

Ms. Patricia O'Brien

"Legal issues facing the United Nations - Reflections from three years as Legal Counsel"

Tuesday, February 14, 2012

Patricia O' Brien was appointed the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and UN Legal Counsel in August 2008. She oversees the Office of Legal Affairs, the overall objectives of which are to provide a unified central legal service for the Secretariat and the principal and other organs of the United Nations; to contribute to the progressive development and codification of international public and trade law; to promote the strengthening and development as well as the effective implementation of the international legal order for the seas and oceans; to register and publish treaties; and to perform the depositary functions of the Secretary-General.

Ms. O'Brien has extensive experience of legal and international affairs. Prior to her appointment she held a number of senior legal positions in and out of Ireland. Immediately before taking up her position at the UN she served for five years as Legal Adviser to the Department of Foreign Affairs of Ireland where she advised on legal issues arising in Irish foreign policy, in particular public international law, human rights law and European Union law. She also served as a Senior Legal Adviser to the Attorney General of Ireland and as Legal Counselor at the Irish Permanent Representation to the European Union in Brussels.

Earlier in her career Ms. O'Brien practiced law at the Irish Bar (1979-1988) and for one year at the Bar of British Columbia, Canada. Between 1989 and 1992 she held academic positions at the University of British Columbia, Canada.

Ms. O'Brien earned a Bachelor of Arts (Mod) in legal science in 1978 and a Master of Arts in 1987 from Trinity College, Dublin; a Barrister-at-Law (BL) from Kings Inns, Dublin, in 1978 and a Bachelor of Laws from the University of Ottawa, Canada, in 1990. She is a member of the Irish Bar (1978) and of the Bar of England and Wales (1986). She is a Fellow of the Society for Advanced Legal Studies, Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, London, Vice-President of the Dublin University Law Society, and an Honorary Bencher of the Kings Inns, Dublin, and a Master of the Bench of the Middle Temple, London.

Ms. O'Brien has three children.