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Global Coalition Urges Qatar and Iraq to Join the International Criminal Court

Both States Should Show Regional Leadership on Justice

New York/The Hague—Iraq and Qatar should take steps to join the International Criminal Court (ICC), the Coalition for the ICC said today.

In a letter to Qatar dated 18 December, the Coalition congratulated Qatar on its recent selection as the ICC's Middle East and North Africa (MENA) focal point on legal trainings. In a letter to Iraq, the Coalition highlighted the recent efforts taken by civil society and by the Kurdistan regional government in urging the federal Iraqi government to ratify the Rome Statute in the near future.

"Ratifying the Rome Statute and joining the global justice movement will serve as a clear sign to Iraq's commitment to the end of impunity and will send a clear message that no future crimes will be tolerated and that justice is the rule rather than the exception," said Amal Nassar, the Coalition's MENA program officer.

The rule of law is progressively becoming a building block for the protection of human rights in several states in the MENA region and Arab leaders are gradually responding to their citizens' demands for accountability and justice. As such, the Coalition asks all countries in the region, and in particular Qatar and Iraq, to ratify the Rome Statute of the ICC. Having both of these countries become states parties to the Rome Statute would broaden the scope and strength of the Court in this important region. In Iraq, there are increasing demands for international human rights and justice norms to be echoed in national forums. Qatar's leadership is already having a positive impact regionally on a range of key—including its diplomatic role in the Arab League and in mediation efforts in the Syrian conflict—and will be even more important in the years to come.

"During the May 2011 Regional Diplomatic Conference on the International Criminal Court hosted by Qatar, H.H. Sheik Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, in a progressive opening statement, called the ICC one of the most important achievements of the international community in the area of international criminal justice," said Leila Hanafi, the Coalition's MENA regional coordinator.

To date, the Arab League, consisting of 22 states, has only four states parties to the Rome Statute—Jordan, Djibouti, the Comoros Islands and Tunisia—and nine signatories. Through its strengthened regional efforts, the Coalition is pushing for an increased number of accessions, ratifications and full implementation of the Rome Statute in MENA countries.

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.

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

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