

16 March 2023

South African government withdraws International Crimes Bill: Only a first step!

On 10 March 2023, more than five years after the [International Crimes Bill](#) was introduced in the South African Parliament, the government has officially withdrawn it. The International Crimes Bill would have resulted in a repeal of the Implementation Act of the Rome Statute and ultimately enabled a withdrawal from the International Criminal Court in The Hague. More importantly, the bill aimed to protect sitting heads of state or other senior state officials from prosecution for international crimes by granting them immunity.

The [Southern Africa Litigation Centre \(SALC\)](#) welcomes the government's decision to withdraw the International Crimes Bill. This sends an important message to the international community that South Africa remains committed to its obligations towards the International Criminal Court (ICC) and holding perpetrators of atrocity crimes accountable.

SALC's Executive Director, Anneke Meerkotter, emphasised that:

"The government's decision to withdraw the bill and renew its commitment to the principles of the ICC is a crucial first move. South Africa's political and economic ties with other governments, heads of state, or any other senior government official cannot and should never again be an obstacle to fighting impunity for atrocity crimes."

SALC calls on the South African government to take its obligations under international law, including the Rome Statute, seriously and live up to those principles. SALC further encourages the government to participate in the ongoing reform process at the International Criminal Court. While South Africa's relationship with the ICC has been complicated after the years that SALC initiated [the Al-Bashir litigation](#) requesting the South African state to arrest the sitting President of Sudan at the time, this move by the government appears to be a step in the right direction.

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