

Annual United Nations event gives boost to international treaties, rule of law



Patricia O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs. UN Photo/JC McIlwaine

2 October 2012 – Forty States either signed or ratified international treaties on a range of issues, from protecting children from violence to promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, during the annual high-level event that accompanies the opening of the United Nations General Assembly.

“States have again manifested their firm belief in the importance of international treaty law,” the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and UN Legal Counsel, Patricia O’Brien, said about the week-long 2012 Treaty Event, which wrapped up today at UN Headquarters.

It is only by ratifying, accepting, acceding to, or expressing consent to be bound that a State is actually bound by an international agreement. This year’s event resulted in 87 treaty actions – 30

ratifications, 24 accessions, four acceptances and two consents to be bound, all of which represent the step of becoming party to a treaty.

“The high number of States becoming parties to various treaties makes this one of the most important treaty events in recent years,” said Ms. O’Brien, adding that “it really supports and strengthens the rule of law.”

Two States – Indonesia and Swaziland – joined the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.

“This is a strong expression of commitment to protect children from violence and prevent the risk of their exploitation as victims of sale, prostitution or pornography,” said the Secretary-General’s Special Representative on Violence against Children, Marta Santos Pais.

The Protocol supplements the Convention on the Rights of the Child and provides detailed guidance to support States in their efforts to prohibit, prevent and bring to an end incidents of sexual exploitation of children, and to protect children from being sold for non-sexual purposes, including forced labour, illegal adoption and organ harvesting.

Indonesia and Swaziland, along with Nigeria, also joined another Optional Protocol that strengthens the Convention on the Rights of the Child – on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. The Protocol serves to ensure that children will not be forced to fight in war or be pressed into military service.

Another important treaty action was Samoa’s ratification of the amendments to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court on the Crime of Aggression, making Samoa the second State party to the Rome Statute to ratify the amendments which define the crime of aggression.

The 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – the first international agreement requiring governments to uphold the rights of children and adults with disabilities – was ratified by Dominica, Israel, Poland, Russia and Swaziland.

Honduras and Portugal joined the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, a 1954 agreement that requires stateless persons – people who are not considered as nationals by any State, but who are not covered by refugee laws either – to be given the same rights as citizens with respect to freedom of religion and education of their children, for instance.

Malta, Nigeria and Turkey ratified the 2005 Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism designed to criminalize acts of nuclear terrorism and to promote police and judicial cooperation to prevent, investigate and punish those acts.

Also, the International Cocoa Agreement, adopted in 2010 to strengthen the cooperation between exporting and importing countries, entered into force provisionally during the Treaty Event, on 1 October 2012, as foreseen in the treaty.

More than 550 multilateral treaties are deposited with the Secretary-General, a number of which are close to achieving universal participation. Others require just a few more instruments of ratification or accession to trigger their entry into force.

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