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## **Belize: ratification of International Criminal Court Rome Statute -- a positive step against impunity**

Belize's ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court ( Rome Statute) indicates the country's commitment to deterring and ending impunity for the worst crimes known to humanity, Amnesty International said today.

The organization welcomed this positive step by Belize, which on 5 April 2000 deposited instruments of ratification with the office of the United Nations Secretary-General. It is the 8th country to take this positive step.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) will be established after 60 states have ratified the Rome Statute. The Court will have the power to prosecute those accused of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes committed both in international and non-international conflicts. To date 88 other countries have indicated their intention to ratify the Rome Statute by signing it.

"The creation of the ICC will be a milestone in ending impunity for these heinous crimes," Amnesty International said.

"In the past, perpetrators of these crimes have acted in the knowledge that they are unlikely to be held accountable for their actions, and victims have been denied their right to see justice done. The ICC is an important opportunity for the world to halt this trend."

Belize is the second member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to ratify the Rome Statute and in doing so has fulfilled its part of a commitment given by all CARICOM members in a meeting of Law Ministers in April 1999 "to pursue the process of ratification of the Rome Statute by their respective States within the shortest possible time".

Amnesty International strongly urges the remaining CARICOM members to follow the positive example set by Belize and Trinidad and Tobago and calls on the two states to offer assistance where necessary.

Further steps Belize can take to fulfil its commitment to end impunity and to ensure perpetrators do not escape justice include enacting or amending national laws to allow its national courts to try people accused of committing the crimes covered by the Rome statute anywhere in the world.

"By ensuring that its territory is not a safe haven for perpetrators of these crimes Belize would set an important example for the world to follow," Amnesty International said.

**Background**

The Rome Statute was adopted on 17 July 1998 at the conclusion of 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.

Once it has been established, the ICC will not be a substitute for national courts which are able and willing to fulfil their responsibilities. Indeed, as the Preamble of the Rome Statute makes clear, countries have the primary responsibility to bring those responsible for such grave crimes to justice. The ICC will exercise its jurisdiction *only* when countries fail to carry out their responsibilities under international law. 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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**For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on 44 171 413 5562.**

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