

The ICJ: A Layman's Explanation

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The International Court of Justice, located in The Hague, Netherlands, is the judicial arm of the United Nations. U.N. member states bring their disputes before the ICJ, whose jurisdiction is dependent on both states' prior acceptance of whatever verdict the court delivers.

The ICJ does not try war criminals; rather, it resolves what we might call 'civil' disputes in an American trial court: it settles border disagreements, assesses fault for breaches of treaties, and arbitrates questions of interpretation of international law between member states.

In these proceedings, the "Applicant" (plaintiff) and "Respondent" (defendant) each submit their written pleadings, Memorials and Counter-Memorials, respectively, in advance of actual written arguments before the court.

The Court also serves as a judicial advisory body to the General Assembly and Security Council, both of whom may ask the Court for Advisory Opinions regarding specific GA or Security Council resolutions' compliance with the U.N. Charter.

The U.N.'s ICJ consists of thirteen Justices, a President, and a Vice-President.