On Monday, 11th July 2022, I walked through the gates of the Peace Palace, the Capital of International Law at the Hague for the first time ever. The Peace Palace would become my home for the three weeks that followed and I couldn’t have been more excited. Not only is The Hague the International Law Capital of the world, the Peace Palace is where the International Court of Justice and the Permanent Court of Arbitration are located.

My time at The Hague Academy was an eye opening and incredibly inspiring one. I attended the Public International Law Session of the Academy for three weeks in The Netherlands and it was one of the best decisions I have ever made. Not only did I grow in my knowledge of international law, I met over 300 individuals who are passionate about international law and driving positive change. In addition to this, The Hague Academy was truly a melting pot of culture and diversity as over 100 nationalities were represented in the Public International Law aspect of the Academy. This allowed for rich and diverging perspectives on topical issues and fresh solutions to the problems that international law faces today.

It was a truly immersive experience with over 45 hours of lectures and over 30 hours of seminars. Both lectures and seminars were conducted in The Hague Academy Auditorium, however the seminars provided delegates with an opportunity to go deeper with the subject matter of lectures. During seminars, we could ask questions and engage with the lecturers. This was a great time of discussion and students could ask questions that dealt with their areas of interest and study.

Topics such as ‘Colonialism’, ‘The Law of the Sea’, ‘The Refugee Convention’, and ‘The Law of General Principles’ were studied and examined in great detail by excellent scholars and jurists of international law. It was great to learn from renowned scholars such as Professor Phillipe Sands, Professor Helene Ruiz Fabri, Professor Lori Fisler Damrosch, Professor Rafael Casado Raigon, Professor Gleider Hernandez and Professor Andreas Zimmerman. Their perspectives on the various topics, in spite of the challenges that the foundational principles of international law currently face, were truly intellectually stimulating and inspirational. As we discussed the journey that international law has been on, it truly filled me with hope and excitement in anticipation of the contribution that my generation will make to international law.

Our weekends and evenings were ours and we filled them with trips to beautiful cities like Leiden and Amsterdam. Outside of the classroom, we had exciting visits to the various institutions, such as the Kenyan Embassy, within The Hague. One of my favorite visits was our visit to the International Criminal Court where we sat in on the Abd-Al-Rahman case. It was truly surreal to sit in the very court I had read and studied about, just a few months ago in Professor Gurule’s International Criminal Law class.

I also got to attend informal meetings with, Their Excellencies, judges of the International Court of Justice. Meetings with H.E. Judge Nolte and H.E. Judge Charlesworth really taught me that life has a way of working itself out. Neither of them started out their careers with the intention of becoming judges of the International Court of Justice, however through consistency, integrity and passion for what they do, they have ended up in truly incredible and influential positions. Their stories were overwhelmingly inspiring.

My greatest highlight of my time at The Hague Academy was my meeting with H.E. Judge Patrick L. Robinson. I was one of five students selected by Professor Philippe Sands to meet H.E. Judge Robinson in the Deliberation Room of the International Court of Justice. It was one of the most surreal moments of
my life, sitting in the same chairs that the judges sit in, listening to H.E. Judge Robinson give a lecture on his separate opinion in the Chagos Advisory Opinion. His insight was incredible, and as a sole dissenter in the case, it was eye opening to hear his reasoning while sitting in the same room as him, especially after I had studied the case for Professor Desierto’s International Law class. Another highlight was sitting in the Peace Palace Auditorium, right next to the International Court of Justice, as the Myanmar-Gambia decision was delivered. Going to The Hague Academy of International Law was an experience of a lifetime. It truly further and deeply ingrained in me my passion and desire to become an international lawyer and a different kind of lawyer.

I am truly grateful for the support I received from Notre Dame Law School, the Nanovic institute for European Studies, and the Friends of the Hague Academy. It wouldn’t have been possible without their collective assistance. I am also thankful for the opportunity to network, collaborate and develop incredible friendships with other students from the Public International Law session. I met international law experts, academics, diplomats, lawyers, and professionals from diverse fields and once again learnt that there is not only true strength and beauty in diversity, but that international law will continue to make a difference.
Deliberation Room of the International Court of Justice Judges. Pictured from the right are Kayla Lee, Elizabeth Nwarueze, Professor Sands, Grace Oladipo, and Lauren Chaplain.

Grace Oladipo
From left Ghislain Agbozo, Grace Oladipo, Suzzie Oyakhire, Kanyiri Kariuki, and Anais Symenouh