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17 July 2014

International Justice Day Sees Progress, Challenges Ahead for ICC*Global civil society urges support for ending impunity, not expanding immunity*

New York/The Hague—Civil society and governments worldwide should reaffirm their support for the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the pursuit of peace through justice and the rule of law this International Justice Day, the Coalition for the ICC said today.

“In effect, 2014 represents the 20th anniversary of the new age of international justice and International Justice Day offers all of us an opportunity to reflect on the threats, challenges and changes to the international justice system that must be addressed in the years ahead,” **said William R. Pace, convener of the Coalition**. “Since 1994, with the beginnings of the UN Security Council tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and the General Assembly consideration of the draft that would become the ICC Rome Statute, there has been a revolution of prosecuting grave crimes at the national, regional and global levels.”

This past year, the new ICC leadership has taken important steps toward dealing with both the opposition to and the need for ICC reforms. ICC states parties have increased their support for the Court, and the prosecutor has demonstrated the resolve to investigate crimes wherever they occur. Additionally, support for the Kampala amendments to the Rome Statute—including the crime of aggression—has grown considerably this year.

“These historic developments have been met, however, by increasing opposition by some major powers and governments,” **Pace added**.

Opponents of the ICC have moved to strengthen their positions. Today, just as in the past, political and military leaders use national sovereignty to shield themselves from accountability for committing the worst crimes under international law. International Justice Day celebrates the creation of the Rome Statute which limits immunity for all officials whose governments have ratified the treaty. No immunity is a fundamental pillar of the ICC and Rome Statute system.

The 122 states that have ratified the Rome Statute have taken a powerful step towards ending impunity. However, some 70 states remain outside the system, creating an impunity gap. This is magnified by the selectivity shown by major powers on the UN Security Council, which all too often use their vetoes on resolutions that would hold accountable the perpetrators of grave crimes.

The recent veto of a Security Council resolution to refer the Syrian conflict to the ICC is a case in point. Although the resolution had wide support—including from 13 of the 15 members of the Council—the resolution was vetoed by Russia and China.

The Security Council has referred only Darfur and Libya to the Court despite well-documented mass human rights violations elsewhere—an inconsistency that has prompted an initiative calling on permanent Security Council members to refrain from using their veto-power when dealing with such crimes.

“Whenever governments block investigations into massive human rights crimes, often to protect powerful individuals from prosecution, they are not only robbing victims of justice, but blocking peace for all of us,” **said Pace**. “These actions make it more likely that atrocities will continue in the future.”

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International Justice Day is celebrated on 17 July every year to commemorate the anniversary of the adoption of the Rome Statute, 16 years ago this year. It is a reminder of the urgency for all states committed to justice for victims around the world to ensure continued support for the international justice system.

Coalition members are holding events worldwide to celebrate this day in solidarity with victims of grave crimes everywhere.

Comments on International Justice Day from Coalition members around the globe:

“More than ever, the international community’s support and urgent action are needed to fight sexual and gender-based crimes,” said **Clément Capo-Chichi, president of the Benin Coalition for the ICC**. “The ICC is the only international criminal institution with universal jurisdiction capable of helping to tackle those crimes. Let’s all take action to make justice matter!”

“International Justice Day belongs to all who are involved in the indefatigable fight against impunity; it belongs to the victims who fell in this fight, to the survivors of atrocities, to human rights defenders, politicians, diplomats who understand that genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity are an affront not only against a particular nation or a group somewhere far away, but against humanity as a whole,” said **Kakha Kozhoridze, chairman of the Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association**. “For us, Georgians, International Justice Day, first and foremost, is the day of the victims of the August 2008 War. Those tragic events convince us that while the peaceful resolution of conflicts has no alternative, the international community should not allow the crimes committed during the war to go unpunished. This is the way to ensure that those atrocities do not occur again in the future.”

“The Rome Statute criminalizes some of, if not the most reprehensible of all crimes, that all governments should aspire to incorporate into domestic legislation, including the Statute’s gender progressive provisions and emphasis on the plight of the victim,” said **Evelyn Balais-Serrano, executive director of FORUM-ASIA**. “In order to work towards the universality of justice and ensure maximum protection and redress for its citizens at both the domestic and international levels—we encourage governments in the Asia region to ratify the Rome Statute—for a government that ratifies the Rome Statute is a government that declares its support for accountability and an end to impunity both at home and abroad.”

“The fight against impunity has an ethical significance, ranging from the memory of victims to the sanctions imposed to those responsible for crimes under international law. The Rome Statute is the first instrument of international criminal law to include sexual crimes. For this reason, International Justice Day bears a significant importance for women, and should lead us to strengthening our fight towards a world that condemns impunity for crimes committed against women,” said **Adriana Benjumea, director for Corporación HUMANAS (Colombia)**. “The progress enshrined within the Rome Statute is a driving force toward strengthening gender justice within local settings. To this aim, this day must be a strong reminder for states to comply with their obligations in implementing, investigating and prosecuting crimes that constitute an attack on the integrity of all women.”

“A dream that started with the adoption of the Rome Statute is now a reality, holding dictators accountable for their crimes,” said **Ammar Qurabi of the National Organization for Human Rights in Syria**. “We hope that the ICC will soon intervene in Syria where many victims are suffering from crimes under the Court’s jurisdiction.”



Background: The ICC is the world's first permanent international court to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Central to the Court's mandate is the principle of complementarity, which holds that the Court will only intervene if national legal systems are unwilling or unable to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. There are currently eight investigations before the Court: the Central African Republic; Cote d'Ivoire; the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Darfur, the Sudan; Uganda; Kenya; Libya; and Mali. The ICC has publicly issued 30 arrest warrants and nine summonses to appear. The Court issued a judgment in its first trial on 14 March 2012. Three other trials are ongoing. The ICC Office of the Prosecutor has also made public that it is conducting 11 preliminary examinations on four continents: Afghanistan, Colombia, Georgia, Guinea, Honduras, Republic of Korea, Nigeria, the Comoros, the Central African Republic, Ukraine and Iraq.