PEACE PALACE CENTENARY

Origins of the Peace Palace
For many years now The Hague, international city of peace and justice, has been the site of endeavours to achieve a better world, centred on the Peace Palace on Carnegie Square. The Peace Palace was officially opened on 28 August 1913. Today it is seen as the international icon of peace and justice. This year, from 28 August to 21 September, we will celebrate its centenary.

Shortly after the first Hague Peace Conference, held in The Hague in 1899, the decision was taken to build a ‘temple of peace’. The Palace was a product of its time. At the end of the 19th century, the idea of world peace flourished as never before. It was a time when many European nations were spending increasing sums of money to expand and modernise their armies and fleets. Experiments were being conducted to develop new and bigger weapons. The modern age of large-scale, fear-inspiring weaponry was dawning. In response, at the end of the 19th century, a major peace movement emerged. Independent thinkers, writers and philosophers spoke up in favour of peace. The Austrian pacifist Bertha von Suttner is a good example of the movement’s activists. In 1889 her novel Die Waffen nieder (Lay Down your Arms) was published, expressing her horror of war. Von Suttner also organised conferences, founded organisations for peace and for many years advocated the establishment of an international court of arbitration. In 1905 her efforts were recognised when she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. She was the first woman to receive this distinction. Peace was thus becoming an increasingly compelling cause in those years. Conferences were held to discuss ways to mitigate the inevitable suffering caused by war and even abolish war altogether.

First Hague Peace Conference
The Russian Tsar Nicolas II, seeing the impact of war on his country and its finances, was also an advocate of discussions of peace. He invited 26 countries to take part in a Peace Conference in The Hague. He chose The Hague because it was easily accessible from many countries, and because the Dutch queen at the time, Wilhelmina, was a relative of his. The queen made Huis ten Bosch Palace, her summer residence, available for the gathering. About a hundred delegates from the 26 countries came to The Hague to discuss peace and disarmament at this first Peace Conference. The countries represented ultimately decided to establish the Permanent Court of Arbitration, which governments could ask to resolve international disputes.

Later, it was decided that the Court of Arbitration should be housed in a suitable building: the Peace Palace. Because the first Hague Peace Conference had been held in The Hague, the decision was made to build the planned ‘temple of peace’ here as well.

Andrew Carnegie
In the search for the funds needed to build the Peace Palace, the American steel magnate Andrew Carnegie was approached. Carnegie was a great admirer of Bertha von Suttner and of her advocacy of an international court of arbitration. He was also a friend of the US diplomat Andrew White. White had represented his country at the first Peace Conference and was a major advocate of the construction of the Peace Palace. He persuaded his immensely rich friend Carnegie to donate one and a half million dollars. Carnegie posed only one condition: he insisted that a library be built linked to the Palace. Carnegie’s donation was placed under the stewardship of the Carnegie Foundation, which is still based at the Peace Palace and responsible for its management.

Design
A competition was held to select a design for the Peace Palace. Architects from around the world – no fewer than 216 of them – submitted proposals. A jury of European and American architects chose the plan submitted by the French architect Louis Marie Cordonnier. His design could be described as eclectic, primarily in Neo-Renaissance style but with Gothic and Baroque elements.
The Peace Palace is a square-shaped building with an interior courtyard. Cordonnier wanted to have a tall tower at each of the palace’s corners, but that would have exceeded the budget and his design was therefore modified. Thanks to the modifications the palace has one large bell tower and one smaller tower. It also has two courtrooms, the Great Hall of Justice and the Small Hall of Justice. Other well-known rooms are the entrance hall, the Japanese Room and the Ferdinand Bol Room.

The gardens of the Peace Palace were designed by the English landscape architect Thomas Mawson, who laid out the park, the lake and the courtyard garden. Mawson’s design features a gradual transition across terraces from the building to the gardens.

Construction took six years and was completed in 1913. As intended, the Peace Palace was an imposing, majestic edifice that exuded a spirit of peace and justice.

Gifts from nations
Countries from around the world contributed to the palace’s construction, donating building materials like marble and granite as well as works of art. The clockwork mechanism for the great tower comes from Switzerland, for example; the steel gates from Germany. There are also vases from Hungary and China, statues from Poland and the United States, leaded glass windows from Britain, a painting from France and tusks from Thailand.

Construction
The first stone of the Peace Palace was laid during the second Hague Peace Conference in 1907. Six years later, on 28 August 1913, the palace was opened in a ceremony attended by Queen Wilhelmina and Andrew Carnegie. The key to the front gate, a gift from Germany, was ceremonially presented to the Permanent Court of Arbitration.

New tenants
Alongside the Permanent Court of Arbitration, in 1922 the Permanent Court of International Justice was established with a fixed bench of judges. It was the judicial organ of the League of Nations, the predecessor of the United Nations. Because the Peace Palace was viewed internationally as a central locus of peace and international law, the League of Nations chose The Hague and the Peace Palace as the site for its court. The member states could ask the Permanent Court of International Justice to resolve disputes between them.

After the Second World War, 51 countries joined in founding the United Nations. All the major UN bodies were headquartered in New York, except for its judicial organ, the International Court of Justice, which was based in the Peace Palace in The Hague. Made up of 15 judges from different countries, the International Court of Justice is the successor to the Permanent Court of International Justice. Its judges hear disputes between UN member states over the interpretation or application of international agreements, their common borders or cases related to violations of consular or diplomatic law. The International Court of Justice also gives advisory opinions on legal questions submitted by the UN.

The International Court of Justice differs in several ways from the Permanent Court of Arbitration. At the Permanent Court of Arbitration the parties may themselves choose the adjudicators, which is not the case at the International Court of Justice. The International Court of Justice also has standard procedures and two working languages, English and French, while the procedures and official languages of the Permanent Court of Arbitration are determined by the parties to each specific case. Finally, the sittings of the International Court of Justice, unlike those of the Permanent Court of Arbitration, are open to the public.
Library and Hague Academy of International Law

In addition to the Permanent Court of Arbitration and the International Court of Justice, the Peace Palace is also home to the Peace Palace Library and the Hague Academy of International Law.

The library has an extensive collection of publications on international law. One of the oldest and best-known books in its possession is De Jure Belli ac Pacis, a work published in 1625 by the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius in which he gave his views on the conduct of war. The book has been used for centuries as a guide in drafting the laws of war. The same authoritative status is enjoyed by Mare Liberum, in which Grotius propounds his view that the seas are free and may not be claimed by any nation.

Students, lawyers, researchers and interested members of the public use the Peace Palace Library, the world’s largest international law library, on a daily basis. This makes the Peace Palace a unique centre of knowledge.

The library was originally housed within the walls of the Palace. Since 2007, however, it has had a new building of its own, linked to the Palace by a pedestrian bridge.

The Hague Academy of International Law gives courses on public and private international law, and about 600 students from around the world come to the Peace Palace to attend its summer programme. One of the people who laid the basis for the Academy was the Dutch Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Tobias Asser, who was awarded the Prize for efforts that contributed to the establishment of the Permanent Court of Arbitration.

City of peace and justice

After the first and second Hague Peace Conferences and the construction of the Peace Palace, The Hague enjoyed a growing international reputation as a city of peace and justice. As a prestigious building that houses reputable courts that embody high ideals, the Peace Palace is of course a major reason for the city’s reputation. Political leaders from many parts of the world come to The Hague to discuss peace and justice. Jurists also use the Peace Palace Library to enhance their knowledge of international law.

The establishment of the Permanent Court of Arbitration and later the International Court of Justice in the Peace Palace only increased the building’s prominence on the global stage. Today it is seen worldwide as the international icon of peace and justice.

The Second World War underlined the Peace Palace’s special status because of the German occupiers’ respect for its character as neutral territory. To avoid any risks, the League of Nations decided to transfer its Permanent Court of International Justice to Geneva for the duration of the conflict. Immediately after the cessation of hostilities, however, the International Court of Justice was founded and housed in the Palace.

The Balkan wars of the 1990s altered international views on the dividing line between national and international law. Parties to the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia perpetrated crimes against humanity such as genocide and ethnic cleansing. In the past such crimes were viewed as a domestic, national affair; countries that were not engaged in a war did not intervene in such matters. This time the response was different. Worldwide indignation made these crimes an international issue. After the wars were over the international community continued to play a role in the Balkans. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was established to prosecute the region’s war criminals. Because of The Hague’s international reputation as a city of peace and justice, this court, too, made the city its home.
The ICTY is only one of many organisations based in The Hague today. At present the city hosts more than 130 international organisations and embassies, where 14,000 people work on a daily basis towards a common goal: a world of greater security and justice.

The Netherlands, The Hague, and at their heart the Peace Palace are increasingly seen as a centre of expertise in the field of international peace and legal issues. The Netherlands is taking the lead by constantly pressing for broader recognition of the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. The history of the past hundred years shows a progression in the Netherlands’ aims from the peaceful settlement of disputes to global justice. This starts with building a legal order at national level and working to create the conditions necessary for peace and justice to thrive. The ultimate objective is the creation of a legal order in which people throughout the world are accountable for their deeds, and in which victims of crimes against humanity obtain recognition and satisfaction. The Netherlands seeks a world in which people everywhere can be sure that justice will prevail.

The Peace Palace will continue to develop in the years to come as a beacon of peace and international law. Today international law is being applied more widely, while there is a felt need for universal declarations that safeguard human rights. At the same time, a growing number of international organisations are working for peace and justice. Many of these organisations continue to choose The Hague for their headquarters. World leaders, jurists, diplomats and students will continue to find their way to The Hague and the Peace Palace, in order to take part in discussions of issues relating to peace and the law and to work together for a more secure and just world.