



## CONCEPT NOTE

79<sup>th</sup> Session, United Nations 6<sup>th</sup> Committee Expert Roundtable Side Event  
**More Women, But Not Enough Women:  
Achieving Gender Parity for Judges at the International Court of Justice**

Friday, 25 October 2024, 1:15pm-2:30pm  
Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP, 425 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10017  
*Lunch provided from 1pm*

### ***Background***

It has been one year since the most recent judicial elections for the International Court of Justice (ICJ) took place in November 2023. With the election of two highly qualified women jurists, Judge Hilary Charlesworth and Judge Sarah Hull Cleveland, 4 out of the 15 permanent ICJ judges are now women. This is a historic high in the ICJ's almost 80-year history, given that only 6 women have served as permanent judges during that time. While this is welcome progress, much more must be done to achieve gender parity on the ICJ's bench. To achieve this, National Groups at the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) and equivalents must nominate more women candidates for the 2026 election. As States begin to announce their ICJ judicial candidates for 2026, it is crucial that they take their gender equality obligations into consideration.

Equality on judicial benches matters. Key goals like access to justice, fairness, and the legitimacy of courts require gender-equal judicial benches. Women's equal participation in the international judiciary is essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and for effective peacebuilding. Judicial identity shapes judicial approaches to law-making. The ICJ is an essential and uniquely important international court, influencing law on everything from the climate to armed conflict to human rights. Now more than ever, all eyes are on the World Court, and the overrepresentation of one gender on its judiciary is even more visible. It is time to change this.

There is no shortage of international law that obligates States and UN offices to ensure gender equal international judiciaries, and the next step is for States and the relevant UN offices to fulfil these commitments regarding nominations for ICJ judges. These

obligations arise from a variety of sources, including the UN Charter, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Sustainable Development Goals, and more.

Recent calls from key players in the ICJ judicial nomination process reaffirm the need for a gender equal ICJ bench. In June 2024, the PCA Congress adopted a Resolution urging Parties and the PCA to ‘consolidat[e] gender equality and to promote the presence of women in technical and decision-making position within the institution, further increasing the number of female arbitrators appointed, and raising awareness amongst the Contracting Parties to achieve and increasing participation of women in other instances, such as national groups’. In March 2024, UN Secretary General António Guterres called for the acceleration of gender equality, gender parity at the highest levels of the UN, and a determined effort to welcome women into leadership roles.

Other international and supranational courts, such as the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights and the International Criminal Court, have successfully reached parity on their benches. This was accomplished via specific rules, mechanisms, and political commitments. For example, the African Court achieved gender parity on its bench when its Office of the Legal Counsel disqualified, pursuant to a Decision of the Executive Council of the African Union, any nominations that did not include at least one female judicial candidate. With State and UN commitment, the same can be achieved for judges at the ICJ.

Against this background, this 6<sup>th</sup> Committee side event aims to converge States, UN offices, international and regional organisations, and other key stakeholders around the goal of a gender equal ICJ judiciary. It creates a forum for discussing practical pathways to achieve this change in the 2026 ICJ elections and beyond. This event invites participants to commit to a gender equal international bench.

**Structure of the event:** This is a roundtable dialogue where all attendees are invited to contribute

1pm Lunch and beverages provided

**1:15pm Welcome and introduction of the topic** by Dr Jessica Lynn Corsi, Associate Professor of Law, City St George’s, University of London, and Co-founder, Working Group for Gender Parity at the ICJ

**1:20pm Prepared interventions:**

- Intervention from Mexico's Legal Adviser Pablo Adrián Arrocha Olabuenaga
- Intervention from UN Women's Senior Advisor and Focal Point for Women in the UN System, Ms. Katja Pehrman
- Intervention from Dr Penelope J. Ridings, Member of the International Law Commission
- Intervention from Nathaniel Khng, Minister-Counsellor (Legal), Permanent Mission of the Republic of Singapore to the United Nations
- Intervention from Dr Priya Pillai, Director of the Asia Justice Coalition
- Intervention from Professor Valerie Oosterveld, Western University Faculty of Law (Canada) and Western Research Chair in International Criminal Justice, Director of the Centre for Transitional Justice and Post-Conflict Reconstruction
- Intervention from Professor Milena Sterio, James A. Thomas Distinguished Professor of Law at Cleveland State University's Cleveland-Marshall College of Law and Managing Director at the Public International Law & Policy Group

**Expert level dialogue:** attendees are invited to make interventions and raise questions and discussion points

**2:25pm Concluding remarks:** Dr Michelle Staggs Kelsall, Senior Lecturer in Law, SOAS University of London, and Co-founder, ATLASWomen

*Co-sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Sweden, the Permanent Mission of the Principality of Liechtenstein, and the International Bar Association*