



Coalition for the International Criminal Court
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African Civil Society Calls on Governments to Maintain Firm Commitment to ICC

June 8-9 AU Meeting Good Opportunity to Resist Backtracking by Some States

Addis, Ababa. Following a three-day meeting of African civil society organizations convened by the Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CICC), advocates for justice called on African states to renew and strengthen their support for the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The meeting was held in the lead up to an 8-9 June 2009 meeting at African Union (AU) headquarters in Addis Ababa of African states that are party to the Rome Statute, the Court's founding treaty.

“Many African officials remain strong supporters of the ICC. This was demonstrated recently when African ambassadors to the UN endorsed a strong statement in support of the Court that was shared with AU embassies and African governments,” said William R. Pace, convenor of the Coalition.

“When Al-Bashir's arrest warrant was issued, it sent a clear message to leaders everywhere: it will no longer be business as usual, as there is now zero tolerance for impunity,” said Oby Nwankwo, executive director of the Enugu, Nigeria-based Civil Resource Development and Documentation Center. “While some backlash to the Court can be expected, African states must toe the line of integrity.”

Some have complained that the Court is using double standards—that it's only investigating in Africa though other leaders commit crimes too. "You have to look carefully at who is making these arguments against the Court," said Mohammed Ndifuna, executive director of the Kampala-based Human Rights Network-Uganda, "These are like neighborhood thugs saying 'don't go after me, get that other thug.'"

"But the message is now clear," said Ndifuna, "No one is above the law."

Organizations at the regional meeting in Kampala issued a statement calling on African ICC states parties to:

Commit to respect the principles established under the Rome Statute and not to take any steps that could undermine the functioning of the Court;

Consider the negative impact any decision to withdraw support would have on the development of international justice, the fight against impunity and the rule of law in Africa and other parts of the world;

Fully support the work of the International Criminal Court, which represents the last resort for thousands of victims of grave human rights violations who cannot obtain justice at the national level;

Fully cooperate with and assist the International Criminal Court in its investigative and prosecutorial mandate;

Encourage all states that have not yet done so to ratify the Rome Statute and the Agreement on Privileges and Immunities, and to fully implement their provisions into national law in order to be able to prosecute crimes nationally and to cooperate better with the Court.

"Governments must not go soft on justice, turning their backs on victims in Africa and around the world who demand an end to impunity for international crimes under the jurisdiction of the ICC," said Dismas Kitenge Senga, vice-president of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and president of its partner organization in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Groupe Lotus.

In addition to its call on African members of the Court, the Coalition for the ICC and its member organizations in Kampala called on the African Union to honor the principles in its Constitutive Act by supporting justice and the rule of law and work to establish a dialogue between the AU, civil society, the ICC and other relevant bodies.

"The CICC recognizes the need to consider all aspects of maintaining peace on the continent and respect for the highest goals of AU institutions," said Pace. "Currently, 39 of the 53 AU member states have ratified or signed the Rome Statute. This is the most of any region in the world. Furthermore, three of the four ICC investigations in Africa were

referred to the Court by African states themselves. It can therefore be said that the ICC is also an *African* institution.”

Participants at the Kampala meeting also urged the Court to help combat negative perceptions of its work by “engaging robustly with key government officials, civil society actors and the general public” and “hold hearings in African states as an important symbolic move to bring justice closer to African victims.”

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