



Coalition for the International Criminal Court
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MEDIA ADVISORY
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ICC OPENS FIRST HEARING IN CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

World Court to Consider Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes Charges against Former DRC Vice-President Jean Pierre Bemba Gombo; Key Victims Advocate Dead

WHAT: On 12 January 2009, the International Criminal Court (ICC) will commence a week-long confirmation of charges hearing in the case of *The Prosecutor v. Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo*. During the hearing, the three judges of Pre-Trial Chamber III will determine whether the charges against Bemba should be confirmed.

In a related development, on approximately 27 December 2008, Nganatouwa Goungaye Wanfiyo, president of the Central African League for Human Rights (LCDH) and a legal representative of victims in the Bemba case, was killed in a car accident while gathering evidence. The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) has requested an independent investigation to determine the cause of Goungaye's death. His organization is a member of the Federation.

“We mourn the passing of Nganatouwa Goungaye Wanfiyo who worked hard to bring accountability to the Central African Republic where impunity has reigned for more than a decade,” says William R. Pace, convenor of the NGO Coalition for the ICC (CICC). “This judicial hearing would have filled Goungaye with great hope, and honors his long and difficult struggle for justice.”

WHO: Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo is the first suspect and the first detainee in the situation of the Central African Republic (CAR). On 23 May 2008, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, which was made public on 24 May 2008. It contains three counts of crimes against humanity (rape; torture; and murder) and five counts of war crimes (rape; torture; outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment; and pillaging of a town or place) On 24 May 2008, Bemba was arrested by Belgian authorities and transferred to The Hague on 3 July 2008. Bemba was the alleged President and Commander in chief of the “Mouvement de Libération du Congo” (MLC). He is the former Vice-President of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and a Senator in the DRC Parliament.

HOW: The ICC Prosecutor will be required to support his charges with sufficient evidence. Bemba will be given the chance to object to the charges and challenge

evidence through his team of lawyers which includes Principal Counsel Nkwebe Liriss and Karim A.A.Khan as well as Associate Counsel Aimé Kilolo Musamba. Marie-Edith Douzima Lawson and the Office of Public Counsel for Victims (OPCV) will represent 54 victims and present their perspective and concerns. If the three judges confirm the charges, the ICC will be able to move the case forward to trial.

COMMENT AND BACKGROUND:

An investigation in the CAR was opened by ICC Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo on 22 May 2007, following a referral by the CAR government on 7 January 2005.

The ICC has issued twelve arrest warrants for investigations in four of the most brutal conflicts of our time: the Central African Republic; Darfur, Sudan; Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. To date, four suspects have been arrested. In a very short time, the ICC has made monumental advances toward ensuring that perpetrators of the gravest crimes are held accountable.

Experts from CAR human rights organizations and international NGOs are listed on the following pages for comment and background on this hearing.

Also, a factsheet on the confirmation of charges hearing for Bemba is posted on the CICC website at: <http://www.iccnw.org/?mod=fsdoc>

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Important notice: *The Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CICC), an independent NGO movement, is dedicated to the establishment of the International Criminal Court as a fair, effective, and independent international organization. The Coalition as a whole, and its secretariat, does not endorse or promote specific investigations or prosecutions or take a position on situations before the ICC. However, individual CICC members may endorse referrals, provide legal and other support on investigations, or develop partnerships with local and other organizations in the course of their efforts*

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