

Statement of Mr Ortwin Runde, First Mayor of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, on the occasion of the Opening of the Headquarters building of the Tribunal

3 July 2000

Mr. Secretary General, Mr. President, Madam Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

it is now almost 20 years since the day - it was 21st August 1981 – that Hamburg was designated the new seat of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

Nearly two decades, filled with plans, preparations and make-shift solutions.

Today, this phase has now finally come to an end.

Hamburg is delighted about that and we welcome all those who have come to celebrate this significant day with us.

Another reason to call this an important day is that the city has been enriched with a most attractive example of the architect's craft.

My thanks to all those who were and are involved in this project. In order not to leave anyone out - neither planners nor implementers - I shall not single out anyone at all for special mention. Thank you, each and every one of you.

The building's location is itself full of symbolism. From here - up above the Elbe, directly overlooking one of the world's major shipping lanes – the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea keeps watch on international shipping. And judgments will be handed down in this room.

The Town Hall of Hamburg may, however, claim the honour of being the place where the very first ruling was made.

On 4th December 1997, in the Great Salon of the Town Hall, the judges passed their first verdict. The fact that the Town Hall was used for this purpose is, I believe, an especially apt way to emphasize the fact that maritime law has always played an important role in Hamburg and continues to do so.

Ever since 1189 - when Emperor Barbarossa granted the city the privilege of free access to the seas - maritime law has been an integral part of the jurisdiction of our City State. And in the past it was not unusual for the Senate of Hamburg to be asked to act as arbitrator in legal disputes involving maritime matters.

It is only logical that in this day and age the law of the sea is especially important for a world port and trading city such as Hamburg. All in all, Hamburg was the candidate that seemed especially pre-destined to be chosen as the right place to establish the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

Of course, we first had, literally, to convince "the rest of the world" of this. But - as one can see - we succeeded in this task. We are gratified that the signatory states to the Convention on the Law of the Sea felt Hamburg provided a worthy setting for the Tribunal. And I may assure you: we count it an honour to host this court of law. Hamburg will live up to the high expectations that are placed in the host of such an institution.

The International Tribunal has the judges, it has a building - what it needs now is general acceptance.

We cannot expect this to happen "over night" and it will take time to grow. But it will come, we know that from the experience of other international courts.

With every new case that is brought before the Tribunal on the Law of the Sea, the community of nations will take more and more notice of the court's work.

And since the oceans of the world will become much more important in the 21st century - whether as transportation routes or reservoirs of natural resources - many legal questions will need to be clarified. The forecasts are that the Tribunal will not be able to complain about lack of work!

I congratulate the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea on its new home.

I hope that all those who use these rooms will find them as pleasant as I do and that the building provides a good setting for people to work in.

This institution will stimulate new ideas. It will be a stimulus that helps create a new culture of maritime law - which will then be associated with the name of our city. And so there will be further confirmation: That Hamburg was the right place for the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea to cast anchor.