Thank you, Mr President.

Let me first thank President Peter Tomka and his team at The Hague for their comprehensive report on the work of the International Court of Justice in the past year.

The Philippines associates itself with the statement delivered by the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Since its creation 68 years ago, the Court continues to play a vital role in international relations. As the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, it resolves disputes which cannot otherwise be resolved by or through the political organs of the UN. Under Article 38 of the Statute of the Court, these are disputes that are capable of settlement through the application of the sources of international law, e.g., treaty, international custom, general principles of law, and – as subsidiary sources -- judicial decisions and the teachings of the most highly qualified publicists.

Two years ago, the UN held its first-ever high-level meeting on the Rule of Law. It resulted in a consensus Declaration on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels. That document recognizes that the international community has the institutions, the working methods, and the relationships to make the rule of law relevant to peace and security, to human rights, and to development. One of those institutions is none other than the Court. Paragraph 31 of the Declaration recognizes the invaluable contribution of the Court in promoting the rule of law.

The Philippines reaffirms its support for that Declaration. We affirm our duty to comply with the decisions of the Court in contentious cases.

We are reminded of Article 1, paragraph 1 of the UN Charter, of our peremptory duty, “to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace”.

Mr President, this is the very rationale for the 1982 Manila Declaration on the Peaceful Settlement of International Disputes, whose 30th anniversary we commemorated also two years ago. The Manila Declaration was negotiated and adopted by the General Assembly during the Cold War, when non-aligned countries were seeking to consolidate their political and economic independence. The Manila Declaration supported their aspirations by articulating the norms of the peaceful settlement of disputes as outlined in Chapter VI of the UN Charter.
Beginning with the Corfu Channel case in 1947 until the adoption in 1982 of the Manila Declaration – or a span of 35 years – the Court had disposed of 49 contentious cases. Since 1982, however, the case load of the Court has increased, disposing of over 80 contentious cases in a comparably lesser period of 32 years.

In the period under review, the Court was seized of seven new contentious cases, bringing its docket to 13 cases. The sovereign parties to those cases come from all over the world, half of them from Latin America. Yesterday, at an event co-organized by Mexico and the American Society of International Law, we gained ideas on why Latin American countries repose great trust in international adjudication including by the Court. Thus, we learned how Latin America as a group has contributed to the progressive development of international law. It is an example that we believe the rest of the world should follow.

This ever increasing confidence – especially among developing countries – in the capabilities, credibility, and impartiality of the Court to settle disputes exclusively by peaceful means, is not unrelated to the norms, values and aspirations articulated by the Manila Declaration. The most fundamental of these is the non-use or threat of use of force. After all, the Manila Declaration reflects the international community's increasing reliance on the rule of law as a cornerstone not only of the peaceful settlement of disputes, but also of the maintenance of international peace and security.

Mr President, only the rule of law at the international level can we guarantee the respect, order, and stability that we desire and deserve. This is how we contribute to the progressive development of international law.

The mandate and the jurisdiction of the Court have become sharper over the years. The creation of the International Criminal Court and specialized dispute settlement mechanisms like the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea and the Appellate Body of the World Trade Organization do not make the Court any less important in the 21st century. On the contrary, the contemporary international legal architecture only strengthens the Court as the only forum for resolving justiciable disputes between States concerning the vast field of general international law. As a matter of fact, the Court is still seized of disputes concerning genocide, territorial and maritime issues, environmental damage, and the conservation of living resources.

Mr President, if there is anything that the UN Charter, together with the Statute, jurisprudence and experience of the Court all teach us, it is that small nations, if their cause is just, should have no fear of the big powers. It is that, through the work of the Court, the rule of law in international relations has a chance to prevail.

The Philippines renews the call for Member States that have not yet done so, to accept the compulsory jurisdiction of the Court.

Finally, we also call on the Security Council to seriously consider Article 96 of the UN Charter, and make greater use of the Court as a source of advisory opinions and of interpretation of relevant norms of international law, particularly on the most current and controversial issues affecting international peace and security.

Thank you, Mr. President.