



Coalition for the International Criminal Court

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**VANUATU BECOMES 120<sup>th</sup> STATE TO JOIN INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT**

*Global Coalition Welcomes Third State to Join Rome Statute in Asia-Pacific in 2011 as Another Critical Step in the Fight against Impunity*

**New York (USA)**—The Coalition for the International Criminal Court today welcomed Vanuatu as the 120<sup>th</sup> state to join the Rome Statute, the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court (ICC), hailing it as a crucial step toward ending impunity for the most serious crimes in the Asia-Pacific region. 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—Vanuatu has made a historic commitment to international justice and the rule of law, and joins the Philippines and Maldives as the third state from the Asia-Pacific region to join the Court in 2011 and commit to the fight against impunity for the gravest crimes, the Coalition said today.

“The Coalition commends Vanuatu’s decision to embrace and strengthen the growing international justice system by acceding to the Rome Statute,” said William Pace, convenor of 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. “With six ratifications, more states have joined the Court in 2011 than any year since 2003. We are greatly encouraged that three of the six are from the Asia-Pacific, as it means we are seeing a definite trend towards accountability for the most serious crimes in a region that has seen terrible atrocities committed yet is one of the most underrepresented at the ICC,” Pace added.

On 2 December 2011, Vanuatu deposited its instrument of accession of the Rome Statute at United Nations headquarters in New York, the final step in the accession process. The Rome Statute will enter into force on 1 February 2011 in Vanuatu.

During the past year, important actions have been carried out by Coalition members in advance of accession. In March 2011, Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA) organized the Second Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Consultation on the Universality of the Rome Statute in Kuala

Lumpur, which brought together parliamentarians, civil society and government representatives from across the region, including Maryline Arnhambat Abel, the head of the Women's Wing of Vanua'aku Party - Greens Confederation of Vanuatu. Ms. Arnhambat Abel committed to tabling a report in Parliament in support of ICC ratification as a way of encouraging the process forward.

The consultation produced the "Kuala Lumpur Action Plan to Promote the Universality of the Rome Statute of the ICC" which includes a commitment on the part of the Kiribati, Vanuatu, Maldives and Indonesia participants to "encourage their governments to proceed with prioritizing consideration of the Rome Statute's accession with the view of taking a positive determination as early as possible." Moreover, in September 2011, within the context of the United Nations General Assembly, Amnesty International called on the government of Vanuatu to demonstrate its continuing commitment to justice by acceding to the Rome Statute.

In addition to completing its accession process, Vanuatu has taken an important step forward in the implementation process of the Rome Statute, by adopting in August 2011 a law committing to investigate and prosecuting crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes before their national courts. Once it includes Rome Statute crimes within its domestic criminal legislation, Vanuatu will ensure that these crimes can be prosecuted internally in compliance with the principle of complementarity.

Although Vanuatu's accession to the Rome Statute brings to 17 the number of ICC states parties from the Asia-Pacific, the region remains underrepresented at the Court. "We are confident that this number will continue to grow and that 2012 will see further ratifications from the Asia-Pacific region," stated Evelyn Serrano, the Coalition's regional coordinator for Asia-Pacific. "Today, for example, we are witnessing the steady efforts that are being carried out by the Malaysian authorities to complete this process, and we hope to welcome Malaysia as the next State Party to the Rome Statute," she added.

The Coalition has taken important steps to promote the participation of Asia-Pacific states at the ICC, including focusing its Universal Ratification Campaign (URC) on Pacific States (May 2010) Malaysia (January 2011), the Philippines (February 2011), Indonesia (July 2011), Nepal (August 2011) and Thailand (October 2011) and many other advocacy efforts throughout the region in an effort to garner support for ratification among government officials and other stakeholders.

One hundred and twenty states have now joined the ICC reflecting a growing global consensus towards ending impunity through the Rome Statute system. As a state party, Vanuatu will be able to actively participate, as of 2012, in the annual Assembly of States Parties during which states make important decisions in relation to the administration of the Court.

**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 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 19 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 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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