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CAPE VERDE BECOMES 119TH STATE TO JOIN INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

Global Coalition Welcomes Rome Statute Ratification as a Crucial Step towards Ending Impunity for the Most Serious Crimes in Africa

New York (USA)—The Coalition for the International Criminal Court today welcomed Cape Verde as the 119th state party to the Rome Statute, the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court (ICC), hailing this as a crucial step towards ending impunity for the most serious crimes in Africa. In recognizing the jurisdiction of the ICC—the world’s first and only permanent international court to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide—Cape Verde has made a historic commitment to international justice and the rule of law, the Coalition said.

“We congratulate the Cape Verdean Government and people for this landmark achievement, which has marked an advance in Africa’s commitment to justice,” said Francis Dako, Africa regional coordinator at the Coalition for the International Criminal Court - a civil society network of more than 2,500 NGOs in 150 countries advocating for a fair, effective and independent ICC and improved access to justice for victims of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. “It has been over a year since the last African state—Seychelles—joined the ICC and it is hoped that this development will spur other states in Africa to take decisive and concrete steps towards fighting impunity by joining the Rome Statute system,” Dako added. “The Coalition for the ICC now calls on the Cape Verdean Government to fulfill its commitment to immediately commence the process of implementing ICC crimes into its national legislation.”

On October 10 2011, Cape Verde deposited its instrument of ratification of the Rome Statute at the United Nations Headquarters, the final step in the ratification process and the culmination of many years of Coalition advocacy efforts and facilitation. In the last five years, the Coalition has engaged in several advocacy missions to Cape Verde to meet with government officials to encourage them to make progress towards ratification. Together with national partners, the Coalition engaged the Cape Verdean Government and Parliament, responding to their concerns and doubts about the Rome Statute, which eventually led to constitutional amendments paving the way toward Cape Verde's ratification. In addition, Cape Verde was the Coalition's November 2010 Universal Ratification Campaign (URC), a monthly campaign launched to encourage countries to join the Rome Statute system. In a letter dated 2 November 2010 to Cape Verdean President H.E. Pedro de Verona Rodrigues Pires, the Coalition for the ICC urged the Government of Cape Verde to prioritize its ratification of the Rome Statute.

"We heartily congratulate the government on the positive step it took in ratifying the Rome Statute and are reminded of how far our country has come in the last few years, and of the ways we can continue to build increased justice for ourselves and for the world," said Maria Gomes, chair of the Association of Female Jurists in Cape Verde and focal point for the Coalition for the ICC. "We call on the government of Cape Verde to continue the great strides of justice recently undertaken and implement the Rome Statute provisions into our national law so that our judicial system will be able to have jurisdiction over these crimes which shake the consciousness of humanity," Gomes added.

One hundred and nineteen states have now joined the ICC—five of which joined in 2011—reflecting a growing global consensus towards ending impunity through the Rome Statute system. As a state party, Cape Verde will be able to actively participate in the annual Assembly of States Parties (ASP) of the ICC during which states make important decisions in relation to the administration of the Court, including the election of judges and prosecutors.

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 seven investigations before the Court: the Central African Republic; Cote d'Ivoire; the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Darfur, the Sudan; Uganda; Kenya; and Libya. The ICC has publicly issued 18 arrest warrants and nine summonses to appear. Three trials are ongoing. The ICC prosecutor has also made public that it is examining eight situations on four continents: Afghanistan, Colombia, Georgia, Guinea, Honduras, Republic of Korea, Nigeria and Palestine.

The Coalition for the International Criminal Court is a global network of civil society organizations in over 150 countries working in partnership to strengthen international cooperation with the ICC; ensure that the Court is fair, effective and independent; make justice both visible and universal; and advance stronger national laws that deliver justice to victims of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. For more information, visit: www.coalitionfortheicc.org

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