



Remarks to the Commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Rome Statute of the ICC

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Today, we gather to commemorate the moment twenty-five years ago when governments and organizations from around the world agreed on a simple idea, yet one that stands monumental in the history of humankind: "The most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole must not go unpunished."

Twenty-five years ago, representatives from 161 governments and 235 organizations engaged in drafting the Rome Statute and establishing the International Criminal Court.

Civil society played an instrumental role in this achievement, even well before the Rome Conference. Under the umbrella of the Coalition for the ICC, civil society effectively campaigned for the adoption of the strongest treaty possible. In addition to achieving a historical codification of core international crimes, our priorities included ensuring the independence of the Court and its prosecutor and judges, centering victims' rights, and the meaningful inclusion of gendered crimes. After the Rome Statute was adopted and Senegal ratified the treaty in February 1999, the treaty entered into force far earlier than expected as a result of sustained civil society campaigning.

Twenty-five years later, Coalition members around the globe continue to campaign for the worldwide ratification of that powerful idea of universal access to justice for the gravest crimes for all.

But excellencies, colleagues, and friends, what have we learned that will make the world a better place before our next commemoration?

On the one hand, we have a fully functioning court, with twenty situations and examinations in seventeen countries worldwide. We have an emerging body of jurisprudence, one that reinforces national and regional accountability efforts. We have breathed life into the treaty that was drafted twenty-five years ago.

At the same time, the Rome Statute system continues to suffer from perceptions of double standards in victims' access to justice, whether because of the Court's resource constraints, gaps in universal application of the Rome Statute, threats against its independence, or a lack of political will. It is critical that we recognize the seriousness of a hierarchical system of justice that deprioritizes action for victims in certain places, and we must commit to both recognizing and confronting such inequity directly.

We spoke with our members about their expectations for the Court and the ASP. They seek a court that is universal and has the resources needed to genuinely do its work. They seek greater outreach to victims, and they seek greater recognition of the role civil society plays in supporting the delivery of justice. We must emphasize that civic space remains under threat. Our member organizations and other human rights

defenders have faced reprisals for their work on behalf of human rights and in support of the ICC. The protection of human rights defenders requires more from the Court and its Assembly of States Parties. As we also commemorate the 25th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders this year, I wish to acknowledge and thank the dedication of our member organizations and human rights defenders, without whom justice would remain an even more distant goal.

To move toward our collective goals as we approach a half century we must:

- Guarantee the Court is victim- and survivor-centered. This means full and effective participation, robust outreach and public information efforts, and adequate reparations and assistance.
- Fundamentally revisit the financial resources that States Parties provide to the Court to ensure it can fully meet its mandate across all situations. This is the best protection against threats to the Court's independence and legitimacy, and eases overly selective approaches to justice that raise perceptions of double-standards;
- Strengthen state cooperation. States Parties have an obligation to cooperate with the Court, and to implement its decisions, including execution of arrest warrants. More States Parties should sign voluntary cooperation agreements to facilitate and enhance the work of the Court.
- Enhance diplomatic support. States should be united in defending the Court against all kinds of political threats and sanctions aimed at undermining its independence.
- Ensure the Court's leaders are elected through fair, transparent, and merit-based elections with no tolerance for vote-trading;
- And, of course, we must keep expanding the Court's reach and make it truly universal. We must treat the Rome Statute as a living instrument and encourage more States ratify the Statute and all of its amendments.

The Rome Statute at twenty-five remains a beacon of hope, a last resort to justice for many victims around the world. A beacon must guide those in peril toward safety and in this case, justice for those people and communities who are living through the worst atrocities known to humankind.

The Court is only as impactful as you, its states parties and the broader international community, allow it to be. We call on governments everywhere to do all they can to ensure the ICC and the broader system for justice it anchors can deliver fully on the promise made in Rome for the sake of the present and future generations to put an end to impunity.