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INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

**CASE CONCERNING ALLEGATIONS OF GENOCIDE UNDER THE CONVENTION
ON THE PREVENTION AND PUNISHMENT OF THE CRIME OF GENOCIDE
(UKRAINE v. RUSSIAN FEDERATION: 32 STATES INTERVENING)**

WRITTEN OBSERVATIONS OF THE KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

5 July 2023

[Translation by the Registry]

I. INTRODUCTION

1. On 5 June 2023, the International Court of Justice (hereinafter “the Court”) decided that the declarations of intervention under Article 63 of the Statute of the Court (hereinafter “the Statute”) submitted by, among others, the Kingdom of Belgium (hereinafter the “Order on the Admissibility of the Declarations of Intervention”) in the case concerning *Allegations of Genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Ukraine v. Russian Federation)* (hereinafter “the proceedings”) were admissible¹. The Court fixed 5 July 2023 as the time-limit for the filing of the written observations referred to in Article 86, paragraph 1, of the Rules of the Court (hereinafter “the Rules”)².

2. The intervention of the Kingdom of Belgium (hereinafter “Belgium”) under Article 63 of the Statute involves the exercise of a right by a State party to a convention the construction of which is in question before the Court³. As determined by the Court in the Order on the Admissibility of the Declarations of Intervention, the construction of Article IX and of other provisions of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (hereinafter the “Genocide Convention”)⁴ concerning the Court’s jurisdiction *ratione materiae* is in question at the present stage of the proceedings⁵. In accordance with the Order on the Admissibility of the Declarations of Intervention, these written observations will solely concern the construction of Article IX and other provisions of the Genocide Convention that are relevant for the determination of the Court’s jurisdiction *ratione materiae* in the proceedings⁶. References in these written observations to other rules and principles of international law outside the Genocide Convention will concern only the construction of the Convention’s provisions, in accordance with the customary rule of interpretation reflected in Article 31, paragraph 3 (c), of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (hereinafter the “Vienna Convention”)⁷. Belgium will not address other matters, such as the dispute between the Parties, the evidence, the facts or the application of the Genocide Convention in the present case⁸.

3. Upon the Court’s invitation to co-ordinate with other intervening States, Belgium has agreed the substance of its position with the Republic of Croatia, the Kingdom of Denmark, the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Finland, Ireland, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the Kingdom of Sweden. Parts II and III of the present written observations are therefore identical to the corresponding parts of the written observations of those intervening States. However, in order to be able to meet the strict time-limit set by the Court and for logistical reasons, Belgium is filing the joint content separately in its national capacity.

¹ *Allegations of Genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Ukraine v. Russian Federation)*, Order of 5 June 2023, available at <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/182/182-20230605-ORD-01-00-EN.pdf>, paras. 99 and 102 (1).

² *Ibid.*, para. 102 (3).

³ *Ibid.*, para. 26.

⁴ Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, signed at Paris on 9 Dec. 1948, United Nations, *Treaty Series*, Vol. 78, p. 277 (entered into force on 12 Jan. 1951).

⁵ Order on the Admissibility of the Declarations of Intervention (fn. 1), para. 26.

⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 99.

⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 84.

⁸ *Ibid.*

II. CONSTRUCTION OF ARTICLE IX AND OTHER PROVISIONS OF THE GENOCIDE CONVENTION RELEVANT FOR JURISDICTION *RATIONE MATERIAE*

4. In its Order of 16 March 2022 indicating provisional measures, the Court affirmed its jurisdiction *prima facie* on the basis of Article IX of the Genocide Convention⁹.

5. Belgium wishes to make four observations on the construction of the Genocide Convention at the present stage of the proceedings.

6. First, applying the rules of treaty interpretation (such as those contained in Articles 31 to 33 of the Vienna Convention, which reflect rules of customary international law¹⁰), it is important to recall the broad scope of Article IX of the Genocide Convention, which includes *disputes about the “fulfilment”* of obligations under the Convention.

7. Second, Article IX of the Genocide Convention applies to *disputes about abusive allegations* of genocide under the Genocide Convention.

8. Third, Article IX of the Genocide Convention applies to *disputes about unlawful action as a means for prevention and punishment of genocide* under the Genocide Convention.

9. Fourth, *any party to the dispute may seize the Court* under Article IX, including the party which is the victim of an abusive allegation of genocide or any unlawful action as a means for prevention and punishment of genocide.

A. Article IX of the Genocide Convention is formulated in broad terms and covers disputes about the “fulfilment” of the Convention

10. Article IX of the Genocide Convention reads as follows:

“Disputes between the Contracting Parties relating to the interpretation, application or fulfilment of the present Convention, including those relating to the responsibility of a State for genocide or for any of the other acts enumerated in article III, shall be submitted to the International Court of Justice at the request of any of the parties to the dispute.”

11. Belgium contends that the notion of “dispute” is already well-established in the jurisprudence of the Court and of its predecessor, the Permanent Court of International Justice. It concurs with the meaning given to the word “dispute” as “a disagreement on a point of law or fact, a conflict of legal views or of interests” between parties¹¹. In order for a dispute to exist, “[i]t must

⁹ *Allegations of Genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Ukraine v. Russian Federation), Provisional Measures, Order of 16 March 2022*, available at: <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/182/182-20220316-ORD-01-00-EN.pdf>, paras. 28-49.

¹⁰ *Arbitral Award of 3 October 1899 (Guyana v. Venezuela), Judgment of 6 April 2023*, available at: <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/171/171-20230406-JUD-01-00-EN.pdf>, para. 87.

¹¹ *Mavrommatis Palestine Concessions, Judgment No. 2, 1924, P.C.I.J., Series A, No. 2*, p. 11.

be shown that the claim of one party is positively opposed by the other”¹². The two sides must “hold clearly opposite views concerning the question of the performance or non-performance of certain international obligations”¹³. Moreover, “in case the respondent has failed to reply to the applicant’s claims, it may be inferred from this silence, in certain circumstances, that it rejects those claims and that, therefore, a dispute exists”¹⁴.

12. In that respect, the document communicated by the Russian Federation to the Court on 7 March 2022 seems to construe the notion of a dispute unduly narrowly by insisting that Article IX cannot be used to establish the jurisdiction of the Court for disputes relating to the use of force or issues of self-defence under general international law¹⁵. However, it follows from the consistent jurisprudence of the Court that certain facts or omissions may give rise to a dispute that falls within the ambit of more than one treaty¹⁶. Hence, a parallel dispute arising out of the same facts about the use of force between two States does not create an obstacle to the jurisdiction of the Court under Article IX of the Genocide Convention, provided that its other conditions are fulfilled.

13. In particular, such a dispute must “relat[e] to the interpretation, application or fulfilment of the present Convention”. Belgium contends that Article IX is a broad jurisdictional clause, allowing the Court to adjudicate upon disputes concerning the fulfilment by a Contracting Party of its obligations under the Convention. The inclusion of the word “fulfilment” is “unique as compared with the compromissory clauses found in other multilateral treaties which provide for submission to the International Court of Justice of such disputes between Contracting Parties as relate to the *interpretation or application* of the treaties in question”¹⁷.

14. The ordinary meaning of the phrase “relating to the interpretation, application or fulfilment of the Convention” may be divided into three parts.

15. The first part (“relating to”) establishes a link between the dispute and the Convention.

16. The second part (“interpretation, application or fulfilment of the Convention”) encompasses three terms. While “interpretation” is typically understood as the process of “explaining the meaning” of a legal norm, “application” is the “action of putting something into operation” in a

¹² *South West Africa (Ethiopia v. South Africa; Liberia v. South Africa), Preliminary Objections, Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 1962*, p. 319, at p. 328.

¹³ *Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Qatar v. United Arab Emirates), Provisional Measures, Order of 23 July 2018, I.C.J. Reports 2018 (II)*, p. 406, at p. 414, para. 18; *Alleged Violations of Sovereign Rights and Maritime Spaces in the Caribbean Sea (Nicaragua v. Colombia), Preliminary Objections, Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 2016 (I)*, p. 3, at p. 26, para. 50, citing *Interpretation of Peace Treaties with Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, First Phase, Advisory Opinion, I.C.J. Reports 1950*, p. 74.

¹⁴ *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (The Gambia v. Myanmar), Preliminary Objections, Judgment of 22 July 2022*, para. 71.

¹⁵ *Allegations of Genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Ukraine v. Russian Federation)*, Document of the Russian Federation, 7 Mar. 2022, paras. 8-15.

¹⁶ *Alleged Violations of the 1955 Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations, and Consular Rights (Islamic Republic of Iran v. United States of America), Preliminary Objections, Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 2021*, p. 27, para. 56.

¹⁷ *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Yugoslavia), Preliminary Objections, Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 1996 (II)*, declaration of Judge Oda, p. 627, para. 5 (emphasis in the original).

given case¹⁸. The term “fulfilment” partially overlaps with the latter, and it may be understood to refer to an application that “meets the requirements” of a legal norm¹⁹. Nevertheless, the addition of the term “fulfilment” supports a broad interpretation of Article IX²⁰. It appears that “by inserting all three alternative terms”, the drafters sought to “give a coverage as exhaustive as possible to the compromissory clause” and to “close down all possible loopholes”²¹.

17. The third part (“of the Convention”) makes clear that the compromissory clause refers back to all the provisions of the Convention. In other words, Article IX does not create further substantive rights or obligations for the parties; the substantive legal norms that are subject to the Court’s jurisdiction must be found elsewhere in the Convention. At the same time, the *renvoi* relates to the entire life of the Convention, including breaches thereof²².

18. For example, there can be a dispute about the interpretation, application or fulfilment of the Convention when one State alleges that another State has committed genocide²³. In that scenario, the Court verifies the factual basis for such an allegation: if it is not satisfied that there were any acts of genocide actually being committed by the respondent State, it may decline its jurisdiction, also *prima facie*²⁴.

19. While this scenario of (alleged) responsibility for acts of genocide constitutes an important type of dispute concerning the “interpretation, application or fulfilment” of the Convention, it is not the only one. In the *Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Yugoslavia* case, the applicant alleged several violations of the Convention by the respondent, including a failure to prevent and punish genocide under Article I²⁵, and the Court affirmed its jurisdiction *ratione materiae*²⁶. In the case of *The Gambia v. Myanmar* (pending), the applicant claims that the respondent not only bears responsibility for prohibited acts under Article III, but also for violations of its obligations under the Convention by failing to prevent genocide in violation of Article I, and failing to punish genocide in violation of Articles I, IV and V²⁷. In these examples, one State alleges that another State is not honouring its commitment to “prevent” and “punish” genocide, because it grants impunity to acts of

¹⁸ C. Tams, “Article IX” in C. Tams, L. Berster and B. Schiffbauer, *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide: A Commentary*, Beck/Hart/Nomos, Munich/Oxford, 2014, para. 45.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Allegations of Genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Ukraine v. Russian Federation)*, joint declaration of intervention of the Governments of Canada and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 7 Dec. 2022, para. 29.

²¹ C. Tams (fn. 18), “Article IX”, para. 45; R. Kolb, “Scope Ratione Materiae”, in P. Gaeta (ed.), *The UN Genocide Convention: A Commentary*, OUP, Oxford, 2009, p. 451.

²² R. Kolb (fn. 21), “Scope Ratione Materiae”, p. 453, with an account of the case law.

²³ *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro)*, Judgment, *I.C.J. Reports 2007 (I)*, p. 43, at p. 75, para. 169.

²⁴ *Legality of Use of Force (Yugoslavia v. France)*, Provisional Measures, Order of 2 June 1999, *I.C.J. Reports 1999 (I)*, p. 363, at pp. 372-373, paras. 24-31. Later, the ICJ declined its jurisdiction on the ground that Serbia and Montenegro did not have access to the Court, at the time of the institution of the proceedings, under Article 35 of the Statute (see e.g. *Legality of Use of Force (Serbia and Montenegro v. France)*, Preliminary Objections, Judgment, *I.C.J. Reports 2004 (II)*, p. 595).

²⁵ *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Yugoslavia)*, Preliminary Objections, Judgment, *I.C.J. Reports 1996 (II)*, p. 595, at p. 614, para. 28, and p. 603, para. 4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 615-617, paras. 30-33.

²⁷ *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (The Gambia v. Myanmar)*, Preliminary Objections, Judgment of 22 July 2022, para. 24, points (1) (c), (d) and (e).

genocide committed on its territory. Therefore, there can also be disputes about “non-action” as a violation of the substantive obligations under Articles I, IV and V.

20. The ordinary meaning of Article IX makes it clear that there is no need to establish genocidal acts in order to affirm the Court’s jurisdiction. Rather, the Court has jurisdiction *over the question whether* genocidal acts have been or are being committed or not²⁸.

21. The context of the phrase (“relating to”) confirms this reading. In particular, the unusual feature of the word “including” in the intermediate sentence indicates the broader scope of Article IX of the Convention when compared to a standard compromissory clause²⁹. Disputes relating to the responsibility of a State for genocide or for any of the other acts enumerated in Article III are therefore only one of the types of dispute covered by Article IX, which are “included” in the wider phrase of disputes “relating to the interpretation, application and fulfilment” of the Convention³⁰.

22. Thus, the context of the phrase (“relating to”) in Article IX confirms that the Court’s jurisdiction goes beyond disputes between States about responsibility for alleged genocidal acts, but also covers disputes between States about the absence of genocide and about the performance of treaty obligations by one or more States parties. In other words:

“With a view to the question of positive fulfilment, the Court therefore has jurisdiction over the question whether a Contracting Party . . . has done enough to prevent and punish genocide. In a negative way, the Court can also adjudicate whether a Contracting Party has failed to fulfil these obligations.”³¹

23. Finally, the object and purpose of the Convention gives further support to the wide interpretation of Article IX. The Court noted that “[a]ll the States parties to the Genocide Convention [thus] have a common interest to ensure the prevention, suppression and punishment of genocide, by committing themselves to fulfilling the obligations contained in the Convention”³². The *erga omnes* nature of the obligations under the Convention also underpins the paramount significance of the text for the international community as a whole, entrusting the International Court of Justice in 1948 with a particularly important mission to enforce it in the interest of all States.

24. In its 1951 Advisory Opinion, the Court held:

“The objects of such a convention must also be considered. The Convention was manifestly adopted for a purely humanitarian and civilizing purpose. It is indeed

²⁸ *Allegations of Genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Ukraine v. Russian Federation), Provisional Measures, Order of 16 March 2022*, para. 43; *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (The Gambia v. Myanmar), Provisional Measures, Order of 23 January 2020, I.C.J. Reports 2020*, p. 14, para. 30.

²⁹ *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro), Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 2007 (I)*, p. 43, at p. 75, para. 169.

³⁰ See also the Written Observations of The Gambia on the Preliminary Objections raised by Myanmar, 20 Apr. 2021, pp. 28-29, para. 3.22 (“The inclusion of disputes ‘relating to the responsibility of a State for genocide’ among those that can be brought before the Court unmistakably means that responsibility for genocide *can* [emphasis added] be the object of a dispute brought before the Court by *any* [emphasis in the original] contracting party.”).

³¹ *Allegations of Genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Ukraine v. Russian Federation)*, declaration of intervention of the Principality of Liechtenstein, 15 Dec. 2022, para. 20.

³² *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (The Gambia v. Myanmar), Preliminary Objections, Judgment of 22 July 2022*, para. 107.

difficult to imagine a convention that might have this dual character to a greater degree, since its object on the one hand is to safeguard the very existence of certain human groups and on the other to confirm and endorse the most elementary principles of morality. In such a convention the contracting States do not have any interests of their own; they merely have, one and all, a common interest, namely, the accomplishment of those high purposes which are the *raison d'être* of the convention. Consequently, in a convention of this type one cannot speak of individual advantages or disadvantages to States, or of the maintenance of a perfect contractual balance between rights and duties. The high ideals which inspired the Convention provide, by virtue of the common will of the parties, the foundation and measure of all its provisions.”³³

25. The Convention’s object to protect the “most elementary principles of morality” also requires that a State party does not abuse its provisions for other purposes. It also strongly supports a reading of Article IX, according to which disputes relating to the interpretation, application and fulfilment include disputes about the abuse of the Convention’s substantive provisions to justify a State’s action vis-à-vis another State party to the Convention. Such abuse can take two forms: abusive allegations and/or or abusive action, which will be examined in the next two sections.

B. Article IX of the Genocide Convention applies to disputes about abusive allegations of genocide

26. Belgium now wishes to turn to one of the scenarios of a dispute under Article IX more precisely, namely the abusive allegation of one State that another State has committed genocide.

27. In doing so, it has carefully reviewed the question whether the Convention enables a State to seise the Court of a dispute concerning allegations of genocide made by another State³⁴.

28. Belgium contends that Article IX of the Genocide Convention also applies to disputes relating to abusive allegations of genocide, since they raise the question of compliance with Article I of the Convention, which provides context for the construction of Article IX. Article I of the Convention reads:

“The Contracting Parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish.”

29. According to Article I of the Genocide Convention, all States parties are obliged to prevent and punish genocide. As the Court has previously emphasized, in fulfilling their duty to prevent genocide, Contracting Parties must act within the limits permitted by international law³⁵. Moreover, the duty under Article I must be carried out in good faith (in accordance with Article 26 of the Vienna

³³ *Reservations to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Advisory Opinion, I.C.J. Reports 1951*, p. 23.

³⁴ For a discussion of this question, see e.g. the Order on Provisional Measures (fn.9), declaration of Judge Bennouna, para. 2.

³⁵ *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro), Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 2007 (I)*, p. 43, at p. 221, para. 430; *Allegations of Genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Ukraine v. Russian Federation), Provisional Measures, Order of 16 March 2022*, para. 57.

Convention, reflecting customary international law³⁶). As the Court has observed, the principle of good faith “obliges the Parties to apply [a treaty] in a reasonable way and in such a manner that its purpose can be realized”³⁷. Good faith interpretation thus operates as a safeguard against misuse of the Genocide Convention. As “one of the basic principles governing the creation and performance of legal obligations”, good faith is also directly linked to the “trust and confidence [that] are inherent in international co-operation”³⁸.

30. In Belgium’s view, the notion of “undertake to prevent” implies that each State party must assess whether a genocide or a serious risk of genocide exists prior to taking action pursuant to Article I³⁹. Such an assessment must be based on substantial evidence⁴⁰.

31. Importantly, the United Nations Human Rights Council called upon all States,

“in order to deter future occurrences of genocide, to cooperate, including through the United Nations system, in strengthening appropriate collaboration between existing mechanisms that contribute to the early detection and prevention of massive, serious and systematic violations of human rights that, if not halted, could lead to genocide”⁴¹.

32. It may thus be considered good practice to rely on the results of independent investigations conducted under the auspices of the United Nations⁴² before qualifying a situation as genocide.

33. Moreover, the Genocide Convention provides guidance concerning the lawful means by which the Contracting Parties may prevent and punish genocide. While “Article I does not specify the kinds of measures that a Contracting Party may take to fulfil this obligation”⁴³, “the Contracting Parties must implement this obligation in good faith, taking into account other parts of the Convention, in particular Articles VIII and IX, as well as its Preamble”⁴⁴. Rather than making an abusive allegation of genocide against another State without having discharged its due diligence obligation, a State may seize the political or judicial organs of the United Nations⁴⁵.

³⁶ *Land and Maritime Boundary between Cameroon and Nigeria (Cameroon v. Nigeria)*, Preliminary Objections, Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 1998, p. 275, at p. 296, para. 38: “The Court observes that the principle of good faith is a well-established principle of international law. It is set forth in Article 2, paragraph 2, of the Charter of the United Nations; it is also embodied in Article 26 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties of 23 May 1969.”

³⁷ *Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Project (Hungary/Slovakia)*, Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 1997, p. 7, at p. 79, para. 142.

³⁸ *Nuclear Tests (Australia v. France)*, Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 1974, p. 253, at p. 268, para. 46.

³⁹ *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro)*, Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 2007 (I), p. 43, at pp. 221-222, paras. 430-431.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 90, para. 209.

⁴¹ United Nations Human Rights Council, resolution 43/29: Prevention of Genocide (29 June 2020), UN doc. A/HRC/RES/43/29, para. 11.

⁴² See e.g. the reliance of The Gambia on the reports of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar drawn up by the United Nations Human Rights Council before bringing a case to the Court; for more details, see *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (The Gambia v. Myanmar)*, Preliminary Objections, Judgment of 22 July 2022, paras. 65-69.

⁴³ Order on Provisional Measures (fn. 9), para. 56.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, separate opinion of Judge Robinson, para. 30.

34. It follows that an abusive allegation by one State against another State runs contrary to the former State's obligations to apply Article I of the Convention in good faith and distorts the terms of the Convention. Accordingly, Article IX also covers such disputes.

C. Article IX of the Genocide Convention applies to disputes about unlawful action as a means for prevention and punishment of genocide

35. Another important scenario of a dispute under Article IX of the Convention concerns disputes about otherwise unlawful action as a means for the prevention and punishment of genocide. As described in the previous section, the correct construction of Article I is that a State is under a due diligence obligation to gather evidence from independent sources before making any allegation of genocide against another State.

36. In the same vein, a State may not take unlawful action based on such abusive allegations.

37. Rather, the scope of the "undertaking to prevent" should be read in light of the final recital in the preamble, which emphasizes the need for "international co-operation". Referring to the preamble is an accepted method of treaty interpretation, as stressed by the Court for example in the *Whaling in the Antarctic* case⁴⁶. Moreover, under Article VIII, States may call upon the competent organs of the United Nations to take action, and Article IX provides for judicial settlement. All this speaks in favour of a duty under the Convention to employ multilateral and peaceful means to prevent genocide. Such a reading is also in accordance with the general obligation set out in Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations (hereinafter the "Charter"), which requires the parties to any dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, to first seek a solution by peaceful means. Article IX also gives effect to the parties' pre-existing obligations under Article 2, paragraph 3, of the Charter and customary international law to settle all their disputes peacefully⁴⁷. Belgium emphasizes that all States parties must be engaged in preventing and punishing genocide worldwide for the benefit of humankind as a whole, and not in order to protect their own interests.

38. It follows from the obligation to carry out a good faith assessment of the existence of genocide or a serious risk of genocide that, where a State has not carried out such an assessment, it cannot invoke the "undertak[ing] to prevent" genocide in Article I of the Convention as a justification for its conduct. This includes conduct which involves the threat or use of force, as underlined by the Court in the *Oil Platforms* case⁴⁸.

39. A State may not claim to enforce international law by violating international law. As the Court explained in the *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro)* case, already referred to in paragraph 29 above, "it is clear that every State may only act within the limits permitted by

⁴⁶ See e.g. *Whaling in the Antarctic (Australia v. Japan: New Zealand intervening)*, Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 2014, p. 226, at p. 215, para. 56 (referring to the preamble of the International Convention on the Regulation of Whaling to discern its object and purpose).

⁴⁷ *Allegations of Genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Ukraine v. Russian Federation)*, declaration of intervention of New Zealand, 28 July 2022, para. 25.

⁴⁸ *Oil Platforms (Islamic Republic of Iran v. United States of America)*, Preliminary Objection, Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 1996 (II), pp. 811-812, para. 21. See also *Allegations of Genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Ukraine v. Russian Federation)*, declaration of intervention of Australia, 30 Sept. 2022, para. 41.

international law”⁴⁹. In other words, Article I of the Genocide Convention imposes an obligation on States parties “not only to act to prevent genocide, but to act within the limits permitted by international law to prevent genocide”⁵⁰.

40. In conclusion, the jurisdiction of the Court extends to disputes concerning unlawful action taken for the stated purpose of preventing and punishing alleged genocide⁵¹.

D. Any party to the dispute may seise the Court under Article IX of the Genocide Convention

41. Finally, Belgium wishes to comment on the view according to which a State cannot invoke the compromissory clause under Article IX of the Convention “only to have the Court confirm its own compliance”⁵².

42. As noted in Section B above, the concepts of “dispute” and “fulfilment” in Article IX are sufficiently broad to allow the Court to declare that the applicant State bears no responsibility for a breach under the Convention, as alleged by another State. Moreover, the wording of Article IX confirms that “any of the parties” to the dispute may seise the Court. Thus, where there is a dispute concerning the question whether a State has engaged in conduct contrary to the Convention, the State accused of such conduct has the same right to submit the dispute to the Court as the State that has made the accusation, with the effect that the Court will have jurisdiction over that dispute⁵³.

43. In addition, the already mentioned *erga omnes partes* character of the Genocide Convention speaks against a narrowly construed opportunity to seek judicial protection before the Court. On the contrary, such an interpretation might preclude a victim State from seeking relief from the Court in the face of abuse of the Convention. This would undermine the Convention’s credibility and efficiency as a universal instrument for the prevention of genocide, as well as the role of the Court as a critical avenue for redress against abuses of the law.

44. More generally, nothing prevents a requesting State from invoking the compromissory clause of a given convention to ask the Court for a negative declaration that it has not breached its international obligations under the convention in question. For example, in the *Lockerbie* case, Libya requested several Court findings that it had complied with Articles 5, 6 and 7 of the 1971 Montreal Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Civil Aviation on the basis of Article 14 of that convention⁵⁴. The United States objected and argued that none of the provisions cited by the applicant concerned obligations binding upon it as respondent⁵⁵. The Court rejected the

⁴⁹ *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro)*, Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 2007 (I), p. 43, at p. 221, para. 430.

⁵⁰ Order on Provisional Measures (fn. 9), separate opinion of Judge Robinson, para. 27.

⁵¹ Order on Provisional Measures (fn. 9), para. 45.

⁵² Order on Provisional Measures (fn. 9), declaration of Vice-President Gevorgian, para. 8.

⁵³ *Allegations of Genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Ukraine v. Russian Federation)*, declaration of intervention of the United Kingdom, 1 Aug. 2022, para. 34; declaration of intervention of Australia, 30 Sept. 2022, paras. 35-36; declaration of intervention of Norway, 10 Nov. 2022, para. 21.

⁵⁴ *Questions of Interpretation and Application of the 1971 Montreal Convention arising from the Aerial Incident at Lockerbie (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya v. United States of America)*, Preliminary Objections, Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 1998, p. 115, at p. 123, para. 25.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 124, para. 26.

preliminary objection. It held that there was a specific dispute before it on the interpretation and application of Article 7 — read in conjunction with Article 1, Article 5, Article 6 and Article 8 of the Montreal Convention — which fell to be decided by the Court on the basis of Article 14⁵⁶. The Court thus assumed jurisdiction over the applicant’s request for a determination that it had not violated the Montreal Convention.

45. Moreover, Belgium notes that it may not even be necessary for the Court to enter into a discussion on whether Article IX also covers “non-violation complaints”. In its Application, Ukraine respectfully requests the Court to:

- “(a) Adjudge and declare that, contrary to what the Russian Federation claims, no acts of genocide, as defined by Article III of the Genocide Convention, have been committed in the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts of Ukraine.
- (b) Adjudge and declare that the Russian Federation cannot lawfully take any action under the Genocide Convention in or against Ukraine aimed at preventing or punishing an alleged genocide, on the basis of its false claims of genocide in the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts of Ukraine.
- (c) Adjudge and declare that the Russian Federation’s recognition of the independence of the so-called ‘Donetsk People’s Republic’ and ‘Luhansk People’s Republic’ on 22 February 2022 is based on a false claim of genocide and therefore has no basis in the Genocide Convention.
- (d) Adjudge and declare that the ‘special military operation’ declared and carried out by the Russian Federation on and after 24 February 2022 is based on a false claim of genocide and therefore has no basis in the Genocide Convention.
- (e) Require that the Russian Federation provide assurances and guarantees of non-repetition that it will not take any unlawful measures in and against Ukraine, including the use of force, on the basis of its false claim of genocide.
- (f) Order full reparation for all damage caused by the Russian Federation as a consequence of any actions taken on the basis of Russia’s false claim of genocide.”

46. While it is for the Court to clarify the precise meaning of the requests, none of the reliefs sought expressly mentions the question of the “compliance” of Ukraine with the Convention. In particular, point (a) could also be understood as a request to the Court to declare that Russia’s allegations that genocide has taken place in the oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk are abusive. Under such a reading, the jurisdiction of the Court would have to be ascertained in line with the interpretation of Article IX of the Convention advanced in Section C above.

III. CONCLUSION

47. Belgium puts forward four observations on the construction of the Genocide Convention. First, Article IX thereof is formulated in broad terms to include disputes about the fulfilment of obligations under the Convention. Second, it applies to disputes relating to abusive allegations of genocide under the Genocide Convention. Third, it also applies to disputes about otherwise unlawful action as a means for prevention and punishment of genocide under the Genocide Convention. Fourth, any party to the dispute may seize the Court under Article IX, including the party that is the

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 127, para. 28.

victim of an abusive allegation or unlawful action as a means for prevention and punishment of genocide.

48. In conclusion, Belgium contends that the ordinary meaning of Article IX of the Convention, its context and the object and purpose of the entire Convention show that a dispute regarding acts carried out by one State against another State based on abusive claims of genocide falls under the notion of “dispute between Contracting Parties relating to the interpretation, application or fulfilment of the present Convention”. Accordingly, the Court has jurisdiction to declare the absence of genocide and the violation of a good faith performance of the Convention. Moreover, the jurisdiction of the Court extends to disputes concerning unlawful action taken for the stated purpose of preventing and punishing alleged genocide.

Respectfully,

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