

Welcome by Johannes Irgens, Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, on August 24, 1912\*

In the name of the Norwegian government and of His Sovereign Majesty, who honors this official opening session with his presence, I have the pleasure of extending to the Institute of International Law a cordial welcome to the capital of Norway.

I assure the Institute and each of its members that it is with the most sincere pleasure that we see them here as our valued and cherished guests.

The noble purpose of the Institute - to encourage the progress of international law - must of itself arouse the most sympathetic response and meet with the keenest interest in every civilized nation. The advancement of the idea of justice among peoples will be a contribution of primary importance in securing peace between states. The Institute's range of activity encompasses the two fields of international law: on one hand, the Institute strives in public law to develop peaceful ties between nations and to make the laws of war more humane; on the other hand, in private law, its aim is to minimize or to eliminate difficulties arising from differences existing in the laws of the different countries.

The realization of the Institute's great work in these two categories of international law will be sought conscientiously and assiduously, we may be sure, by the eminent gentlemen meeting in the session which begins today.

One important and characteristic trait of the Institute is its totally private nature. The Institute is a free association of individuals from nearly every civilized country in the world, united by the lively interest which they bring to the study of the problems I have just mentioned. We all admire the energy and the dispatch displayed by these distinguished gentlemen who never hesitate at the prospect of taking long, tiring journeys every year or two for the purpose of meeting to carry on these discussions.

And, I should like to emphasize the significant fact that these meetings are organized through private initiative! Free and disinterested discussions among individuals who are bound neither by mandates nor instructions have in their quest for truth a special importance, now and in the future, along with the more official discussions that have also fortuitously ensued during the great peace conferences of our time. The Institute reminds me, in more than one way, of the beginnings of the universities at the end of the Middle Ages, those scholarly communities

whose independent studies have contributed so much to the development and the progress of nations.

Let me pause for a moment to point out how useful the work of this unique institute is to the governments of the different nations. Statesmen must continually consult international law. In the various ministries of foreign affairs no long period of time ever goes by without producing some new problem which poses the question: what solution is indicated by international law? Thus the practical actions of statesmen are linked to the principles and requirements formulated by learned specialists. And it is in precisely this area, I think, that the Institute carries out its most important function. All of its members are scholars, but they are not scholars only: most of them are, or have been, practical men of affairs - judges, lawyers, diplomats, government officials, and the like. And that is why the annals of the Institute are veritable mines of information for all those who seek to put into practice the principles of international law. Should a moot question arise in the area of international law today, it would be unusual indeed not to find some clue to its solution in one of the publications of the Institute.

*Justitia et pace* is the splendid motto of the Institute. But if the ordinary man in our hurried and incessantly active age should stop to think about it, I imagine that what would strike him most about this motto would be its last word: *pace*. And it is by a happy coincidence that the Institute is holding its current sessions in the hall of the [Norwegian Nobel Institute](#). You are undoubtedly aware that the distinguished Swedish philanthropist, in his will, entrusted the Norwegian Parliament with the honorific task of distributing every year one of the five Nobel prizes, the Peace Prize, which is awarded to "the person who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity among nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses". In 1904 when this prize was awarded to the Institute which we have the honor of seeing assembled here today in this room, the choice was greeted with virtually unanimous approbation, not only here in Norway but all over the world. Through this prize our Norwegian people became still better acquainted with the Institute than we had been previously; and so the news that the Institute had accepted our invitation to hold its session here this year was received enthusiastically.

In conclusion, allow me to express the very sincere hope that the results of these meetings will be fruitful, for the Institute as well as for the progress of international law, and to wish each of the members of the Institute a pleasant stay in Oslo and in Norway.

\* Since there was no presentation speech at the Nobel award ceremony in 1904, this speech by Mr. Irgens, welcoming the Institute to Oslo in 1912, is given here instead. Mr. Irgens presided over the opening session of the Institute which was convened on August 24, 1912, at 3:00 p.m. in the auditorium of the Norwegian Nobel Institute in Oslo. His Majesty Haakon VII, King of Norway, and members of the diplomatic corps, as well as members of the Institute, were present. This translation is based on the French text in *Annuaire de l'Institut de droit international - Session de Christiania - Août 1912* (Paris: A. Pedone, 1912), Vol. 25, pp. 539-542

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Footnotes omitted.