

**The 13<sup>th</sup> Red Cross International Humanitarian Law Moot**  
**14 March 2015**

**Speech by**  
**the Honourable Chief Justice Geoffrey Ma**

1. Sir TL, Mr Lo, Mr Ho, Mr Ryter, judges, participants, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. I extend a warm welcome in particular to all the participants in this year's Law Moot, the 13<sup>th</sup> Red Cross International Humanitarian Law Moot. This year, apart from being accorded the honour of saying a few words and presenting prizes to the winners, I had the pleasure of attending the grand final of the competition. Much praise will be given to all the participants, not just those in the final, and I wholeheartedly associate myself with this.

2. Ever since my first moot in 1975 in Gray's Inn in London, I have been a keen follower and supporter of mooting. I have said this before: mooting is perhaps the ultimate form of persuasion in a format that requires extreme discipline and concentration. Discipline is required because, quite literally, every word matters and there is no leeway for wasted words.

Given the strict time limits, there is no room for flowery language or showmanship. The objective is to persuade and to do so in a limited time. Not even advocates in real life, apart perhaps from the restrictions in the length of oral submissions in SCOTUS (The Supreme Court of the United States), come under such constraints.

3. I also mentioned concentration. This is a quality that is essential in everything we do. For the advocate – and everyone in this court room can call himself or herself an advocate today – one of the stiffest challenges come by way of the sheer unpredictability of proceedings. No one is a psychic and it is the unpredictability of questions which makes concentration on the part of the advocate essential, first to understand exactly what the judge is asking in the first place and then, to be able convincingly to answer the question. Naturally, thorough preparation is important but the job needs to be completed on one's feet.

4. This year's moot problem is as always an international law problem which is heard in the International Criminal Court. The problem in this competition is always a difficult and complex one. The problem this year highlights the type of real challenges faced by the Red Cross the world over, although we are here merely dealing with the legal aspects. It is sadly a fact of life and very much part of our global historical experience that wars and armed conflicts do happen. Some argue that the highlight of civilization was the golden age of the city states in Greece when each territory kept very much to itself, with no ambitions to annex other people's territories. It was in relative terms a short lived age. In all other periods of history up to the present, conflicts have been in our lives.

5. But amidst such conflicts is a belief that crimes against humanity and war crimes must not go unpunished. The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 was perhaps the first concerted attempt to ensure that there should be an international tribunal to try international crimes. This eventually led to the

establishment of the International Criminal Court in 2002. Just as the Peace Palace in The Hague is a homage to peace, the International Criminal Court (which sits mainly in The Hague) is a reminder that peace is not always with us. The International Criminal Court is also a reminder to all of us who are lawyers and those among you who aspire to be lawyers that due process and a fair trial are essential qualities in the quest for justice. In this year in particular – 2015, 800 years since the sealing of Magna Carta in 1215 – this becomes more important than ever.

6. Lastly, I would like to congratulate again all the participants in this year's Moot, all the prize winners, the organizers and everyone who has assisted in the event.