

Study Abroad Programme to The Hague, Netherland

By Andrew Hill, J.D.

A group of twenty-three students from the Irish School of Ecumenics (ISE) participated in a study abroad programme in The Hague, Netherlands in order to study the international courts and tribunals that are, according to the mission of one tribunal, "bringing war criminals to justice, and justice to victims." The study trip, which took place in April of 2009, allowed students to meet with educators, prosecutors and judges from institutions such as the International Criminal Court (ICC).

"The fact of being able to enter in the ICC, and hear judges and prosecutors explain the *raison d'être* of the ICC, and also being able to hear their experiences was something extraordinary," said Romeo Cagatin, an M.Phil. student in International Peace Studies from the Philippines.

The trip was organized by Dylan Lee Lehrke, an American research student at the ISE and a military veteran who is studying the moral restrictions on combat. He led the group as they visited and heard from representatives of:

- International Criminal Court (ICC)
- International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY)
- Special Court for Sierra Leone
- Special Tribunal for Lebanon
- Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

This type of direct, experiential learning from the range of people who constitute these critical peace and justice frameworks is an important part of the ISE's mission as a multi-disciplinary, cross-border institute. Specifically, our group met with, among others:

- Kimberly Prost, ICTY Judge
- Peter Foster, Special Tribunal for Lebanon Official Spokesman
- Stephen Rapp, Chief Prosecutor, Special Court for Sierra Leone
- Patrick Nicolle, ICC Official Spokesman

"In Reconciliation Studies there is a danger in getting caught up in abstract themes such as peace, truth, and justice," said Eileen Paquette, a masters student from the USA. She added, "being at the ICC and The Hague was a chance to see people - whether they're the judges and attorneys on tribunals or those working to do away with chemical weapons - who are working hard to bring these terms into reality with tangible results."

The Hague is a natural cross-roads for ISE students studying Ecumenics, International Peace Studies, and Reconciliation Studies because of its long reputation as the "City of Peace and Justice." Following two major, international peace conferences in 1899 and 1907, the city became home to the Peace Palace. Built in 1913, this monumental hall houses the two main judicial institutions of the United Nations: the International Court of Justice and the Permanent Court of Arbitration.

Building on this growing reputation as an international legal capital, The Hague has attracted over 150 international legal bodies and judicial organizations. These include not only the major judicial arms of the United Nations, but private law groups such as The Hague Conference on Private International Law, and European Union networks such as Europol (the EU law enforcement organization that handles criminal intelligence in their fight against organized crime).

“The Hague trip adds volume to the ISE peace studies program. To see and interact with some of the institutions we study about adds a live perspective and input on the material,” said Shadia Qubti, a student of International Peace Studies from Israel. Shadia is a Christian Palestinian Israeli, who spent five years as head of the Youth Department for Musalaha, a non-profit organization that seeks to promote reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians. She added “my favorite lecture would be the talk given by Judge Kimberly for the Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia. She was very realist, dynamic and interesting.”

The visit to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia was a high point for many of the students. This is an ad-hoc court of the United Nations, established in 1993 by Resolution 827 of the United Nations Security Council and given jurisdiction over crimes committed on the territory of the former Yugoslavia since 1991. The students had a chance to hear from Canadian Judge Kimberly Prost, who was appointed to the Tribunal in 2006. Judge Prost described in detail her work for the court both in The Netherlands and in the former Yugoslavia, and answered questions from the students.

“I have done a lot of work on the conflict in the Former Yugoslavia and read a lot of court proceedings,” said Atje Gercama, who is from the Netherlands and studies in the MPhil Peace Studies program. “Yet it was strange to see, and be in, and be in contact with, what usually remains a hidden dimension of one's work - a bit like the characters from a story coming to life. It brought my work to life.”

Marek Mariusz Lenarcik, an International Peace Studies student from Poland, was particularly struck by the presentation about the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, the newest of the legal bodies established having come into effect in temporary quarters only the month before the students arrived.

Lenarcik said, “the whole trip was very insightful and interesting, but I especially liked the presentation about the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. It's probably because of my particular interest in the region.” Lenarcik is freelance journalist specialising in international politics and has focused on the Middle East, having worked with RTE Radio 1, Polish Express Magazine, Onet.pl, BBC Radio Ulster, Global, American Civilization Website, and International Relations Magazine.

The spring trip to The Hague is annual ISE event, and has been a popular trip for years. Many of the students stayed on in Holland after the official trip ended, to enjoy the warm spring climate in this seaside town. Atje Gercama, our ISE participant from the Netherlands added, “I would definitely recommend the tour, as it gives a good insight into and introduction to the efforts that are being made in the area of justice and accountability. Additionally, it's a good excuse for people to come and visit my beautiful home country!”