

International Court of Justice

[The World Court]

The International Court of Justice, also known as the World Court, was established in 1945 by the United Nations (UN) and began its work in 1946. The Statute of the International Court of Justice is the main document that guides the work of the Court.

The main role of the International Court of Justice is to act as the arbiter of global conflict. It hears cases involving member countries of the UN at odds with one another. Additionally, it advises the United Nations on legal questions. Under the UN Charter, World Court rulings are enforceable by the United Nations, however, the five permanent members of the Security Council (United States, France, Great Britain, China, and Russia) have veto power over enforcement of the court's rulings.



The World Court has a panel of fifteen judges appointed by the UN for nine-year terms. To ensure that its judges are not biased, the Court pays judges a salary, forbids them from working on any other government or legal project, and ensures that no more than one judge per country is on the Court. Since its inception, the United States has had many judges on the Court.



As a UN member state, an advantage for the U.S. taking cases to the International Court of Justice is that it brings international attention to disagreements between two or more countries. As the neutral, global arbiter of international law, the Court's rulings help mitigate further hostilities that could lead to war, highlight atrocities committed by nations on their people, and establish precedent for the operation of international law. However, with advantages come disadvantages. A major disadvantage for the United States participating in the World Court is if a ruling is contrary to its interests, which highlights a weakness of the Court, and that is its ineffectiveness of enforcement. Historically, nations have rejected the findings of the Court. For example, in 1980, Iran rejected the International Court of Justice/World Court's call to release American hostages.

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