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17 July 2013

Victims Must not be Forgotten on International Justice Day

On International Justice Day, civil society underlines hope for victims of grave crimes that Rome Statute system represents

New York/The Hague—The countless victims of brutal crimes in Africa must not be forgotten in the ongoing debate around the work of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the region, the Coalition for the ICC said today, International Justice Day.

"International Justice Day is a day to celebrate the historic achievement of the Rome Statute of the ICC, the creation of a permanent international court and new system of justice to prevent the worst crimes against humanity, and to bring even the most powerful perpetrators of these crimes to justice," **said William Pace, convenor of the Coalition for the ICC.** "For the ICC to achieve its highest goals, the governments, court officials and NGOs must do better than what they did in the ICC's first 10 years. The purpose of International Justice Day is for all those of goodwill around the world to recommit to the promise that peace, justice and the rule of law must prevail over anarchy, hatred and violence," Pace continued. "The powerful individuals being brought to trial for terrible crimes like to portray themselves as the political victims—but it is the millions of women, children and civilians who have been killed, raped, wounded and whose homes and communities have been destroyed who are the victims."

While all of the ICC prosecutor's investigations are taking place in African countries, preliminary examinations on other continents are taking place in order to see if judicial action is possible or necessary. However, in recent months, several African leaders have made public declarations accusing the Court of bias.

The ICC prosecutor's investigations in Africa have allowed for the participation of thousands of victims of grave crimes in the various cases before the Court, giving them a voice in the process of justice and playing a key role in the restoration of their dignity.

Meanwhile, the Trust Fund for Victims has for several years been providing general assistance to victims of grave crimes in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Fund is currently preparing to provide reparations to the victims of recently convicted Congolese militia leader Thomas Lubanga. They are on track to become the first recipients of Court-ordered reparations for harm suffered.

International Justice Day is celebrated on 17 July every year to commemorate the anniversary of the adoption of the Rome Statute, 15 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, not only Africa.

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

"International Justice Day was conceived as a way to acknowledge the countless suffering of

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victims of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity the world over,” **said Philip Grant, director of TRIAL**. “TRIAL calls on all actors—states, regional and international organizations, civil society, the media and the public at large—to honor those victims by re-committing to ending impunity for international crimes wherever they occur. Humanity must unite to ensure that perpetrators of these crimes are held to account—in national jurisdictions or at the International Criminal Court.”

“To date, impunity continues to reign in Mexico,” **said Nancy J. López, chair of the Mexican Coalition for the ICC**. “The message that is being conveyed to the global community is a bleak and disheartening one: that the authors of gross human rights violations remain free from prosecution, and that victims are suffering from a lack of access to justice and reparation amid a climate which tolerates crimes under international law,” López added. “In this context, International Justice Day serves us a reminder to all nations, including Mexico, that impunity cannot and must not have a place in the current international order, in which crimes under international law constitute a threat to peace, security, development and the well-being of every individual.”

“Today, 15 years after the adoption of the Rome Statute that created the ICC, FIDH takes this opportunity to recall to all states that we expect them to invest their energy in supporting the ICC rather than attacking it,” **said Karim Lahidji, president of the International Federation for Human Rights**. “Justice for international crimes remains a serious, challenging endeavor. Strengthening an independent and effective ICC, along with the prevention of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, should be the highest priority on their agenda. States should enhance their cooperation and contribution to the Court, and refrain from adding difficulties to its work.”

“International Justice Day is a time to commemorate the adoption of the Rome Statute, which represents the most significant advance in the fight against impunity for the world’s worst crimes,” **said Carla Ferstman, director of REDRESS**. “But while celebrating the founding of the ICC, it is important to also recall that bringing justice to the many thousands of children, women and men that have suffered unimaginable atrocities is difficult, challenging work requiring humility, creativity, perseverance and foresight from all those involved with the Court,” Ferstman continued. “To make justice a reality, states are strongly encouraged to continue what they started; they should ensure that the Court has the necessary funding, and provide the necessary legal and political support to ensure that indictees do not enjoy safe havens.”

“International Justice Day celebrates the adoption of the Rome Statute of the ICC, the most significant achievement in fighting impunity for grave crimes during the 20th century,” **said Ali Ouattara, president of the Ivorian Coalition for the ICC**. “Although Côte d’Ivoire’s ratification of the Rome Statute was a milestone, much remains to be done to bring impartial justice to post-election violence victims from all sides to the conflict.”

“Developments sweeping the MENA region are an ongoing reminder of the need for a permanent, effective accountability mechanism that delivers justice and puts an end to the culture of impunity in the region,” **said Judge Mohammad Al-Tarawneh, coordinator of the Jordanian Coalition for the ICC**.

“We will never know how many lives have been or will be saved by the mere existence of the Rome Statute system,” **said Ross Robertson, assistant speaker in the New Zealand parliament and president of Parliamentarians for Global Action**. “What is clear to PGA is that 15 years after the adoption of the Statute, and in the face of continued victimization of entire populations around the world, Parliamentarians are ready to fight impunity and prevent



these crimes through the universal ratification and domestic implementation of the Rome Statute,” Robertson added. “From Indonesia to Yemen, from El Salvador to the Central African Republic, from Ukraine to Mali, Parliamentarians stand ready to strengthen the rule of law and contribute to peace through the law.”

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