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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **States Must End Impunity for Grave Crimes against Women**

*On International Women's Day, civil society calls for protection of women's rights through Rome Statute system*

**The Hague/ New York**—Governments must urgently ensure greater protection for women from sexual and gender based violence, the Coalition for the International Criminal Court said today on the occasion of International Women's Day.

"States can advance and protect women's rights by ratifying the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and by implementing its landmark gender provisions at the national level," **said Jelena Pia-Comella, program director of the Coalition for the ICC.** "Gender-based crimes can only be properly addressed if states commit to tackle their root causes and join efforts to eradicate impunity for such crimes."

By targeting sexual crimes, the Rome Statute's provisions represent a historic advance for international justice. The Statute is one of the first international treaties to extensively address gender-based crimes and sexual violence as crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide, in recognition that these horrendous crimes are among the most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole.

International Women's Day helps bring into sharper focus the urgency of the work of the ICC to end impunity for crimes against women. It also serves as a reminder for ICC states parties to move forward with effective and comprehensive legislation implementing Rome Statute crimes so that protection of women's rights are guaranteed at both national and international levels.

From the beginning of her term in office, the new ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda has been proactive in addressing the gender-justice gap and made the investigation and prosecution of sexual and gender based crimes a priority.

The Coalition and other organizations around the world will continue their tireless efforts after today's celebration to ensure that sexual and gender based violence are treated as the criminal and humanitarian law violations that they are.

## ***Coalition member statements in honor of International Women's Day***

“Women’s rights were a driving force for many during the Arab Spring. However, this has not translated into the full and equal enjoyment of human rights for women today. It is time to end Arab women’s winter.”

**Bahija Jamal, Moroccan Coalition for the ICC and a board member of Réseau Droit International Humanitaire (DIH)**

“Over the past decades, many Asian countries that have experienced violence against women and girls in contexts of conflict, and as a part of mass-scale violence, continue to strive towards justice and accountability. We commemorate the strength and resolve of victim-survivors and their families searching for justice, and celebrate the solidarity among members of civil society who believe that justice is possible and crucial for long-lasting peace.”

**Saumya Uma, executive director of Women Research Action Group (Mumbai, India).**

“Rape and other forms of sexual violence continue to be used as weapons to terrorize populations in conflicts around the world. We reiterate our call for the ICC to use its full potential to fight impunity for these atrocities and to contribute to deterring the commission of such crimes. While we strongly welcome the prosecutor's commitment to making gender-based crimes a priority, we call for stronger measures to ensure that such crimes are effectively investigated and prosecuted in all situations under ICC jurisdiction.”

**Souhayr Belhassen, president of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)**

“Women and girls are disproportionately affected by sexual violence and other crimes during armed conflict. They continue to be affected in innumerable ways long after atrocities are committed, in terms of physical and psychological trauma. They are stigmatised by families and communities and are unable to seek justice and reparation due to endemic discrimination. We welcome the commitment of new ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda to make the suffering of women and girls a top priority of her office, and we call on states parties to the Rome Statute to reaffirm their support to the ICC, politically and financially, to ensure it is able to deliver gender sensitive justice and reparation.”

**Dadimos Haile, interim director, REDRESS**

“Women must come together to make this Women’s Day more than just a routine anniversary, forgotten as soon as it is over. Women’s human rights continue to be violated in many countries, especially in the absence of democracy. We need to continue to work tirelessly to guarantee women’s security and to end the harassment of women human rights’ defenders. We must also push hard for the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Women’s Resolutions on women, peace and security, which have often been violated by the UN itself. I would also like to take this opportunity to remind the whole world that women in Darfur and South Kordofan are still suffering from systematic attacks and living under inhumane conditions.”

**Amira Mohamed Khair, Sudan and Libya Programme Officer, Women’s Initiatives for Gender Justice**

“The treatment of women worldwide does not reflect the evolution of human rights in the twenty-first century. Sexual and gender-based crimes must receive special attention from states and international institutions. But while we welcome all of the efforts being made by national and international stakeholders, we think that it is essential to address the causes and parameters promoting such violence. We must focus in particular on women’s experience of war across the globe. We ask world leaders, especially those of the African Great Lakes region who recently signed a framework agreement to end the war in the DRC, to respect the commitments they have made to promote peace and stop playing both pyromaniac and fire-fighter.”

**Stella Yanda, executive secretary, Initiatives Alpha, and a key partner of the Women’s Initiatives for Gender Justice in South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**

“I am writing my words on behalf of Arab women and girls whom are facing daily different kind of sexual violence, abuse, rape, and other severe crimes. Unfortunately such crimes are not prosecuted because of the kind of crimes or because of the gap in the national laws or because of some of the Arab countries

didn't ratify yet the Rome Statute. The ICC is the only international legal system who can insure justice for women especially since the Rome Statute is the first treaty that recognized gender crimes. The role of the civil society is to urge the accession to the ICC, and to work on the implementation of the Rome Statute in to national laws. The international community must urge the Security Council to refer war crimes and crimes against humanity (including gender crimes) committed in non state parties to the Court. It is shameful that in 2013 we are celebrating International Women Day while millions of women are suffering from violence and gender crimes and impunity. Justice must not be selective but justice must be for all — including women and girls.”

**Brigitte Chelebian, founder-director, Justice without Frontiers**

On the occasion of 8 March - International Women's Day, TRIAL wishes to remind the international community that sexual violence against girls and women is still being used as a weapon of war all over the world and while perpetrators almost always go unpunished. Many survivors live with the stigma of these crimes, without support from their state, their communities or their closest family members. Rape in war is criminalized as a war crime, a crime against humanity and genocide, yet many more actions need to be urgently taken to bring perpetrators to justice and grant survivors reparation and redress for the harm suffered. **Lejla Mamut, human rights coordinator, TRIAL**

**Background:** *The ICC is the world's first permanent international court to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. 122 states have joined the Rome Statute, the Court's founding treaty. The Statute is one of the first international treaties to extensively address gender-based crimes as crimes against humanity, war crimes, and in some instances, genocide. Specifically, the Statute recognizes rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilizations, gender-based persecutions, trafficking of persons particularly women and children, and sexual violence as among the most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole. 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 active investigations before the Court: the Central African Republic; the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Côte d'Ivoire; Darfur, the Sudan; Uganda; Kenya, Libya and Mali.*

*The Coalition for the International Criminal Court is a global network of civil society organizations in 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](http://www.coalitionfortheicc.org)*

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