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AN INTRODUCTION: ADAPTING TO A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD

By Monica Hakimi, Natalie L. Reid,† Samuel Witten‡*

The 2015 American Society of International Law (ASIL) Annual Meeting aimed to assess how international law is and should be adapting to the profound global changes that are now underway. The Meeting took place against a dramatic backdrop of events: the rapid expansion of the so-called Islamic State in Syria and Iraq; a security and refugee crisis in the Middle East; escalating conflict in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea; an Ebola crisis in West Africa; and the build-up to a widely anticipated round of negotiations on climate change. These and similar geopolitical developments raise serious questions about the continued relevance and adequacy of existing international legal arrangements and institutions. For example, are the traditional processes for making international law capable of effectively and legitimately addressing these challenges? Can existing international institutions maintain their relevance in an increasingly multi-polar system? And how should the world tackle complex problems such as the proliferation of violence among non-state actors, degradation of the global environment, and persistent levels of severe poverty?

These and other questions were addressed by more than 175 speakers over the course of four days at the 2015 Annual Meeting. Meeting highlights included the Grotius Lecture by Sir Kenneth Keith, who had just completed a nine-year appointment as a judge at the International Court of Justice (New Zealand); Dame Rosalyn Higgins served as the distinguished discussant on his lecture. The 2015 Charles N. Brower Lecture was given by Yale Law Professor Michael Reisman, who presented a critical assessment of the minimum standard of treatment in customary international law. Mr. Ahmet Üzümcü, Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, spoke of the organization's recent work in Syria and participated in the Hudson Medal Luncheon, which centered around a relaxed conversation between Professor Reisman and Hudson Medal recipient Pierre-Marie DuPuy of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva. Anne-Marie Slaughter, former ASIL President and current President and CEO of the New America Foundation, gave well-received remarks to the Women in International Law Luncheon. And Judge Rosemary Barkett, of the Iran-U.S. Claims Tribunal, served as the keynote speaker at the Meeting's Gala Dinner.

The 2015 Program Committee used various techniques to keep the Meeting fresh, lively, and interesting. The Committee sought to promote younger international lawyers in the program—both by having them as panelists in many program sessions and by devoting two specific sessions to their academic work. One of the two “new voices” sessions focused on international criminal law and Benjamin Ferencz shared his reflections from a remarkable lifetime of experience that began with the prosecutions at Nuremberg. In addition, the Program Committee worked to engage “first time” ASIL Meeting attendees and to organize the program sessions so that speakers with diverse backgrounds and perspectives would interact with one another and with the attending audience. Separately, the Committee selected a

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number of sessions that went beyond the traditional “panel” format. One session centered on the screening of “The Agreement,” a film about the critical talks achieving a peaceful co-existence between Serbia and Kosovo, followed by discussion with some of the key negotiators involved. Others focused on innovative topics, such as the effect of social media on international relations and international law, and the role of video games in educating people about the law of war.

We are delighted to have chaired the 2015 Annual Meeting and look forward to continued debate on the challenges that are confronting international law.