

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE

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Spain: Ratification of the International Criminal Court Rome Statute -- one more step away from impunity, one step closer to justice

Spain's ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court has moved the world one step closer to international justice and ending impunity for the worst crimes known to humanity, said Amnesty International today.

The organization welcomed this positive step by Spain, which on 25 October 2000 deposited instruments of ratification with the office of the United Nations Secretary-General. It is the 22nd country to take this positive step, and the 5th member of the European Union.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) will only be established once 60 states have ratified the Rome Statute. The Court will have the power to prosecute those accused of genocide, crimes against humanity -- including murder of civilians, torture and mass rape -- and war crimes, committed both in international and non-international conflicts. To date, 115 countries have signed the Rome Statute, the first step towards ratifying it. The United States is one of seven countries, including China, Iraq, Libya and India, which has not signed the Rome Statute.

"38 countries still need to ratify the Rome Statute and show their commitment to ending impunity for such crimes, crimes which by their horrendous nature cast their dark shadow over us all," Amnesty International said. "We urge all countries to follow the positive example set by Spain and to pursue the process of ratification within the shortest possible time."

"In the past, perpetrators of these crimes have acted in the knowledge that they are unlikely to have to face the consequences of their actions, and, subsequently, victims have been denied justice. The ICC is a crucial opportunity for the world to halt this trend," the organization emphasized.

Background

The Rome Statute was adopted on 17 July 1998 in a diplomatic conference in Rome. 120 of the 148 countries present voted in favour of the Rome Statute. Only seven countries voted against it and 21 abstained.

The ICC will not act as a substitute for national courts. The national courts will always have jurisdiction over such crimes. The ICC will only exercise its jurisdiction when the national courts are unable or unwilling to do so. The very existence of the ICC will act as

a catalyst to inspire national legal systems to fulfil their duties and will act as a deterrent to such crimes.

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