

UNA-USA STATEMENT REGARDING FIRST ARREST FOR THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

New York, NY -- The United Nations Association of the USA (UNA-USA) hails the arrest and transfer to the International Criminal Court (ICC) of Thomas Lubanga, leader of the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC), an armed group responsible for alleged war crimes, especially against children, in the Ituri region of the Democratic Republic of Congo. This is the first arrest warrant issued by the ICC in its investigation in the Congo and a first step toward ending atrocity crimes in that country.

"Since 1999, UNA-USA has worked to build support in the United States for the International Criminal Court, and this event reaffirms that our support has been justified and we will continue to garner support for the important work of the court," said William H. Luers, president of the United Nations Association of the USA. "This arrest and arraignment shows strong momentum for prosecuting atrocities committed around the world despite the disappointing outcome of the Slobodan Milosevic trial."

The ICC's Chief Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo also has stated that he will continue to bring to justice others responsible for crimes in the Congo, as well as in other areas around the world.

"Thomas Lubanga's arrest provides victims of his alleged crimes assurances that his monstrous atrocities will be heard in court, especially those against the innocent children in the Congo," said John Washburn, director of UNA-USA's ICC programs and convener of AMICC, the American Non-governmental Organizations Coalition on the International Criminal Court. "The ICC has built a solid case against Lubanga and they are able to send a very strong and clear message that crimes against humanity will be—and must be—punished. The atrocities committed by the likes of Lubanga will hopefully lead to not only further charges, but further arrests of those who are alleged to have carried out his orders."

In the arrest warrant against Lubanga, the ICC found reasonable grounds to believe he committed the following war crimes: abducting and forcing children under the age of 15 to be soldiers and sex slaves and using them to participate in the conflict, and allegedly using systematic techniques of brutalization and degradation to keep children in a constant state of traumatized obedience. Moreno-Ocampo indicated that the investigation is ongoing and further charges are expected.

"UNA-USA is pleased that the arrest of Lubanga is the result of effective cooperation between the Democratic Republic of Congo, UN Peacekeeping forces and the government of France, which responded to a request by the DRC and the ICC," added Luers. "This is a perfect example of how the UN works with other international organizations and national governments against atrocity crimes which cause conflict and immense human suffering."

The International Criminal Court, based in The Hague, The Netherlands, has broad international support, with 100 countries ratifying its treaty, the Rome Statute, and nearly 140 countries signing the treaty. The ICC also issued arrest warrants in July 2005 against five leaders of the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda. Investigations are ongoing in Darfur, Sudan as well; the case was referred by the Security Council to the Court last year.

On June 27, 2006, after Lubanga and his counsel have had time to prepare a defense, he will face a pre-trial chamber confirmation of charges proceeding, which essentially serves the same purpose as an indictment proceeding in the US court system. If there is confirmation of the charges against him, a trial will follow.