

President of the Senate of the Netherlands Mei Li Vos

Address to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's 33rd Annual Session

The Hague, 4 July 2026

Mr President,
Excellencies,
Members of the Parliamentary Assembly,
Dear attendees,

Welkom, welcome in The Hague.

This city has been the political and administrative capital of the Netherlands for over 400 years.

Internationally, it is the capital of peace and justice.

Here, justice is done to ensure peace,
to hold accountable those who have endangered it,
and to resolve disputes between states peacefully.

This system of international justice has its roots at the beginning of the 17th century.

Hugo de Groot – or Grotius, his Latin name – was a public prosecutor in those days.

His drive to advocate for international agreements on war and peace, stemmed from his experiences at the Court of Holland.

Later, he himself was imprisoned as a political prisoner during the Dutch Revolt, the war between the Netherlands and Spain.

This made him all the more critical of rulers who put their own interests over the interests of peace for the people.

In 1625, after his imprisonment, he published his book *The Law of War and Peace*.

Grotius addresses questions that remain relevant to this day:

- What is war?
- What is justice?
- Who has the right to wage war, and under what circumstances?
- What is permitted and what is prohibited in times of war?

It was his conviction that everyone benefits from peace.

Therefore, there must be an internationally recognised right to peace for all peoples,
with rules when war may be waged.

And, there must also be an organisation above all nations to regulate matters as part of international law:

the current International Court of Justice.

And thus, Grotius laid the foundations for international law as we know it.

Fast forward, from 1625 to 1899, to the First Hague Peace Conference.
26 countries from around the world gathered for the first time to discuss disarmament and international law.

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The conference was a response to the growing concern about the arms race and the possibility of war in Europe.

The conference reflected the growing interest in international law and the need for a system of international justice.

Since 1899, many organisations have established themselves here, in The Hague. Such as the Peace Palace, that houses the Permanent Court of Arbitration, the United Nations International Court of Justice, and The Hague Academy of International Law.

The Hague is also the home of the International Criminal Court.

In the 127 years that have passed since the First Hague Peace Conference, we have seen outbreaks of war and re-establishment of peace throughout the world.

Past conflicts have in the end resulted in multilateral frameworks, such as the European Union and United Nations.

Also, organisations like the Council of Europe and the OSCE, were established to serve as multilateral fora for dialogue.

And as I am well aware, these developments have not prevented new wars and old conflicts re-surfacing.

They put pressure on these fora, and on international law.

They urge us to reaffirm international cooperation, and to continue striving for peace.

Upholding international law is our best chance of ensuring peace.

Dear attendees,

Article 90 of the Dutch Constitution calls on the government to promote the development of the international legal order.

It is the duty of parliament to ensure our government fulfils that task.

Democracy benefits from continuous discussions within the institutions, from power and that power being challenged.

Conflicts can be prevented by creating the circumstances for a free and democratic debate.

I would rather have people engage in heated verbal debate than take up arms.

Instead of creating the conditions for conflicts, we need to create the conditions for debate.

That is why the work of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is important.

In this forum you provide those conditions, to use words instead of weapons.

Grotius noted that – when used – force must always be proportionate to the objective.

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These principles are just as relevant today as they were 400 years ago.
They define our international legal order.

And this is why it is so fitting that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly convenes here
in the international capital of peace and justice.

I wish you a fruitful Annual Session.

Dank u wel,
Thank you.