



# The Right Livelihood Award

*for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people*

Christopher Weeramantry (Sri Lanka)

(2007)



*"... for his lifetime of groundbreaking work to strengthen and expand the rule of international law".*

Christopher Weeramantry

**Christopher Weeramantry is a world-renowned legal scholar and a former Vice-President of the International Court of Justice, who has played a crucial role in strengthening and expanding the rule of international law. His work demonstrates how international law can be used to address current global challenges such as the continued threat of nuclear weapons, the protection of human rights and the protection of the environment.**

## Career

Christopher Weeramantry was born in Sri Lanka in 1926 and studied at universities in Colombo and London, earning a higher doctorate in laws (LL.D.) from London University. He became a judge in the Sri Lanka Supreme Court in 1967. In 1972, he moved to Australia to be Professor of Law at Monash University, Melbourne (until 1991). In Australia his writings led to the initiation of the annual Law Week, where numerous events are organised for members of the legal profession to discuss with and explain their work to the public.

Weeramantry has held Visiting Professorships in many countries. He is chair of the international council of the Institute of Sustainable Development at McGill University in Canada, President of the International Association of Lawyers against Nuclear Arms (IALANA) and Chairman of the International Chief Justices Working Group on Strengthening Judicial Integrity.

During the 1980s, Weeramantry became prominent in helping to unravel international disputes, notably as chair of the Nauru Commission of Inquiry from 1987-88. The Commission was set up by the government of Nauru to investigate responsibility under international law for rehabilitation of the phosphate lands of Nauru, which had been ruined during international trusteeship.

Nuclear weapons have always been a particular concern of his. His book *Nuclear Weapons and Scientific Responsibility* (1987) has been widely translated and is the major text on the legal responsibilities of nuclear scientists.

Weeramantry was elected to fill the Asian seat on the International Court of Justice in 1990 and was elected by his colleagues as their Vice-President in 1997, while still a first term member of the court. He retired from the court in 2000, having presided over many cases, including the Lockerbie case.

Weeramantry won the UNESCO Prize for Peace Education in 2006.

In 2008, the Lifetime Achievement Award of The Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy was conferred on Weeramantry. He is also a councillor of the World Future Council.

### **The illegality of nuclear weapons**

When the International Court of Justice made its decision on nuclear weapons in 1996, Weeramantry was a dissenting voice. He strongly disagreed with the majority's decision to leave undetermined the legality of one area of the use of nuclear weapons - nuclear weapons in self-defence when the survival of the state was at stake. His dissenting opinion recognised that this exception would in practice be widely used by the nuclear weapon states, and he categorically asserted their illegality "in any circumstances whatsoever".

His book-length exposition of international law in this, one of the most important cases in the history of the International Court of Justice, is regarded as his crowning achievement. "The threat and use of nuclear weapons", he says in his opening paragraph, "contradicts the fundamental principle of the dignity and worth of the human person on which all law depends. It violates the fundamental principles of international law, and represents the very negation of the humanitarian concerns which underlie the structure of humanitarian law."

### **A global legal scholar and pioneer**

Weeramantry has also focused on other areas of cutting-edge jurisprudence, where social questions and theology and philosophy meet, e.g. the impact of technology on human rights, or the environmental principles in international law. According to Weeramantry, international law is "mono-cultural and Euro-centred". He has shown that international law has many other roots. The first writers of systematic texts on international law were the Islamic writers in the 8th century. So Weeramantry has written about Islamic jurisprudence and has repeatedly cited old religious principles as customary law in his judgements. In his book *The Lord's Prayer: Bridge to a Better World*, he shows how over a hundred principles of human rights and international law lie embedded in the Lord's Prayer.

Weeramantry is still extraordinarily active, travelling widely all over the world to give keynote speeches at major conferences. A book published in association with McGill University's Centre for International Sustainable Development is called *Sustainable Justice: Reconciling Economic, Social and Environmental Law*, and charts how the concept of sustainable development is becoming important in international law. His book *Armageddon or Brave New World: Reflections on the Hostilities in Iraq* (2003) was one of the first books to appear on the legal implications of the Iraq War. In this book, Weeramantry makes a very powerful case that humanity will either step back from the error of the Iraq War and reaffirm the essential importance of the UN and the rule of international law, or it will slide into further unilateral wars, and, ultimately, nuclear catastrophe. A second edition was published in 2005.

Another book, *Xenotransplantation: The Legal & Ethical Aspects*, just published, embodies research done for the Medical Faculty of Harvard University. It deals with the possible dangers to global human rights of the new technique of transplanting animal organs into human bodies.

### **The Weeramantry International Centre for Peace Education and Research**

Christopher Weeramantry set up the Weeramantry International Centre for Peace Education and

Research in Sri Lanka in 2001. It rests on the three pillars of Peace Education, Cross Cultural Understanding and International Law as an Instrument of Peace. The work of the Centre covers all these aspects both locally and globally. In Sri Lanka, the Centre holds camps for school children and university students from different Sri Lankan backgrounds, in order to foster inter-cultural understanding. It also conducts lectures and seminars on these topics, sometimes by itself and sometimes in association with organisations like the International Committee of the Red Cross. The Centre has also produced detailed reports for the Sri Lankan Law Reform Commission on both the protection of witnesses and the compensation of victims of crime and terrorism.

### **Weeramantry's most recent campaign: A new World Court Judgement**

In its 1996 judgement, the International Court of Justice ruled that nuclear weapon states have an obligation under international law to continue and to conclude negotiations leading to the abandonment of nuclear weapons. Weeramantry is currently working on another case to bring back various aspects of these issues to the International Court, including the violation by nuclear weapons states of their obligations as set out by the Court.

### **Quotation**

*"We need to resolve the mutual lack of understanding between the worlds of Islam and Christianity. There is a total unawareness on each side of the richness and inspirational value of the other and in fact a tendency, born of ignorance, to deride the other."*

Christopher Weeramantry

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