

Owada Chair
Third Symposium: 'Human Rights and Global Diversity'

Word of Welcome from prof.dr.ir. Hester Bijl
Rector Magnificus of Leiden University

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Dear colleagues and guests, good morning. Welcome to the third edition of the Owada Chair, a special collaboration between Leiden University and the University of Tokyo. The Chair celebrates the life's work of Professor Hisashi Owada. Let me particularly welcome Professor Owada himself and the rest of the University of Tokyo delegation that has travelled from Japan to attend this symposium.

Professor Owada has had a long and distinguished career in academia, diplomacy, and legal practice. His diplomatic posts included Moscow, Washington, and Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations. He was elected to the International Court of Justice in The Hague, where he served as a Judge from 2003 until 2018, and as the Court's President from 2009 to 2012. In academic life, Professor Owada has taught at Columbia University, Harvard Law School, New York University, Waseda University, and, of course, the Universities of Leiden and Tokyo. At Leiden he is our Professor Emeritus of Japanese Language and Cultures.

For the audience, I should say a little more about the format of the Owada Chair. When the idea to honour Professor Owada came up five years ago, he suggested not to give an annual lecture himself. Instead, he proposed that we convene an annual symposium with a keynote speaker and debate of the keynote speech, especially involving new-generation scholars. That is why today Professor Owada will present some opening remarks, but the Owada Chair lecture itself will be delivered by our honoured guest, Professor Obiora Chinedu Okafor. Then this afternoon, eight

young academics (four each from Leiden and Tokyo) will debate the arguments in Professor Okafor's lecture. Tomorrow morning we have a roundtable of Leiden and Tokyo senior staff that also addresses the symposium theme. Tomorrow afternoon there is a panel where PhD students from the two universities present their work. Everyone is of course welcome to attend these other further events. Details are in your programme.

In terms of vision and mission, the Owada Chair seeks to stimulate dialogue between the fields of international law and international relations. During his career, Professor Owada often regretted that the worlds of international law and international politics did not communicate enough with each other. The lawyers and courts tended to stay in one corner, while the officials and governments tended to stay in another. International law did not sufficiently take account of politics, and international relations missed many opportunities afforded by international law.

Dialogue between international law and international relations is especially important today. The world is undergoing major geopolitical changes and challenges that affect – and can be affected by – international law. Thirty years ago, the USA stood as a single leading state in the world. Yet nowadays we have a more multipolar world, with several major states in leading positions, and emergent leadership competition between the USA and China. Thirty years ago, we saw the end of the Cold War and hopes for expanded global cooperation. Yet nowadays we witness a revival of bloc competition, particularly between NATO countries on one side and Shanghai Cooperation Organization countries on the other. Thirty years ago, geopolitics was decidedly centered on the West, as reflected in the Group of 7. Yet nowadays many non-western countries also have a major say in world politics, as reflected in the Group of 20. Thirty years ago some expected an 'End of History' with perpetual peace, but today we confront major geopolitical wars in Ukraine and the Middle East.

What do contemporary geopolitical shifts imply for international law and global governance? Will we see, as pessimists anticipate, less rule of law and less cooperation in world politics? Or could the changing geopolitical situation bring new turns in international law and international

collaboration? What sorts of new connections between international law and international relations can be imagined, and how could such visions be realized? These are major questions for the Owada Chair to explore.

The initial programme of the Owada Chair lasts for six years, and each annual symposium highlights a particular theme. The first edition of the Owada Chair, at Leiden in 2022, examined the relationship of international law and international relations through the theme of emotions. The first Owada Chair keynote speaker, Professor Dominique Moïsi, looked at ways that affective responses (such as anger, fear, compassion, and love) can shape the development of international law and geopolitics.

The second edition of the Owada Chair, held in Tokyo last year, had the theme of memory and reconciliation. The keynote speaker on that occasion, Professor Atsuko Kawakita, looked especially at how people in Germany have handled the consequences of Nazism and the Second World War. Other participants in the 2023 Owada Chair symposium explored the implications of memory in other contexts, including Japan vis-à-vis Korea and the Netherlands vis-à-vis Indonesia.

Today we have the third Owada Chair symposium. Its theme is 'Human Rights and Global Diversity'. The topic explores the international law of human rights in a context of ongoing geopolitical changes. The debate of unity and diversity in global human rights is not new, of course. Liberal cosmopolitans have long claimed the same single set of human rights apply equally all over the world. In contrast, others have argued that cultural differences mean that interpretations and implementations of human rights need to be adapted to context. This debate about human rights and global diversity becomes all the more pronounced in our present day, given substantial geopolitical transformations, including the rise of non-western powers in particular.

To explore these issues, this year's Owada Chair keynote speaker is Professor Obiora Chinedu Okafor. Professor Okafor currently holds the Edward B. Burling Chair in International Law and Institutions at Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, DC. He has previously held other positions at the University of Nigeria, Carleton University, and York University (Toronto). Like Professor Owada, Professor Okafor has extensively combined academic and practical work. He has been United Nations Independent Expert on Human Rights and International Solidarity, reporting to the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council. He also previously chaired the UN Human Rights Council Advisory Committee.

Professor Okafor has published extensively on international law, with particular attention to the relationship of international law to inequality and imperialism in international relations. Much of his work develops the concept of Third World approaches to international law. This critical perspective directly addresses the issue of unity and diversity in international law, including with respect to human rights. In particular, Professor Okafor has examined the African human rights system. So he is especially well placed to explore our theme of 'Human Rights and Global Diversity'. His lecture is entitled 'Global Diversity and the Living International Human Rights Law'. So welcome, Professor Okafor. We look forward with anticipation to your lecture.

Before turning to the keynote speech, though, we will hear a word of welcome from our University of Tokyo partners, with a video message from Professor Fumitaka Mafune, Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Then Professor Owada will give his opening reflections on the topic of 'Human Rights and Global Diversity'.

To conclude, I wish to acknowledge the generous sponsors who make possible the Owada Chair. They include the Ailion Foundation, the Leiden Asia Centre, the Leiden University Fund, and the Japan-Netherlands Commission for Academic and Cultural Exchange. Mr Hiroshi Inomata from the Japan-Netherlands Commission is with us today: thank you, Mr Inomata, also for your extensive personal support to the Owada Chair. I also wish to extend special thanks to Kikkoman

Foods Europe for their recent generous renewal of funding for the Owada Chair. Mr Nota Sakai represents Kikkoman with us today: our deep thanks to you and your company.

Once again, welcome to everyone. Thank you for joining us for the Third Owada Chair Symposium. We look forward to two days of stimulating and productive dialogue.