

**INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE**  
**General List, No. 121, 14 February 2002**

**CASE CONCERNING THE ARREST WARRANT OF 11 APRIL 2000**  
**(DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO v. BELGIUM)**  
**[THE YERODIA CASE]**

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THE COURT, composed as above, after deliberation, *delivers the following Judgment:*

1. On 17 October 2000 the Democratic Republic of the Congo (hereinafter referred to as “the Congo”) filed in the Registry of the Court an Application instituting proceedings against the Kingdom of Belgium (hereinafter referred to as “Belgium”) in respect of a dispute concerning an “international arrest warrant issued on 11 April 2000 by a Belgian investigating judge . . . against the Minister for Foreign Affairs in office of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Abdulaye Yerodia Ndobasi”.

In that Application the Congo contended that Belgium had violated the “principle that a State may not exercise its authority on the territory of another State”, the “principle of sovereign equality among all Members of the United Nations, as laid down in Article 2, paragraph 1, of the Charter of the United Nations”, as well as “the diplomatic immunity of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of a sovereign State, as recognized by the jurisprudence of the Court and following from Article 41, paragraph 2, of the Vienna Convention of 18 April 1961 on Diplomatic Relations”.

In order to found the Court’s jurisdiction the Congo invoked in the aforementioned Application the fact that “Belgium ha[d] accepted the jurisdiction of the Court and, in so far as may be required, the [aforementioned] Application signifie[d] acceptance of that jurisdiction by the Democratic Republic of the Congo”.

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10. In its Application, the Congo formulated the decision requested in the following terms:

“The Court is requested to declare that the Kingdom of Belgium shall annul the international arrest warrant issued on 11 April 2000 by a Belgian investigating judge, Mr. Vandermeersch, of the Brussels *tribunal de première instance* against the Minister for Foreign Affairs in office of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Abdulaye Yerodia Ndobasi, seeking his provisional detention pending a request for extradition to Belgium for alleged crimes constituting ‘serious violations of international humanitarian law’, that warrant having been circulated by the judge to all States, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which received it on 12 July 2000.”

11. In the course of the written proceedings, the following submissions were presented by the Parties:

*On behalf of the Government of the Congo, in the Memorial:*

“In light of the facts and arguments set out above, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo requests the Court to adjudge and declare that:

1. by issuing and internationally circulating the arrest warrant of 11 April 2000 against Mr. Abdulaye Yerodia Ndobasi, Belgium committed a violation in regard to the DRC of the rule of customary international law concerning the

absolute inviolability and immunity from criminal process of incumbent foreign ministers;

2. a formal finding by the Court of the unlawfulness of that act constitutes an appropriate form of satisfaction, providing reparation for the consequent moral injury to the DRC;

3. the violation of international law underlying the issue and international circulation of the arrest warrant of 11 April 2000 precludes any State, including Belgium, from executing it;

4. Belgium shall be required to recall and cancel the arrest warrant of 11 April 2000 and to inform the foreign authorities to whom the warrant was circulated that, following the Court's Judgment, Belgium renounces its request for their co-operation in executing the unlawful warrant."

*On behalf of the Government of Belgium, in the Counter-Memorial:*

"... Belgium requests the Court to reject the submissions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the merits of the case and to dismiss the application."

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13. On 11 April 2000 an investigating judge of the Brussels *tribunal de première instance* issued "an international arrest warrant *in absentia*" against Mr. Abdulaye Yerodia Ndombasi, charging him, as perpetrator or co-perpetrator, with offences constituting grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and of the Additional Protocols thereto, and with crimes against humanity.

At the time when the arrest warrant was issued Mr. Yerodia was the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Congo.

14. The arrest warrant was transmitted to the Congo on 7 June 2000, being received by the Congolese authorities on 12 July 2000. According to Belgium, the warrant was at the same time transmitted to the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), an organization whose function is to enhance and facilitate cross-border criminal police co-operation worldwide; through the latter, it was circulated internationally.

15. In the arrest warrant, Mr. Yerodia is accused of having made various speeches inciting racial hatred during the month of August 1998. The crimes with which Mr. Yerodia was charged were punishable in Belgium under the Law of 16 June 1993 "concerning the Punishment of Grave Breaches of the International Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and of Protocols I and II of 8 June 1977 Additional Thereto", as amended by the Law of 19 February 1999 "concerning the Punishment of Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law" (hereinafter referred to as the "Belgian Law").

Article 7 of the Belgian Law provides that "The Belgian courts shall have jurisdiction in respect of the offences provided for in the present Law, wheresoever they may have been committed". In the present case, according to Belgium, the complaints that initiated the proceedings as a result of which the arrest warrant was issued emanated from 12 individuals all resident in Belgium, five of whom were of Belgian nationality. It is not contested by Belgium,

however, that the alleged acts to which the arrest warrant relates were committed outside Belgian territory, that Mr. Yerodia was not a Belgian national at the time of those acts, and that Mr. Yerodia was not in Belgian territory at the time that the arrest warrant was issued and circulated. That no Belgian nationals were victims of the violence that was said to have resulted from Mr. Yerodia's alleged offences was also uncontested.

Article 5, paragraph 3, of the Belgian Law further provides that "[i]mmunity attaching to the official capacity of a person shall not prevent the application of the present Law".

16. At the hearings, Belgium further claimed that it offered "to entrust the case to the competent authorities [of the Congo] for enquiry and possible prosecution", and referred to a certain number of steps which it claimed to have taken in this regard from September 2000, that is, before the filing of the Application instituting proceedings. The Congo for its part stated the following: "We have scant information concerning the form [of these Belgian proposals]." It added that "these proposals . . . appear to have been made very belatedly, namely *after* an arrest warrant against Mr. Yerodia had been issued."

17. On 17 October 2000, the Congo filed in the Registry an Application instituting the present proceedings (see paragraph 1 above), in which the Court was requested "to declare that the Kingdom of Belgium shall annul the international arrest warrant issued on 11 April 2000". The Congo relied in its Application on two separate legal grounds. First, it claimed that "[t]he *universal jurisdiction* that the Belgian State attributes to itself under Article 7 of the Law in question" constituted a

"[v]iolation of the principle that a State may not exercise its authority on the territory of another State and of the principle of sovereign equality among all Members of the United Nations, as laid down in Article 2, paragraph 1, of the Charter of the United Nations".

Secondly, it claimed that "[t]he non-recognition, on the basis of Article 5 . . . of the Belgian Law, of the immunity of a Minister for Foreign Affairs in office" constituted a "[v]iolation of the diplomatic immunity of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of a sovereign State, as recognized by the jurisprudence of the Court and following from Article 41, paragraph 2, of the Vienna Convention of 18 April 1961 on Diplomatic Relations".

18. On the same day that it filed its Application instituting proceedings, the Congo submitted a request to the Court for the indication of a provisional measure under Article 41 of the Statute of the Court. During the hearings devoted to consideration of that request, the Court was informed that in November 2000 a ministerial reshuffle had taken place in the Congo, following which Mr. Yerodia had ceased to hold office as Minister for Foreign Affairs and had been entrusted with the portfolio of Minister of Education. Belgium accordingly claimed that the Congo's Application had become moot and asked the Court, as has already been recalled, to remove the case from the List. By Order of 8 December 2000, the Court rejected both Belgium's submissions to that effect and also the Congo's request for the indication of provisional measures . . . .

19. From mid-April 2001, with the formation of a new Government in the Congo, Mr. Yerodia ceased to hold the post of Minister of Education. He no longer holds any ministerial office today.

20. On 12 September 2001, the Belgian National Central Bureau of Interpol requested the Interpol General Secretariat to issue a Red Notice in respect of Mr. Yerodia. Such notices concern

individuals whose arrest is requested with a view to extradition. On 19 October 2001, at the public sittings held to hear the oral arguments of the Parties in the case, Belgium informed the Court that Interpol had responded on 27 September 2001 with a request for additional information, and that no Red Notice had yet been circulated.

21. Although the Application of the Congo originally advanced two separate legal grounds (see para. 17 above), the submissions of the Congo in its Memorial and the final submissions which it presented at the end of the oral proceedings refer only to a violation “in regard to the . . . Congo of the rule of customary international law concerning the absolute inviolability and immunity from criminal process of incumbent foreign ministers” (see paras. 11 and 12 above).  
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*[In paragraphs 22-44, the Court addresses, but does not uphold, preliminary objections made by Belgium on the grounds of jurisdiction and admissibility.]*

45. . . . [T]he Congo originally challenged the legality of the arrest warrant of 11 April 2000 on two separate grounds: on the one hand, Belgium’s claim to exercise a universal jurisdiction and, on the other, the alleged violation of the immunities of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Congo then in office. However, in its submissions in its Memorial, and in its final submissions at the close of the oral proceedings, the Congo invokes only the latter ground.

46. As a matter of logic, the second ground should be addressed only once there has been a determination in respect of the first, since it is only where a State has jurisdiction under international law in relation to a particular matter that there can be any question of immunities in regard to the exercise of that jurisdiction. However, in the present case, and in view of the final form of the Congo’s submissions, the Court will address first the question whether, assuming that it had jurisdiction under international law to issue and circulate the arrest warrant of 11 April 2000, Belgium in so doing violated the immunities of the then Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Congo.

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47. The Congo maintains that, during his or her term of office, a Minister for Foreign Affairs of a sovereign State is entitled to inviolability and to immunity from criminal process being “absolute or complete”, that is to say, they are subject to no exception. Accordingly, the Congo contends that no criminal prosecution may be brought against a Minister for Foreign Affairs in a foreign court as long as he or she remains in office, and that any finding of criminal responsibility by a domestic court in a foreign country, or any act of investigation undertaken with a view to bringing him or her to court, would contravene the principle of immunity from jurisdiction. According to the Congo, the basis of such criminal immunity is purely functional, and immunity is accorded under customary international law simply in order to enable the foreign State representative enjoying such immunity to perform his or her functions freely and without let or hindrance. The Congo adds that the immunity thus accorded to Ministers for Foreign Affairs when in office covers *all* their acts, including any committed before they took office, and that it is irrelevant whether the acts done whilst in office may be characterized or not as “official acts”.

48. The Congo states further that it does not deny the existence of a principle of international criminal law, deriving from the decisions of the Nuremberg and Tokyo international military tribunals, that the accused’s official capacity at the time of the acts cannot, before any court, whether domestic or international, constitute a “ground of exemption from his criminal responsibility or a ground for mitigation of sentence”. The Congo then stresses that the fact that an immunity might bar prosecution before a specific court or over a specific period does not mean

that the same prosecution cannot be brought, if appropriate, before another court which is not bound by that immunity, or at another time when the immunity need no longer be taken into account. It concludes that immunity does not mean impunity.

49. Belgium maintains for its part that, while Ministers for Foreign Affairs in office generally enjoy an immunity from jurisdiction before the courts of a foreign State, such immunity applies only to acts carried out in the course of their official functions, and cannot protect such persons in respect of private acts or when they are acting otherwise than in the performance of their official functions.

50. Belgium further states that, in the circumstances of the present case, Mr. Yerodia enjoyed no immunity at the time when he is alleged to have committed the acts of which he is accused, and that there is no evidence that he was then acting in any official capacity. It observes that the arrest warrant was issued against Mr. Yerodia personally.

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51. The Court would observe at the outset that in international law it is firmly established that, as also diplomatic and consular agents, certain holders of high-ranking office in a State, such as the Head of State, Head of Government and Minister for Foreign Affairs, enjoy immunities from jurisdiction in other States, both civil and criminal. For the purposes of the present case, it is only the immunity from criminal jurisdiction and the inviolability of an incumbent Minister for Foreign Affairs that fall for the Court to consider.

52. A certain number of treaty instruments were cited by the Parties in this regard. These included, first, the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 18 April 1961, which states in its preamble that the purpose of diplomatic privileges and immunities is “to ensure the efficient performance of the functions of diplomatic missions as representing States”. It provides in Article 32 that only the sending State may waive such immunity. On these points, the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, to which both the Congo and Belgium are parties, reflects customary international law. The same applies to the corresponding provisions of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations of 24 April 1963, to which the Congo and Belgium are also parties.

The Congo and Belgium further cite the New York Convention on Special Missions of 8 December 1969, to which they are not, however, parties. They recall that under Article 21, paragraph 2, of that Convention:

“The Head of the Government, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and other persons of high rank, when they take part in a special mission of the sending State, shall enjoy in the receiving State or in a third State, in addition to what is granted by the present Convention, the facilities, privileges and immunities accorded by international law.”

These conventions provide useful guidance on certain aspects of the question of immunities. They do not, however, contain any provision specifically defining the immunities enjoyed by Ministers for Foreign Affairs. It is consequently on the basis of customary international law that the Court must decide the questions relating to the immunities of such Ministers raised in the present case.

53. In customary international law, the immunities accorded to Ministers for Foreign Affairs are not granted for their personal benefit, but to ensure the effective performance of their functions on

behalf of their respective States. In order to determine the extent of these immunities, the Court must therefore first consider the nature of the functions exercised by a Minister for Foreign Affairs. He or she is in charge of his or her Government's diplomatic activities and generally acts as its representative in international negotiations and intergovernmental meetings. Ambassadors and other diplomatic agents carry out their duties under his or her authority. His or her acts may bind the State represented, and there is a presumption that a Minister for Foreign Affairs, simply by virtue of that office, has full powers to act on behalf of the State (see, e.g., Art. 7, para. 2 (a), of the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties). In the performance of these functions, he or she is frequently required to travel internationally, and thus must be in a position freely to do so whenever the need should arise. He or she must also be in constant communication with the Government, and with its diplomatic missions around the world, and be capable at any time of communicating with representatives of other States. The Court further observes that a Minister for Foreign Affairs, responsible for the conduct of his or her State's relations with all other States, occupies a position such that, like the Head of State or the Head of Government, he or she is recognized under international law as representative of the State solely by virtue of his or her office. He or she does not have to present letters of credence: to the contrary, it is generally the Minister who determines the authority to be conferred upon diplomatic agents and countersigns their letters of credence. Finally, it is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs that *chargés d'affaires* are accredited.

54. The Court accordingly concludes that the functions of a Minister for Foreign Affairs are such that, throughout the duration of his or her office, he or she when abroad enjoys full immunity from criminal jurisdiction and inviolability. That immunity and that inviolability protect the individual concerned against any act of authority of another State which would hinder him or her in the performance of his or her duties.

55. In this respect, no distinction can be drawn between acts performed by a Minister for Foreign Affairs in an "official" capacity, and those claimed to have been performed in a "private capacity", or, for that matter, between acts performed before the person concerned assumed office as Minister for Foreign Affairs and acts committed during the period of office. Thus, if a Minister for Foreign Affairs is arrested in another State on a criminal charge, he or she is clearly thereby prevented from exercising the functions of his or her office. The consequences of such impediment to the exercise of those official functions are equally serious, regardless of whether the Minister for Foreign Affairs was, at the time of arrest, present in the territory of the arresting State on an "official" visit or a "private" visit, regardless of whether the arrest relates to acts allegedly performed before the person became the Minister for Foreign Affairs or to acts performed while in office, and regardless of whether the arrest relates to alleged acts performed in an "official" capacity or a "private" capacity. Furthermore, even the mere risk that, by travelling to or transiting another State a Minister for Foreign Affairs might be exposing himself or herself to legal proceedings could deter the Minister from travelling internationally when required to do so for the purposes of the performance of his or her official functions.

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56. The Court will now address Belgium's argument that immunities accorded to incumbent Ministers for Foreign Affairs can in no case protect them where they are suspected of having committed war crimes or crimes against humanity. In support of this position, Belgium refers in its Counter-Memorial to various legal instruments creating international criminal tribunals, to examples from national legislation, and to the jurisprudence of national and international courts.

Belgium begins by pointing out that certain provisions of the instruments creating international criminal tribunals state expressly that the official capacity of a person shall not be a

bar to the exercise by such tribunals of their jurisdiction.

Belgium also places emphasis on certain decisions of national courts, and in particular on the judgments rendered on 24 March 1999 by the House of Lords in the United Kingdom and on 13 March 2001 by the Court of Cassation in France in the *Pinochet* and *Qaddafi* cases respectively, in which it contends that an exception to the immunity rule was accepted in the case of serious crimes under international law. Thus, according to Belgium, the *Pinochet* decision recognizes an exception to the immunity rule when Lord Millett stated that “[i]nternational law cannot be supposed to have established a crime having the character of a *jus cogens* and at the same time to have provided an immunity which is co-extensive with the obligation it seeks to impose”, or when Lord Phillips of Worth Matravers said that “no established rule of international law requires state immunity *rationae materiae* to be accorded in respect of prosecution for an international crime”. As to the French Court of Cassation, Belgium contends that, in holding that, “under international law as it currently stands, the crime alleged [acts of terrorism], irrespective of its gravity, does not come within the exceptions to the principle of immunity from jurisdiction for incumbent foreign Heads of State”, the Court explicitly recognized the existence of such exceptions.

57. The Congo, for its part, states that, under international law as it currently stands, there is no basis for asserting that there is any exception to the principle of absolute immunity from criminal process of an incumbent Minister for Foreign Affairs where he or she is accused of having committed crimes under international law.

In support of this contention, the Congo refers to State practice, giving particular consideration in this regard to the *Pinochet* and *Qaddafi* cases, and concluding that such practice does not correspond to that which Belgium claims but, on the contrary, confirms the absolute nature of the immunity from criminal process of Heads of State and Ministers for Foreign Affairs. Thus, in the *Pinochet* case, the Congo cites Lord Browne-Wilkinson’s statement that “[t]his immunity enjoyed by a head of state in power and an ambassador in post is a complete immunity attached to the person of the head of state or ambassador and rendering him immune from all actions or prosecutions . . .”. According to the Congo, the French Court of Cassation adopted the same position in its *Qaddafi* judgment, in affirming that “international custom bars the prosecution of incumbent Heads of State, in the absence of any contrary international provision binding on the parties concerned, before the criminal courts of a foreign State”.

As regards the instruments creating international criminal tribunals and the latter’s jurisprudence, these, in the Congo’s view, concern only those tribunals, and no inference can be drawn from them in regard to criminal proceedings before national courts against persons enjoying immunity under international law.

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58. The Court has carefully examined State practice, including national legislation and those few decisions of national higher courts, such as the House of Lords or the French Court of Cassation. It has been unable to deduce from this practice that there exists under customary international law any form of exception to the rule according immunity from criminal jurisdiction and inviolability to incumbent Ministers for Foreign Affairs, where they are suspected of having committed war crimes or crimes against humanity.

The Court has also examined the rules concerning the immunity or criminal responsibility of persons having an official capacity contained in the legal instruments creating international criminal tribunals, and which are specifically applicable to the latter (see Charter of the

International Military Tribunal of Nuremberg, Art. 7; Charter of the International Military Tribunal of Tokyo, Art. 6; Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Art. 7, para. 2; Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Art. 6, para. 2; Statute of the International Criminal Court, Art. 27). It finds that these rules likewise do not enable it to conclude that any such an exception exists in customary international law in regard to national courts.

Finally, none of the decisions of the Nuremberg and Tokyo international military tribunals, or of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, cited by Belgium deal with the question of the immunities of incumbent Ministers for Foreign Affairs before national courts where they are accused of having committed war crimes or crimes against humanity. The Court accordingly notes that those decisions are in no way at variance with the findings it has reached above.

In view of the foregoing, the Court accordingly cannot accept Belgium's argument in this regard.

59. It should further be noted that the rules governing the jurisdiction of national courts must be carefully distinguished from those governing jurisdictional immunities: jurisdiction does not imply absence of immunity, while absence of immunity does not imply jurisdiction. Thus, although various international conventions on the prevention and punishment of certain serious crimes impose on States obligations of prosecution or extradition, thereby requiring them to extend their criminal jurisdiction, such extension of jurisdiction in no way affects immunities under customary international law, including those of Ministers for Foreign Affairs. These remain opposable before the courts of a foreign State, even where those courts exercise such a jurisdiction under these conventions.

60. The Court emphasizes, however, that the *immunity* from jurisdiction enjoyed by incumbent Ministers for Foreign Affairs does not mean that they enjoy *impunity* in respect of any crimes they might have committed, irrespective of their gravity. Immunity from criminal jurisdiction and individual criminal responsibility are quite separate concepts. While jurisdictional immunity is procedural in nature, criminal responsibility is a question of substantive law. Jurisdictional immunity may well bar prosecution for a certain period or for certain offences; it cannot exonerate the person to whom it applies from all criminal responsibility.

61. Accordingly, the immunities enjoyed under international law by an incumbent or former Minister for Foreign Affairs do not represent a bar to criminal prosecution in certain circumstances.

First, such persons enjoy no criminal immunity under international law in their own countries, and may thus be tried by those countries' courts in accordance with the relevant rules of domestic law. Secondly, they will cease to enjoy immunity from foreign jurisdiction if the State which they represent or have represented decides to waive that immunity.

Thirdly, after a person ceases to hold the office of Minister for Foreign Affairs, he or she will no longer enjoy all of the immunities accorded by international law in other States. Provided that it has jurisdiction under international law, a court of one State may try a former Minister for Foreign Affairs of another State in respect of acts committed prior or subsequent to his or her period of office, as well as in respect of acts committed during that period of office in a private capacity.



Fourthly, an incumbent or former Minister for Foreign Affairs may be subject to criminal proceedings before certain international criminal courts, where they have jurisdiction. Examples include the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, established pursuant to Security Council resolutions under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, and the future International Criminal Court created by the 1998 Rome Convention. The latter's Statute expressly provides, in Article 27, paragraph 2, that "[i]mmunities or special procedural rules which may attach to the official capacity of a person, whether under national or international law, shall not bar the Court from exercising its jurisdiction over such a person".

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62. Given the conclusions it has reached above concerning the nature and scope of the rules governing the immunity from criminal jurisdiction enjoyed by incumbent Ministers for Foreign Affairs, the Court must now consider whether in the present case the issue of the arrest warrant of 11 April 2000 and its international circulation violated those rules. The Court recalls in this regard that the Congo requests it, in its first final submission, to adjudge and declare that:

“[B]y issuing and internationally circulating the arrest warrant of 11 April 2000 against Mr. Abdulaye Yerodia Ndombasi, Belgium committed a violation in regard to the Democratic Republic of the Congo of the rule of customary international law concerning the absolute inviolability and immunity from criminal process of incumbent foreign ministers; in so doing, it violated the principle of sovereign equality among States.”

63. In support of this submission, the Congo maintains that the arrest warrant of 11 April 2000 as such represents a “coercive legal act” which violates the Congo’s immunity and sovereign rights, inasmuch as it seeks to “subject to an organ of domestic criminal jurisdiction a member of a foreign government who is in principle beyond its reach” and is fully enforceable without special formality in Belgium.

The Congo considers that the mere issuance of the warrant thus constituted a coercive measure taken against the person of Mr. Yerodia, even if it was not executed.

64. As regards the international circulation of the said arrest warrant, this, in the Congo’s view, not only involved further violations of the rules referred to above, but also aggravated the moral injury which it suffered as a result of the opprobrium “thus cast upon one of the most prominent members of its Government”. The Congo further argues that such circulation was a fundamental infringement of its sovereign rights in that it significantly restricted the full and free exercise, by its Minister for Foreign Affairs, of the international negotiation and representation functions entrusted to him by the Congo’s former President. In the Congo’s view, Belgium “[thus] manifests an intention to have the individual concerned arrested at the place where he is to be found, with a view to procuring his extradition”. The Congo emphasizes moreover that it is necessary to avoid any confusion between the arguments concerning the legal effect of the arrest warrant abroad and the question of any responsibility of the foreign authorities giving effect to it. It points out in this regard that no State has acted on the arrest warrant, and that accordingly “no further consideration need be given to the specific responsibility which a State executing it might incur, or to the way in which that responsibility should be related” to that of the Belgian State. The Congo observes that, in such circumstances, “there [would be] a direct causal relationship between the arrest warrant issued in Belgium and any act of enforcement carried out elsewhere”.

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67. The Court will first recall that the “international arrest warrant in absentia”, issued on 11 April 2000 by an investigating judge of the Brussels *Tribunal de première instance*, is directed against Mr. Yerodia, stating that he is “currently Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, having his business address at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kinshasa”.

The warrant states that Mr. Yerodia is charged with being “the perpetrator or co-perpetrator” of:

“—Crimes under international law constituting grave breaches causing harm by act or omission to persons and property protected by the Conventions signed at Geneva on 12 August 1949 and by Additional Protocols I and II to those Conventions (Article 1, paragraph 3, of the Law of 16 June 1993, as amended by the Law of 10 February 1999 concerning the punishment of serious violations of international humanitarian law)

— Crimes against humanity (Article 1, paragraph 2, of the Law of 16 June 1993, as amended by the Law of 10 February 1999 concerning the punishment of serious violations of international humanitarian law).”

The warrant refers to “various speeches inciting racial hatred” and to “particularly virulent remarks” allegedly made by Mr. Yerodia during “public addresses reported by the media” on 4 August and 27 August 1998. It adds:

“These speeches allegedly had the effect of inciting the population to attack Tutsi residents of Kinshasa: there were dragnet searches, manhunts (the Tutsi enemy) and lynchings.

The speeches inciting racial hatred thus are said to have resulted in several hundred deaths, the internment of Tutsis, summary executions, arbitrary arrests and unfair trials.”

68. The warrant further states that “the position of Minister for Foreign Affairs currently held by the accused does not entail immunity from jurisdiction and enforcement”. The investigating judge does, however, observe in the warrant that “the rule concerning the absence of immunity under humanitarian law would appear . . . to require some qualification in respect of immunity from enforcement” and explains as follows:

“Pursuant to the general principle of fairness in judicial proceedings, immunity from enforcement must, in our view, be accorded to all State representatives welcomed as such onto the territory of Belgium (on ‘official visits’). Welcoming such foreign dignitaries as official representatives of sovereign States involves not only relations between individuals but also relations between States. This implies that such welcome includes an undertaking by the host State and its various components to refrain from taking any coercive measures against its guest and the invitation cannot become a pretext for ensnaring the individual concerned in what would then have to be labelled a trap. In the contrary case, failure to respect this undertaking could give rise to the host State’s international responsibility.”

69. The arrest warrant concludes with the following order:

“We instruct and order all bailiffs and agents of public authority who may be so required to execute this arrest warrant and to conduct the accused to the detention centre in Forest;

We order the warden of the prison to receive the accused and to keep him (her) in custody in the detention centre pursuant to this arrest warrant;

We require all those exercising public authority to whom this warrant shall be shown to lend all assistance in executing it.”

70. The Court notes that the *issuance*, as such, of the disputed arrest warrant represents an act by the Belgian judicial authorities intended to enable the arrest on Belgian territory of an incumbent Minister for Foreign Affairs on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The fact that the warrant is enforceable is clearly apparent from the order given to “all bailiffs and agents of public authority . . . to execute this arrest warrant” (see paragraph 69 above) and from the assertion in the warrant that “the position of Minister for Foreign Affairs currently held by the accused does not entail immunity from jurisdiction and enforcement”. The Court notes that the warrant did admittedly make an exception for the case of an official visit by Mr. Yerodia to Belgium, and that Mr. Yerodia never suffered arrest in Belgium. The Court is bound, however, to find that, given the nature and purpose of the warrant, its mere issue violated the immunity which Mr. Yerodia enjoyed as the Congo’s incumbent Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The Court accordingly concludes that the issue of the warrant constituted a violation of an obligation of Belgium towards the Congo, in that it failed to respect the immunity of that Minister and, more particularly, infringed the immunity from criminal jurisdiction and the inviolability then enjoyed by him under international law.

71. The Court also notes that Belgium admits that the purpose of the international *circulation* of the disputed arrest warrant was “to establish a legal basis for the arrest of Mr. Yerodia . . . abroad and his subsequent extradition to Belgium”. The Respondent maintains, however, that the enforcement of the warrant in third States was “dependent on some further preliminary steps having been taken” and that, given the “inchoate” quality of the warrant as regards third States, there was no “infringe[ment of] the sovereignty of the [Congo]”. It further points out that no Interpol Red Notice was requested until 12 September 2001, when Mr. Yerodia no longer held ministerial office.

The Court cannot subscribe to this view. As in the case of the warrant’s issue, its international circulation from June 2000 by the Belgian authorities, given its nature and purpose, effectively infringed Mr. Yerodia’s immunity as the Congo’s incumbent Minister for Foreign Affairs and was furthermore liable to affect the Congo’s conduct of its international relations. Since Mr. Yerodia was called upon in that capacity to undertake travel in the performance of his duties, the mere international circulation of the warrant, even in the absence of “further steps” by Belgium, could have resulted, in particular, in his arrest while abroad. The Court observes in this respect that Belgium itself cites information to the effect that Mr. Yerodia, “on applying for a visa to go to two countries, [apparently] learned that he ran the risk of being arrested as a result of the arrest warrant issued against him by Belgium”, adding that “[t]his, moreover, is what the [Congo] . . . hints when it writes that the arrest warrant ‘sometimes forced Minister Yerodia to travel by roundabout routes’”. Accordingly, the Court concludes that the circulation of the warrant, whether or not it significantly interfered with Mr. Yerodia’s diplomatic activity, constituted a

violation of an obligation of Belgium towards the Congo, in that it failed to respect the immunity of the incumbent Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Congo and, more particularly, infringed the immunity from criminal jurisdiction and the inviolability then enjoyed by him under international law.

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72. The Court will now address the issue of the remedies sought by the Congo on account of Belgium's violation of the above-mentioned rules of international law. In its second, third and fourth submissions, the Congo requests the Court to adjudge and declare that:

“A formal finding by the Court of the unlawfulness of [the issue and international circulation of the arrest warrant] constitutes an appropriate form of satisfaction, providing reparation for the consequent moral injury to the Democratic Republic of the Congo;

The violations of international law underlying the issue and international circulation of the arrest warrant of 11 April 2000 preclude any State, including Belgium, from executing it;

Belgium shall be required to recall and cancel the arrest warrant of 11 April 2000 and to inform the foreign authorities to whom the warrant was circulated that Belgium renounces its request for their co-operation in executing the unlawful warrant.”

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75. The Court has already concluded (see paragraphs 70 and 71) that the issue and circulation of the arrest warrant of 11 April 2000 by the Belgian authorities failed to respect the immunity of the incumbent Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Congo and, more particularly, infringed the immunity from criminal jurisdiction and the inviolability then enjoyed by Mr. Yerodia under international law. Those acts engaged Belgium's international responsibility. The Court considers that the findings so reached by it constitute a form of satisfaction which will make good the moral injury complained of by the Congo.

76. However, as the Permanent Court of International Justice stated in its Judgment of 13 September 1928 in the case concerning the *Factory at Chorzów*: “[t]he essential principle contained in the actual notion of an illegal act — a principle which seems to be established by international practice and in particular by the decisions of arbitral tribunals — is that reparation must, as far as possible, wipe out all the consequences of the illegal act and reestablish the situation which would, in all probability, have existed if that act had not been committed” (*P.C.I.J., Series A, No. 17, p. 47*).

In the present case, “the situation which would, in all probability, have existed if [the illegal act] had not been committed” cannot be re-established merely by a finding by the Court that the arrest warrant was unlawful under international law. The warrant is still extant, and remains unlawful, notwithstanding the fact that Mr. Yerodia has ceased to be Minister for Foreign Affairs. The Court accordingly considers that Belgium must, by means of its own choosing, cancel the warrant in question and so inform the authorities to whom it was circulated.

77. The Court sees no need for any further remedy: in particular, the Court cannot, in a judgment ruling on a dispute between the Congo and Belgium, indicate what that judgment's implications might be for third States, and the Court cannot therefore accept the Congo's submissions on this point.

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78. For these reasons, THE COURT,

(1) (A) By fifteen votes to one,

*Rejects* the objections of the Kingdom of Belgium relating to jurisdiction, mootness and admissibility;

IN FAVOUR: *President* Guillaume; *Vice-President* Shi; *Judges* Ranjeva, Herczegh, Fleischhauer, Koroma, Vereshchetin, Higgins, Parra-Aranguren, Kooijmans, Rezek, Al-Khasawneh, Buergenthal; *Judges ad hoc* Bula-Bula, Van den Wyngaert;

AGAINST: *Judge* Oda;

(B) By fifteen votes to one,

*Finds* that it has jurisdiction to entertain the Application filed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 17 October 2000;

IN FAVOUR: *President* Guillaume; *Vice-President* Shi; *Judges* Ranjeva, Herczegh, Fleischhauer, Koroma, Vereshchetin, Higgins, Parra-Aranguren, Kooijmans, Rezek, Al-Khasawneh, Buergenthal; *Judges ad hoc* Bula-Bula, Van den Wyngaert;

AGAINST: *Judge* Oda;

(C) By fifteen votes to one,

*Finds* that the Application of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not without object and that accordingly the case is not moot;

IN FAVOUR: *President* Guillaume; *Vice-President* Shi; *Judges* Ranjeva, Herczegh, Fleischhauer, Koroma, Vereshchetin, Higgins, Parra-Aranguren, Kooijmans, Rezek, Al-Khasawneh, Buergenthal; *Judges ad hoc* Bula-Bula, Van den Wyngaert;

AGAINST: *Judge* Oda;

(D) By fifteen votes to one,

*Finds* that the Application of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is admissible;

IN FAVOUR: *President* Guillaume; *Vice-President* Shi; *Judges* Ranjeva, Herczegh, Fleischhauer, Koroma, Vereshchetin, Higgins, Parra-Aranguren, Kooijmans, Rezek, Al-Khasawneh, Buergenthal; *Judges ad hoc* Bula-Bula, Van den Wyngaert;

AGAINST: *Judge* Oda;

(2) By thirteen votes to three,

*Finds* that the issue against Mr. Abdulaye Yerodia Ndombasi of the arrest warrant of 11 April 2000, and its international circulation, constituted violations of a legal obligation of the Kingdom of Belgium towards the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in that they failed to respect the immunity from criminal jurisdiction and the inviolability which the incumbent Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo enjoyed under international law;

IN FAVOUR: *President* Guillaume; *Vice-President* Shi; *Judges* Ranjeva, Herczegh, Fleischhauer, Koroma, Vereshchetin, Higgins, Parra-Aranguren, Kooijmans, Rezek, Buergenthal; *Judge ad hoc* Bula-Bula;

AGAINST: *Judges* Oda, Al-Khasawneh; *Judge ad hoc* Van den Wyngaert;

(3) By ten votes to six,

*Finds* that the Kingdom of Belgium must, by means of its own choosing, cancel the arrest warrant of 11 April 2000 and so inform the authorities to whom that warrant was circulated;

IN FAVOUR: *President* Guillaume; *Vice-President* Shi; *Judges* Ranjeva, Herczegh, Fleischhauer, Koroma, Vereshchetin, Parra-Aranguren, Rezek; *Judge ad hoc* Bula-Bula;  
AGAINST: *Judges* Oda, Higgins, Kooijmans, Al-Khasawneh, Buergenthal; *Judge ad hoc* Van den Wyngaert.

Done in French and in English, the French text being authoritative, at the Peace Palace, The Hague, this fourteenth day of February, two thousand and two, in three copies, one of which will be placed in the archives of the Court and the others transmitted to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Government of the Kingdom of Belgium, respectively.

*(Signed)* Gilbert GUILLAUME,  
President.

*(Signed)* Philippe COUVREUR,  
Registrar.

President GUILLAUME appends a separate opinion to the Judgment of the Court [*attached*]; Judge ODA appends a dissenting opinion to the Judgment of the Court; Judge RANJEVA appends a declaration to the Judgment of the Court; Judge KOROMA appends a separate opinion to the Judgment of the Court; Judges HIGGINS, KOOIJMANS and BUERGENTHAL append a joint separate opinion to the Judgment of the Court [*attached*]; Judge REZEK appends a separate opinion to the Judgment of the Court; Judge AL-KHASAWNEH appends a dissenting opinion to the Judgment of the Court; Judge *ad hoc* BULA-BULA appends a separate opinion to the Judgment of the Court; Judge *ad hoc* VAN DEN WYNGAERT appends a dissenting opinion to the Judgment of the Court.

*(Initialed)* G.G.

*(Initialed)* Ph.C.

**SEPARATE OPINION OF PRESIDENT GUILLAUME**

...

1. I fully subscribe to the Judgment rendered by the Court. I believe it useful however to set out my position on one question which the Judgment has not addressed: whether the Belgian judge had jurisdiction to issue an international arrest warrant against Mr. Yerodia Ndombasi on 11 April 2000.

This question was raised in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Application instituting proceedings. The Congo maintained that the arrest warrant violated not only Mr. Yerodia's immunity as Minister for Foreign Affairs but also "the principle that a State may not exercise its authority on the territory of another State". It accordingly concluded that the universal jurisdiction which the Belgian State had conferred upon itself pursuant to Article 7 of the Law of 16 June 1993, as amended on 10 February 1999, was in breach of international law and that the same was therefore true of the disputed arrest warrant.

The Congo did not elaborate on this line of argument during the oral proceedings and did not include it in its final submissions. Thus, the Court could not rule on this point in the operative part of its Judgment. It could, however, have addressed certain aspects of the question of universal jurisdiction in the reasoning for its decision (see Judgment, para. 43).

That would have been a logical approach; a court's jurisdiction is a question which it must decide before considering the immunity of those before it. In other words, there can only be immunity from jurisdiction where there is jurisdiction. Moreover, this is an important and controversial issue, clarification of which would have been in the interest of all States, including Belgium in particular. I believe it worthwhile to provide such clarification here.

...

[4.] The primary aim of the criminal law is to enable punishment in each country of offences committed in the national territory. That territory is where evidence of the offence can most often be gathered. That is where the offence generally produces its effects. Finally, that is where the punishment imposed can most naturally serve as an example. Thus, the Permanent Court of International Justice observed as far back as 1927 that "in all systems of law the principle of the territorial character of criminal law is fundamental". ("Lotus", Judgment No. 9, 1927 P.C.I.J., Series A, No. 10, p. 20).

The question has, however, always remained open whether States other than the territorial State have concurrent jurisdiction to prosecute offenders. . . .

In practice, the principle of territorial sovereignty did not permit of any exception in respect of coercive action, but that was not the case in regard to legislative and judicial jurisdiction. In particular, classic international law does not exclude a State's power in some cases to exercise its judicial jurisdiction over offences committed abroad. But as the Permanent Court stated, once again in the "*Lotus*" case, the exercise of that jurisdiction is not without its limits. ("*Lotus*", p. 19) Under the law as classically formulated, a State normally has jurisdiction over an offence committed abroad only if the offender, or at the very least the victim, has the nationality of that State or if the crime threatens its internal or external security. Ordinarily, States are without jurisdiction over crimes committed abroad as between foreigners.

5. Traditionally, customary international law did, however, recognize one case of universal

jurisdiction, that of piracy. In more recent times, Article 19 of the Geneva Convention on the High Seas of 29 April 1958 and Article 105 of the Montego Bay Convention of 10 December 1982 have provided:

“On the high seas, or in any other place outside the jurisdiction of any State, every State may seize a pirate ship or aircraft . . . and arrest the persons and seize the property on board. The courts of the State which carried out the seizure may decide upon the penalties to be imposed.”

Thus, under these conventions, universal jurisdiction is accepted in cases of piracy because piracy is carried out on the high seas, outside all State territory. However, even on the high seas, classic international law is highly restrictive, for it recognizes universal jurisdiction only in cases of piracy and not of other comparable crimes which might also be committed outside the jurisdiction of coastal States, such as trafficking in slaves or in narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances.

6. The drawbacks of this approach became clear at the beginning of the twentieth century in respect of currency counterfeiting, and the Convention of 20 April 1929, prepared within the League of Nations, marked a certain development in this regard. That Convention enabled States to extend their criminal legislation to counterfeiting crimes involving foreign currency. It added that “[f]oreigners who have committed abroad” any offence referred to in the Convention “and who are in the territory of a country whose internal legislation recognises as a general rule the principle of the prosecution of offences committed abroad, should be punishable in the same way as if the offence had been committed in the territory of that country”. But it made that obligation subject to various conditions. . . .

7. A further step was taken in this direction beginning in 1970 in connection with the fight against international terrorism. To that end, States established a novel mechanism: compulsory, albeit subsidiary, universal jurisdiction.

This fundamental innovation was effected by The Hague Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft of 16 December 1970. The Convention places an obligation on the State in whose territory the perpetrator of the crime takes refuge to extradite or prosecute him. But this would have been insufficient if the Convention had not at the same time placed the States parties under an obligation to establish their jurisdiction for that purpose. Thus, Article 4, paragraph 2, of the Convention provides:

“Each Contracting State shall . . . take such measures as may be necessary to establish its jurisdiction over the offence in the case where the alleged offender is present in its territory and it does not extradite him pursuant to [the Convention].”

This provision marked a turning point, of which The Hague Conference was moreover conscious. From then on, the obligation to prosecute was no longer conditional on the existence of jurisdiction, but rather jurisdiction itself had to be established in order to make prosecution possible.

8. The system as thus adopted was repeated with some minor variations in a large number of conventions . . . [*Judge Guillaume goes on to list a number of conventions, from 1971-1999, dealing with aircraft hijackings, torture, stealing nuclear materials, terrorist bombings, funding terrorism, etc.*]



9. Thus, a system corresponding to the doctrines espoused long ago by Grotius was set up by treaty. Whenever the perpetrator of any of the offences covered by these conventions is found in the territory of a State, that State is under an obligation to arrest him, and then extradite or prosecute. It must have first conferred jurisdiction on its courts to try him if he is not extradited. Thus, universal punishment of the offences in question is assured, as the perpetrators are denied refuge in all States.

By contrast, none of these texts has contemplated establishing jurisdiction over offences committed abroad by foreigners against foreigners when the perpetrator is not present in the territory of the State in question. Universal jurisdiction *in absentia* is unknown to international conventional law.

10. Thus, in the absence of conventional provisions, Belgium, both in its written Memorial and in oral argument, relies essentially on this point on international customary law.

11. In this connection, Belgium cites the development of international criminal courts. But this development was precisely in order to provide a remedy for the deficiencies of national courts, and the rules governing the jurisdiction of international courts as laid down by treaty or by the Security Council of course have no effect upon the jurisdiction of national courts.

12. Hence, Belgium essentially seeks to justify its position by relying on the practice of States and their *opinio juris*. However, the national legislation and jurisprudence cited in the case file do not support the Belgian argument . . . [Judge Guillaume goes on to quote provisions of the French, German, and Dutch criminal codes, as well as the decision of Lord Slynn of Hadley in the first Pinochet case. Each country requires that an alleged perpetrator of genocide or torture be present in the territory of the country before the courts have jurisdiction. Guillaume notes that the only country with legislation or jurisprudence going the other way is Israel, “which in this field obviously constitutes a very special case.”]

In other words, international law knows only one true case of universal jurisdiction: piracy. Further, a number of international conventions provide for the establishment of subsidiary universal jurisdiction for purposes of the trial of certain offenders arrested on national territory and not extradited to a foreign country. Universal jurisdiction *in absentia* as applied in the present case is unknown to international law.

13. Having found that neither treaty law nor international customary law provide a State with the possibility of conferring universal jurisdiction on its courts where the author of the offence is not present on its territory, Belgium contends lastly that, even in the absence of any treaty or custom to this effect, it enjoyed total freedom of action. To this end it cites from the Judgment of the Permanent Court of International Justice in the “*Lotus*” case:

“Far from laying down a general prohibition to the effect that States may not extend the application of their laws and the jurisdiction of their courts to persons, property and acts outside their territory, [international law] leaves them in this respect a wide measure of discretion which is only limited in certain cases by prohibitive rules . . .” [“*Lotus*” p. 19]

Hence, so Belgium claimed, in the absence of any prohibitive rule it was entitled to confer upon itself a universal jurisdiction *in absentia*.

14. This argument is hardly persuasive. Indeed the Permanent Court itself, having laid down the general principle cited by Belgium, then asked itself “whether the foregoing considerations really

apply as regards criminal jurisdiction”. [“Lotus” p. 20] It held that either this might be the case, or alternatively, that: “the exclusively territorial character of law relating to this domain constitutes a principle which, except as otherwise expressly provided, would, *ipso facto*, prevent States from extending the criminal jurisdiction of their courts beyond their frontiers”. [“Lotus” p. 20] In the particular case before it, the Permanent Court took the view that it was unnecessary to decide the point. Given that the case involved the collision of a French vessel with a Turkish vessel, the Court confined itself to noting that the effects of the offence in question had made themselves felt on Turkish territory, and that consequently a criminal prosecution might “be justified from the point of view of this so called territorial principle”. [“Lotus” p. 23]

15. The absence of a decision by the Permanent Court on the point was understandable in 1927, given the sparse treaty law at that time. The situation is different today, it seems to me — totally different. The adoption of the United Nations Charter proclaiming the sovereign equality of States, and the appearance on the international scene of new States, born of decolonization, have strengthened the territorial principle. International criminal law has itself undergone considerable development and constitutes today an impressive legal *corpus*. It recognizes in many situations the possibility, or indeed the obligation, for a State other than that on whose territory the offence was committed to confer jurisdiction on its courts to prosecute the authors of certain crimes where they are present on its territory. International criminal courts have been created. But at no time has it been envisaged that jurisdiction should be conferred upon the courts of every State in the world to prosecute such crimes, whoever their authors and victims and irrespective of the place where the offender is to be found. To do this would, moreover, risk creating total judicial chaos. It would also be to encourage the arbitrary for the benefit of the powerful, purportedly acting as agent for an ill-defined “international community”. Contrary to what is advocated by certain publicists, such a development would represent not an advance in the law but a step backward.

16. States primarily exercise their criminal jurisdiction on their own territory. In classic international law, they normally have jurisdiction in respect of an offence committed abroad only if the offender, or at least the victim, is of their nationality, or if the crime threatens their internal or external security. Additionally, they may exercise jurisdiction in cases of piracy and in the situations of subsidiary universal jurisdiction provided for by various conventions if the offender is present on their territory. But apart from these cases, international law does not accept universal jurisdiction; still less does it accept universal jurisdiction *in absentia*.

17. Passing now to the specific case before us, I would observe that Mr. Yerodia Ndombasi is accused of two types of offence, namely serious war crimes, punishable under the Geneva Conventions, and crimes against humanity.

As regards the first count, I note that, under Article 49 of the First Geneva Convention, Article 50 of the Second Convention, Article 129 of the Third Convention and Article 146 of the Fourth Convention:

“Each High Contracting Party shall be under the obligation to search for persons alleged to have committed, or to have ordered to be committed, [certain] grave breaches [of the Convention], and shall bring such persons, regardless of their nationality, before its own courts. It may also, if it prefers, and in accordance with the provisions of its own legislation, hand such persons over for trial to another High Contracting Party concerned . . .”

This provision requires each contracting party to search out alleged offenders and bring them

before its courts (unless it prefers to hand them over to another party). However, the Geneva Conventions do not contain any provision on jurisdiction comparable, for example, to Article 4 of The Hague Convention already cited. What is more, they do not create any obligation of search, arrest or prosecution in cases where the offenders are not present on the territory of the State concerned. They accordingly cannot in any event found a universal jurisdiction *in absentia*. Thus Belgium could not confer such jurisdiction on its courts on the basis of these Conventions, and the proceedings instituted in this case against Mr. Yerodia Ndombasi on account of war crimes were brought by a judge who was not competent to do so in the eyes of international law.

The same applies as regards the proceedings for crimes against humanity. No international convention, apart from the Rome Convention of 17 July 1998, which is not in force, deals with the prosecution of such crimes. Thus the Belgian judge, no doubt aware of this problem, felt himself entitled in his warrant to cite the Convention against Torture of 10 December 1984. But it is not permissible in criminal proceedings to reason by analogy, as the Permanent Court of International Justice indeed pointed out in its Advisory Opinion of 4 December 1935 concerning the *Consistency of Certain Danzig Legislative Decrees with the Constitution of the Free City*. [*Advisory Opinion*, 1935, P.C.I.J., Series A/B, No. 65, pp. 41 *et seq.*] There too, proceedings were instituted by a judge not competent in the eyes of international law.

If the Court had addressed these questions, it seems to me that it ought therefore to have found that the Belgian judge was wrong in holding himself competent to prosecute Mr. Yerodia Ndombasi by relying on a universal jurisdiction incompatible with international law.

*(Signed)* Gilbert GUILLAUME.

**JOINT SEPARATE OPINION OF JUDGES HIGGINS, KOOIJMANS AND BUERGENTHAL**

...

1. We generally agree with what the Court has to say on the issues of jurisdiction and admissibility and also with the conclusions it reaches. There are, however, reservations that we find it necessary to make, both on what the Court has said and what it has chosen not to say when it deals with the merits. Moreover, we consider that the Court erred in ordering Belgium to cancel the outstanding arrest warrant.

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2. In its Judgment the Court says nothing on the question of whether — quite apart from the status of Mr. Yerodia at the relevant time — the Belgian magistracy was entitled under international law to issue an arrest warrant for someone not at that time within its territory and pass it to Interpol. It has, in effect, acceded to the common wish of the Parties that the Court should not pronounce upon the key issue of jurisdiction that divided them, but should rather pass immediately to the question of immunity as it applied to the facts of this case.

3. In our opinion it was not only desirable, but indeed necessary, that the Court should have stated its position on this issue of jurisdiction. The reasons are various. “Immunity” is the common shorthand phrase for “immunity from jurisdiction”. If there is no jurisdiction *en principe*, then the question of an immunity from a jurisdiction which would otherwise exist simply does not arise. The Court, in passing over the question of jurisdiction, has given the impression that “immunity” is a free-standing topic of international law. It is not. “Immunity” and “jurisdiction” are inextricably linked. Whether there is “immunity” in any given instance will depend not only upon the status of Mr. Yerodia but also upon what type of jurisdiction, and on what basis, the Belgian authorities were seeking to assert it.

4. While the notion of “immunity” depends, conceptually, upon a pre-existing jurisdiction, there is a distinct corpus of law that applies to each. What can be cited to support an argument about the one is not always relevant to an understanding of the other. In bypassing the issue of jurisdiction the Court has encouraged a regrettable current tendency (which the oral and written pleadings in this case have not wholly avoided) to conflate the two issues.

5. Only if it is fully appreciated that there are two distinct norms of international law in play (albeit that the one — immunity — can arise only if the other — jurisdiction — exists) can the larger picture be seen. One of the challenges of present-day international law is to provide for stability of international relations and effective international intercourse while at the same time guaranteeing respect for human rights. The difficult task that international law today faces is to provide that stability in international relations by a means other than the impunity of those responsible for major human rights violations. This challenge is reflected in the present dispute and the Court should surely be engaged in this task, even as it fulfils its function of resolving a dispute that has arisen before it. But through choosing to look at half the story — immunity — it is not in a position to do so.

6. As Mr. Yerodia was a non-national of Belgium and the alleged offences described in the arrest warrant occurred outside of the territory over which Belgium has jurisdiction, the victims being non-Belgians, the arrest warrant was necessarily predicated on a universal jurisdiction. Indeed, both it and the enabling legislation of 1993 and 1999 expressly say so. Moreover, Mr. Yerodia himself was outside of Belgium at the time the warrant was issued.

...

[Paragraphs 7-18 indicate that the non ultra petita rule (applicable here to the issue of universal criminal jurisdiction because neither the Congo nor Belgium asked ICJ to rule on it) does not operate to bar the ICJ from addressing issues necessary to dispose of the case one way or the other. In paragraphs 19-52, the Judges in this separate opinion reviewed analyze the state practice--national legislation, cases, and international treaties--that Judge Guillaume reviewed in his separate opinion. Unlike Judge Guillaume, however, Judges Higgins, Kooijmans and Buergenthal examined state practice and concluded that international law is evolving to allow universal jurisdiction over crimes other than piracy, such as crimes against humanity and similarly heinous crimes. In paragraphs 53-58, these judges also found there was no bar to the exercise of universal jurisdiction in absentia.]

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59. If, as we believe to be the case, a State may choose to exercise a universal criminal jurisdiction *in absentia*, it must also ensure that certain safeguards are in place. They are absolutely essential to prevent abuse and to ensure that the rejection of impunity does not jeopardize stable relations between States.

No exercise of criminal jurisdiction may occur which fails to respect the inviolability or infringes the immunities of the person concerned. We return below to certain aspects of this facet, but will say at this juncture that commencing an investigation on the basis of which an arrest warrant may later be issued does not of itself violate those principles. The function served by the international law of immunities does not require that States fail to keep themselves informed.

A State contemplating bringing criminal charges based on universal jurisdiction must first offer to the national State of the prospective accused person the opportunity itself to act upon the charges concerned. The Court makes reference to these elements in the context of this case at paragraph 16 of its Judgment.

Further, such charges may only be laid by a prosecutor or *juge d'instruction* who acts in full independence, without links to or control by the government of that State. Moreover, the desired equilibrium between the battle against impunity and the promotion of good inter-State relations will only be maintained if there are some special circumstances that do require the exercise of an international criminal jurisdiction and if this has been brought to the attention of the prosecutor or *juge d'instruction*. For example, persons related to the victims of the case will have requested the commencement of legal proceedings.

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60. It is equally necessary that universal criminal jurisdiction be exercised only over those crimes regarded as the most heinous by the international community.

61. Piracy is the classical example. This jurisdiction was, of course, exercised on the high seas and not as an enforcement jurisdiction within the territory of a non-agreeing State. But this historical fact does not mean that universal jurisdiction only exists with regard to crimes committed on the high seas or in other places outside national territorial jurisdiction. Of decisive importance is that this jurisdiction was regarded as lawful because the international community regarded piracy as damaging to the interests of all. War crimes and crimes against humanity are no less harmful to the interests of all because they do not usually occur on the high seas. War crimes (already since 1949 perhaps a treaty-based provision for universal jurisdiction) may be added to the list. The specification of their content is largely based upon the 1949 Conventions and those parts of the 1977 Additional Protocols that reflect general international law. Recent years have also seen the phenomenon of an alignment of national jurisdictional legislation on war crimes, specifying those crimes under the statutes of the ICTY, ICTR and the intended ICC.

62. The substantive content of the concept of crimes against humanity, and its status as crimes warranting the exercise of universal jurisdiction, is undergoing change. Article 6 (c) of the Charter of the International Military Tribunal of 8 August, 1945, envisaged them as a category linked with those crimes over which the Tribunal had jurisdiction (war crimes, crimes against the peace). In 1950 the International Law Commission defined them as murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation or other inhuman acts perpetrated on the citizen population, or persecutions on political, racial or religious grounds if in exercise of, or connection with, any crime against peace or a war crime (*YILC* 1950, Principle VI (c), pp. 374-377). Later definitions of crimes against humanity both widened the subject-matter, to include such offences as torture and rape, and de-coupled the link to other earlier established crimes. Crimes against humanity are now regarded as a distinct category. . . .

63. The Belgian legislation of 1999 asserts a universal jurisdiction over acts broadly defined as “grave breaches of international humanitarian law”, and the list is a compendium of war crimes and the Draft Codes of Offences listing of crimes against humanity, with genocide being added. Genocide is also included as a listed “crime against humanity” in the 1968 Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutes of Limitation to War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity, as well as being included in the ICTY, ICTR and ICC Statutes.

64. The arrest warrant issued against Mr. Yerodia accuses him both of war crimes and of crimes against humanity. As regards the latter, charges of incitement to racial hatred, which are said to have led to murders and lynchings, were specified. Fitting of this charge within the generally understood substantive context of crimes against humanity is not without its problems. “Racial hatred” would need to be assimilated to “persecution on racial grounds”, or, on the particular facts, to mass murder and extermination. . . .

65. It would seem (without in any way pronouncing upon whether Mr. Yerodia did or did not perform the acts with which he is charged in the warrant) that the acts alleged do fall within the concept of “crimes against humanity” and would be within that small category in respect of which an exercise of universal jurisdiction is not precluded under international law. . . .

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70. We now turn to the findings of the Court on the impact of the issue of circulation of the warrant on the inviolability and immunity of Mr. Yerodia.

71. As to the matter of immunity, although we agree in general with what has been said in the Court’s Judgment with regard to the specific issue put before it, we nevertheless feel that the approach chosen by the Court has to a certain extent transformed the character of the case before it. By focusing exclusively on the immunity issue, while at the same time bypassing the question of jurisdiction, the impression is created that immunity has value *per se*, whereas in reality it is an exception to a normative rule which would otherwise apply. It reflects, therefore, an interest which in certain circumstances prevails over an otherwise predominant interest, it is an exception to a jurisdiction which normally can be exercised and it can only be invoked when the latter exists. It represents an interest of its own that must always be balanced, however, against the interest of that norm to which it is an exception.

. . . [73.]As we said in paragraph 49, a gradual movement towards bases of jurisdiction other than territoriality can be discerned. This slow but steady shifting to a more extensive application of extraterritorial jurisdiction by States reflects the emergence of values which enjoy an ever-increasing recognition in international society. One such value is the importance of the

punishment of the perpetrators of international crimes. In this respect it is necessary to point out once again that this development not only has led to the establishment of new international tribunals and treaty systems in which new competences are attributed to national courts but also to the recognition of other, non-territorially based grounds of national jurisdiction (see paragraph 51 above).

74. The increasing recognition of the importance of ensuring that the perpetrators of serious international crimes do not go unpunished has had its impact on the immunities which high State dignitaries enjoyed under traditional customary law. Now it is generally recognized that in the case of such crimes, which are often committed by high officials who make use of the power invested in the State, immunity is never substantive and thus cannot exculpate the offender from personal criminal responsibility. It has also given rise to a tendency, in the case of international crimes, to grant procedural immunity from jurisdiction only for as long as the suspected State official is in office.

75. These trends reflect a balancing of interests. On the one scale, we find the interest of the community of mankind to prevent and stop impunity for perpetrators of grave crimes against its members; on the other, there is the interest of the community of States to allow them to act freely on the inter-State level without unwarranted interference. A balance therefore must be struck between two sets of functions which are both valued by the international community. Reflecting these concerns, what is regarded as a permissible jurisdiction and what is regarded as the law on immunity are in constant evolution. The weights on the two scales are not set for all perpetuity. Moreover, a trend is discernible that in a world which increasingly rejects impunity for the most repugnant offences, the attribution of responsibility and accountability is becoming firmer, the possibility for the assertion of jurisdiction wider and the availability of immunity as a shield more limited. The law of privileges and immunities, however, retains its importance since immunities are granted to high State officials to guarantee the proper functioning of the network of mutual inter-State relations, which is of paramount importance for a well-ordered and harmonious international system.

76. Such is the backdrop of the case submitted to the Court. Belgium claims that under international law it is permitted to initiate criminal proceedings against a State official who is under suspicion of having committed crimes which are generally condemned by the international community; and it contends that because of the nature of these crimes the individual in question is no longer shielded by personal immunity. The Congo does not deny that a Foreign Minister is responsible in international law for all of his acts. It asserts instead that he has absolute personal immunity from criminal jurisdiction as long as he is in office and that his status must be assimilated in this respect to that of a Head of State (Memorial of Congo, p. 30).

77. Each of the Parties, therefore, gives particular emphasis in its argument to one set of interests referred to above: Belgium to that of the prevention of impunity, the Congo to that of the prevention of unwarranted outside interference as the result of an excessive curtailment of immunities and an excessive extension of jurisdiction.

78. In the Judgment, the Court diminishes somewhat the significance of Belgium's arguments. After having emphasized — and we could not agree more — that the immunity from jurisdiction enjoyed by incumbent Ministers for Foreign Affairs does not mean that they enjoy impunity in respect of any crimes they might have committed (para. 60), the Court goes on to say that these immunities do not represent a bar to criminal prosecution in certain circumstances (para. 61). We feel less than sanguine about examples given by the Court of such circumstances. The chance that a Minister for Foreign Affairs will be tried in his own country in accordance with the relevant

rules of domestic law or that his immunity will be waived by his own State is not high as long as there has been no change of power, whereas the existence of a competent international criminal court to initiate criminal proceedings is rare; moreover, it is quite risky to expect too much of a future international criminal court in this respect. The only credible alternative therefore seems to be the possibility of starting proceedings in a foreign court after the suspected person ceases to hold the office of Foreign Minister. This alternative, however, can also be easily forestalled by an uncooperative government that keeps the Minister in office for an as yet indeterminate period.

79. We wish to point out, however, that the frequently expressed conviction of the international community that perpetrators of grave and inhuman international crimes should not go unpunished does not *ipso facto* mean that immunities are unavailable whenever impunity would be the outcome. The nature of such crimes and the circumstances under which they are committed, usually by making use of the State apparatus, makes it less than easy to find a convincing argument for shielding the alleged perpetrator by granting him or her immunity from criminal process. But immunities serve other purposes which have their own intrinsic value and to which we referred in paragraph 77 above. International law seeks the accommodation of this value with the fight against impunity, and not the triumph of one norm over the other. A State may exercise the criminal jurisdiction which it has under international law, but in doing so it is subject to other legal obligations, whether they pertain to the non-exercise of power in the territory of another State or to the required respect for the law of diplomatic relations or, as in the present case, to the procedural immunities of State officials. In view of the worldwide aversion to these crimes, such immunities have to be recognized with restraint, in particular when there is reason to believe that crimes have been committed which have been universally condemned in international conventions. It is, therefore, necessary to analyse carefully the immunities which under customary international law are due to high State officials and, in particular, to Ministers for Foreign Affairs.

80. Under traditional customary law the Head of State was seen as personifying the sovereign State. The immunity to which he was entitled was therefore predicated on status, just like the State he or she symbolised. Whereas State practice in this regard is extremely scarce, the immunities to which other high State officials (like Heads of Government and Ministers for Foreign Affairs) are entitled have generally been considered in the literature as merely functional. (Cf. Arthur Watts, "The Legal Position in International Law of Heads of States, Heads of Governments and Foreign Ministers", *Recueil des Cours 1994-III*, Vol. 247, pp. 102-103.)

81. We have found no basis for the argument that Ministers of Foreign Affairs are entitled to the same immunities as Heads of State. In this respect, it should be pointed out that paragraph 3.2 of the International Law Commission's *Draft Articles on Jurisdictional Immunities of States and their Property* of 1991, which contained a saving clause for the privileges and immunities of Heads of State, failed to include a similar provision for those of Ministers for Foreign Affairs (or Heads of Government). In its commentary, the ILC, stated that mentioning the privileges and immunities of Ministers for Foreign Affairs would raise the issues of the basis and the extent of their jurisdictional immunity. In the opinion of the ILC these immunities were clearly not identical to those of Heads of State.

82. The Institut de droit international took a similar position in 2001 with regard to Foreign Ministers. Its resolution on the Immunity of Heads of State, based on a thorough report on all relevant State practice, states expressly that these "shall enjoy, in criminal matters, immunity from jurisdiction before the courts of a foreign State for any crime he or she may have committed, regardless of its gravity". But the Institut, which in this resolution did assimilate the position of



Head of Government to that of Head of State, carefully avoided doing the same with regard to the Foreign Minister.

83. We agree, therefore, with the Court that the purpose of the immunities attaching to Ministers for Foreign Affairs under customary international law is to ensure the free performance of their functions on behalf of their respective States (Judgment, para. 53). During their term of office, they must therefore be able to travel freely whenever the need to do so arises. There is broad agreement in the literature that a Minister for Foreign Affairs is entitled to full immunity during official visits in the exercise of his function. This was also recognized by the Belgian investigating judge in the arrest warrant of 11 April 2000. The Foreign Minister must also be immune whenever and wherever engaged in the functions required by his office and when in transit therefor.

84. Whether he is also entitled to immunities during private travels and what is the scope of any such immunities, is far less clear. Certainly, he or she may not be subjected to measures which would prevent effective performance of the functions of a Foreign Minister. Detention or arrest would constitute such a measure and must therefore be considered an infringement of the inviolability and immunity from criminal process to which a Foreign Minister is entitled. The arrest warrant of 11 April 2000 was directly enforceable in Belgium and would have obliged the police authorities to arrest Mr. Yerodia had he visited that country for non-official reasons. The very issuance of the warrant therefore must be considered to constitute an infringement on the inviolability to which Mr. Yerodia was entitled as long as he held the office of Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Congo.

85. Nonetheless, that immunity prevails only as long as the Minister is in office and continues to shield him or her after that time only for “official” acts. It is now increasingly claimed in the literature . . . that serious international crimes cannot be regarded as official acts because they are neither normal State functions nor functions that a State alone (in contrast to an individual) can perform. . . . This view is underscored by the increasing realization that State-related motives are not the proper test for determining what constitutes public State acts. The same view is gradually also finding expression in State practice, as evidenced in judicial decisions and opinions. (For an early example, see the judgment of the Israel Supreme Court in the *Eichmann* case; Supreme Court, 29 May 1962, 36 *International Law Reports*, p. 312.) . . .

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86. We have voted against paragraph (3) of the *dispositif* for several reasons.

87. In paragraph (3) of the *dispositif*, the Court “[f]inds that the Kingdom of Belgium must, by means of its own choosing, cancel the arrest warrant of 11 April 2000 and so inform the authorities to whom that warrant was circulated”. In making this finding, the Court relies on the proposition enunciated in the *Factory at Chorzów* case pursuant to which “reparation must, as far as possible, wipe out all the consequences of the illegal act and re-establish the situation which would . . . have existed if that act had not been committed” (*P.C.I.J., Series A, No. 17*, p. 47). Having previously found that the issuance and circulation of the warrant by Belgium was illegal under international law, the Court concludes that it must be withdrawn because “the warrant is still extant, and remains unlawful, notwithstanding the fact that Mr. Yerodia has ceased to be Minister for Foreign Affairs”.

88. We have been puzzled by the Court’s reliance on the *Factory at Chorzów* case to support its finding in paragraph (3) of the *dispositif*. It would seem that the Court regards its order for the cancellation of the warrant as a form of *restitutio in integrum*. Even in the very different

circumstances which faced the Permanent Court in the *Factory at Chorzów* case, *restitutio* in the event proved impossible. Nor do we believe that restoration of the *status quo ante* is possible here, given that Mr. Yerodia is no longer Minister for Foreign Affairs.

89. Moreover — and this is more important — the Judgment suggests that what is at issue here is a continuing illegality, considering that a call for the withdrawal of an instrument is generally perceived as relating to the cessation of a continuing international wrong . . . . However, the Court's finding in the instant case that the issuance and circulation of the warrant was illegal, a conclusion which we share, was based on the fact that these acts took place at a time when Mr. Yerodia was Minister for Foreign Affairs. As soon as he ceased to be Minister for Foreign Affairs, the illegal consequences attaching to the warrant also ceased. The mere fact that the warrant continues to identify Mr. Yerodia as Minister for Foreign Affairs changes nothing in this regard as a matter of international law, although it may well be that a misnamed arrest warrant, which is all it now is, may be deemed to be defective as a matter of Belgian domestic law; but that is not and cannot be of concern to this Court. Accordingly, we consider that the Court erred in its finding on this point.

*(Signed)* Rosalyn HIGGINS.

*(Signed)* Pieter KOOIJMANS.

*(Signed)* Thomas BUERGENTHAL.