



Coalition for the International Criminal Court

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Global Coalition Urges Lebanon to Join International Criminal Court

Says Country Can Reinforce its Commitment to Ending Impunity and Bolster Arab Support for Court

New York, USA – The Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CICC)—an international network of more than 2,500 non-governmental and civil society organizations—today called on Lebanon to demonstrate its commitment to international justice and the rule of law by acceding to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Lebanon is the March 2009 country target for the Coalition’s Universal Ratification Campaign (URC). To complement its ongoing campaign to make justice universal, the Coalition organizes advocacy initiatives around the world, including this monthly push to secure a new ICC member state.

"We support the president's efforts to accelerate Lebanon's accession to the Rome Statute," said William Pace, Convener of the Coalition for the ICC. "The people of Lebanon would gain from the clear statement by the government that the commission of serious crimes in Lebanon must not go unpunished. And the region would benefit from the moral leadership in this crucial time."

In a 3 March 2009 letter to the President of the Republic of Lebanon, Michel Suleiman, the CICC urged Lebanon to prioritize its accession to the Rome Statute, which is the Court’s founding treaty. The ICC is the first permanent, global court capable of trying individuals accused of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Since Lebanon did not sign the Rome Statute before the 31 January 2000 deadline for doing so, Lebanon would have to accede—not ratify—the Statute.

The letter also stressed the need for Lebanon and other Arab States to join the ICC. Lebanon played an important role in creating this new system of international justice. To date, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is vastly under-represented at the Court. Jordan is the only country in the region that has joined the ICC. The Arab League, which includes 22 Arab states, has only three members that are States Parties to the ICC – Jordan, Djibouti, and the Comoros Islands.

"Lebanon must fulfill its obligations to ending impunity as exemplified through its commitments to international human rights treaties," said Brigitte Chelebian, Director of Beirut-based *Justice Without Frontiers* and the Lebanese Coalition for the ICC. "Lebanon played an important role in the creation of the Rome Statute and we urge Lebanon to carry out its role as a representative of the Arab World."

Lebanon was a victim of severe international crimes during its 15-year long civil war, which ended in 1990. On 1 March 2009, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon opened, highlighting Lebanon's commitment to ending the culture of impunity. The UN-endorsed tribunal was created to prosecute those involved in the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri.

The CICC also stresses the fact that the ICC does not have retroactive jurisdiction and would only be able to investigate crimes that occur *after* Lebanon joins the Court, unless the Lebanese government expressly chooses to accept the Court's jurisdiction over crimes committed since July 2002, when the Rome Statute entered into force.

There are currently 108 ICC States Parties. Central to the Court's mandate is the principle of complementarity, which holds that the Court will only intervene if national legal systems are unable or unwilling to do so. There are currently four active investigations before the Court: the Central African Republic; the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Darfur, the Sudan; and Uganda.

The Lebanese Coalition for the ICC/Justice Without Frontiers will be holding a Regional Media Training about the International Criminal Court on 12-13 March 2009 as part of its *End Impunity Now* campaign – in partnership with the European Union, No Peace Without Justice, and the CICC. For more information, please contact Ms. Brigitte Chelebian, Justice Without Frontiers, Coordinator of Lebanese Coalition for the ICC, jwficc@yahoo.com or +961 1 890877.