

CANCELLATION OF 2020 INTERNATIONAL ROUNDS

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PRESS RELEASE

It is with a very heavy heart that we must announce the cancellation of the 2020 White & Case International Rounds of the Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition.

We know that this comes as a shattering disappointment to everyone in the global Jessup community. The decision pains us deeply and personally. As former Jessup Competitors ourselves, we understand the enormous investment our students have made of time, energy and passion. They have spent the last 6 or more months breathing life into the world of Adawa and Rasasa, pouring countless hours into legal research and writing. They have argued with teammates about the merits of their arguments. Many of them have emerged triumphant at National and Regional Rounds, ready to prepare for the final stage: Washington, and the International Rounds.

We issued a statement on 3 March 2020, hopeful that we could proceed with the International Rounds, but noting that ILSA would “continue to monitor this evolving situation.” We asked our community of students and coaches to apprise us of the situation in their countries and at their universities. Over the past week, we have spoken to and heard from teams, judges, volunteers, and officials from around the world, and we have continued to consult with appropriate national and local authorities.

A growing and substantial number of teams have informed us that because of local conditions or school or governmental regulations, they are unable to attend the International Rounds. The attendance of many other teams and judges is increasingly uncertain as a result of school, firm, national, local and other policies and restrictions that are quickly evolving to meet the continued threat of COVID-19. The World Health Organization has now declared COVID-19 to be a global pandemic. In the end, we have concluded that it is

impossible to proceed with the International Rounds. There are some important reasons why we have reached this conclusion.

First, the Jessup exists to preserve and promote the fragile but growing corpus of international law.

Tens of thousands of medical professionals around the world – supported by policy-makers and governments – are working around the clock to contain and suppress the COVID-19 outbreak. The World Health Organization and governments around the world have repeatedly advised against mass gatherings and international travel.

It would be irresponsible for the Jessup Competition – a cornerstone of the international legal community – to undermine the efforts of our brothers and sisters around the world by convening a conference of hundreds of law students and volunteers from more than 100 countries. It would be contrary to our mission – even symbolically – to convene the largest gathering of international lawyers and students, while our medical partners-in-arms are still fighting to ascertain the scope of this crisis and to prevent its further spread.

Second, the informal motto of the Jessup is, “In the future, world leaders will look upon each other differently, because they met here first, as friends.”

We have, over the past several weeks, seriously considered alternative formats for the Jessup. We have discussed the possibility of a “fully virtual” Competition. We have considered a “Memorials-only” Jessup. We have even, in the worst-case scenario, mooted the idea of International Rounds with only a handful of teams in attendance. All of these alternatives are deeply unsatisfactory, and contrary to the entire point of the Jessup. It is also impossible – in the midst of the uncertainty surrounding this global pandemic – for us to reschedule the International Rounds. We are a group of almost 1,000 students and lawyers, and we cannot sensibly discuss an event that consumes a full week without at least a substantial likelihood that the current situation will be improved, if not resolved, by a date certain. The uncertainty of the weeks ahead and many other concerns effectively preclude

rescheduling. We cannot simply postpone the International Rounds.

The Jessup Cup will not be awarded this year.

In the end, the Cup follows the community, not the other way around. The Jessup Cup is awarded to the team that, after a week in Washington, meeting and competing against the best of every other country on earth, prevails on the highest stage of international mootings. If we are not able to provide that stage, then we should not provide that Cup.

The 2020 Jessup Competition will, however, award Memorials prizes. The Dillard, Evans, and Baxter Competitions will proceed as usual. We are currently exploring options to live-stream awards ceremonies and speeches to our Jessup 2020 Teams and our global community and will make announcements in the weeks ahead. However, there is no point in pretending that there is a “Jessup Champion” without the International Rounds.

In the end, our decision is based upon respect for the international legal order, as complicated as it might be. We stand in solidarity with the international health organizations, doctors, and civil servants around the world who are fighting to contain this virus – not just on a global scale, but in communities, local and national. That is, at the end of the day, why the Jessup Competition exists: to promote and provoke international responses to global challenges.

We understand that this decision will cause complications for our teams around the world who have already made travel and other arrangements. We are working with the Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill to release any committed room bookings. Many airlines have offered waivers or refunds based on the COVID-19 crisis. If there are other aspects of your travel plans and related arrangements that cannot be resolved, please contact us: we would like to try to help. We hope that, on balance, this announcement will provide clarity and support for any teams and judges that are still making their decisions and booking their tickets.

We thank our global community for its support and solidarity during these challenging times. We extend our immense gratitude to all of the sponsors

and donors whose support makes our work and the Jessup Competition possible. We are firmly committed to reconvening for Jessup 2021 (4-10 April 2021) and hope that many of you will be able to participate again next year.

If you have any questions or concerns about this decision, please do not hesitate to contact us.



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