowledge transfer.

The Convention on the Law of the Sea, and in particular its system for settling differences of opinion peacefully, was feted as a big step in the further development of international law, peace in general and safety. For this reason, the expectations placed on the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea and on you, honourable Judges, were and are great.

Ten years is not a long time in the light of the importance of the task entrusted to you. And yet the decisions made thus far show that the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea has lived up to these expectations, for the parties to the disputes have complied fully with all the decisions rendered. In one dispute, the vessel was released as soon as the Tribunal was seized of the case.

This is proof of the confidence in the Tribunal's independence and professionalism as well as of the acceptance of its authority.

There is no better basis for continuing success than confidence and acceptance.

I wish you every success for the future.