

## Foreword

The current volume of *The International Lawyer* is the first following its twenty-fifth anniversary volume. The Section of International Law and Practice is proud of the quality of this publication and the role it is playing during the current United Nations Decade of International Law (1990-1999). International law is no longer a sole preserve of diplomats and statesmen. During the last forty-five years, international law has recognized that it has to deal with rights and duties of individuals and corporations. The number of cases involving issues of international law in domestic courts has rapidly increased, and each year several cases of this kind reach even the august Supreme Court of the United States.

Lawyers no longer can serve their clients properly if they do not watch the international aspect of their client transactions. I recently attended a conference on "Uniform Commercial Law in the Twenty-First Century," celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of UNCITRAL, the United Nations Commission on International Law. That Commission's main function is to facilitate international trade by drafting uniform laws which now govern a large proportion of international transactions. The readers of *The International Lawyer* are, of course, familiar with the United Nations Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods (Vienna 1980), which establishes uniform rules for such contracts that bridge the differences between disparate social, economic, and legal systems and removes important legal barriers to international trade. It has been ratified by more than twenty countries, including the United States, and is applied in fact in many other countries. Its one hundred articles constitute a veritable code of commercial law.

More recently, UNCITRAL prepared the United Nations Convention on International Bills of Exchange and International Promissory Notes, which was approved not by a special international conference, but—at much lesser expense—by the General Assembly of the United Nations, which submitted it for comments to gov-

---

\*Chair, 1992-93, ABA Section of International Law and Practice. Distinguished Research Professor of Law, The National Law Center, The George Washington University.

ernments and established a working group to analyze the comments and prepare some modifications in light of them. At its next session, in 1988, the General Assembly adopted the ninety articles of this convention, an important step in facilitating the free circulation of these documents and thus expediting international trade and finance.

UNCITRAL has also contributed greatly to the settlement of international trade disputes by developing a generally acceptable set of arbitration rules, a model law on international commercial arbitration, and a parallel set of conciliation rules.

Several other helpful instruments have also been prepared by UNCITRAL and there are at least seven new ones in preparation, including one on the conclusion of contracts by electronic means.

This is, of course, only one of several international organizations laboring in this important area, and the recent conference heard also interesting reports on the Hague Conferences on the Unification of Private International Law, and on the work of the Rome Institute for the Unification of Private Law (Unidroit). Important unification work is also being done in other sectors, especially maritime and air law, and on a regional basis, especially in the Western Hemisphere.

It is quite likely that the twenty-first century will see the growth of uniform laws in many fields, making international trade and investment, and accompanying industrial development of large parts of the world, more rapid and efficient. A lawyer anywhere will be able to have easier access to uniform laws applying everywhere.

I am sure that *The International Lawyer* will keep its readers abreast of these developments, and that because of the efficiency of its excellent staff they will be the first to know of the new international instruments which will make their practice easier.