

Commissioners, Honorary Members, Representatives of ICJ Sections and Affiliates and Guests- I am very honored to welcome you to the ICJ's 18th World Congress.

I would like in particular to thank the Government of Tunisia and the President of Tunisia's High Court of Justice, Mr.Yussef Bouzakher, for facilitating and agreeing to host this important event.

Our presence in Tunisia today is a testament to the progress Tunisia has made since the events of 2010 in undertaking democratic reforms and promoting human rights protections. Thank you again Mr. Justice for being with us today.

It has been over 20 years since we last held a World Congress in Africa, which took place in South Africa in 1998. Since that time, the ICJ has gradually expanded our work in this continent, and it is good to see that so many colleagues from the region are with us today.

Since its founding in 1952, the ICJ has played a preeminent, if not unique, role in seeking to promote and uphold the rule of law around the globe. While notable progress has been made over the years, we sadly are now in a period of clear regression.

The new challenges we face today are neither East/West nor North/South in origin, but are rather global and endemic in nature.

The ICJ has seen this before. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, many States, including some liberal democracies, adopted counter-terrorism measures that threatened the very core of the international human rights framework put in place since the Second World War, claiming that observance of human rights was no longer convenient.

The ICJ responded to that crisis in 2004 at its World Conference in Berlin by adopting the Berlin Declaration on Upholding Human Rights & the Rule of Law in Combating Terrorism. This important document led to the creation of the Eminent jurists Panel on Terrorism, Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights which was so ably chaired by the then ICJ President & former Chief justice of South Africa, the late Arthur Chaskalson.

The EJP's Report was very well received internationally and lead many states to reevaluate and reform their counter-terrorism laws and practices.

Today the very concept of the rule of law is itself under attack, particularly by self-styled populist leaders on the Left and Right who have embraced and espouse authoritarian, nationalistic and/or xenophobic policies.

Their policies have led to the demonization of immigrants, asylum seekers and minorities, as well as attacks on human rights defenders and civil society organizations, attacks on the civilian judiciary, attacks on the media, attacks on and arrests of opposition leaders, and the use of counter-terrorism laws against peaceful protesters and the use of military courts to try them.

Such practices are exquisitely antithetical to and utterly destructive of the rule of law and the rights based system that the ICJ has sought to promote and protect over the years.

While these new challenges to human rights and the international legal framework supporting them are grave indeed, the ICJ, by experience and deeds, is uniquely qualified to meet them.

This unique approach is founded on the organization's focus on the transformative role and potential of the law, of justice institutions and of justice actors. Our ability to influence legal and institutional reform and individual justice actors is unparalleled and this reinforces the relevance and effectiveness of the ICJ.

We should, of course, recall that what we do is ultimately intended to benefit all rights holders in all places and in all contexts.

Our collective task in Tunis over the next two days is therefore clear- we must, after careful debate and due deliberation, adopt a new Declaration and plan of action for the ICJ that vigorously reaffirms our vision of a rule of law that upholds the dignity and human rights of every person everywhere in the world.