

Building a world community



## The Rome Statute at 20 by Yasmina Gourchane

On 15 and 16 February 2018, in the Hague, the Coalition for the International Criminal Court (Coalition) launched its commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the Rome Statute. With this launch, the Coalition initiated a full year of wide and diverse convocations, celebrations, and renewed commitments to the treaty.

The adoption of the Rome Statute in 1998 was a groundbreaking achievement -- the establishment of the only permanent international criminal court mandated to end impunity for genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the crime of aggression. The occasion of the 20th anniversary offers the opportunity for governments, international organizations, civil society, and academia to reaffirm and reinvigorate their support for this historic victory for international peace and security, while also reflecting on the future of this increasingly vital legal body.

The first day of the launch was held at the permanent premises of the International Criminal Court (ICC) beginning with a high-level forum that included interventions and statements from the Coalition Convenor, civil society representatives, the ICC President and ICC Prosecutor, the President of the Assembly of States Parties, the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, and the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs, among others. The event brought together key government and civil society players from the early days of the Court's establishment, as well as modern champions of the Rome Statute system from across disciplines.

In his address to participants, Coalition Convenor William Pace reiterated that the goal of these commemorative events is "to look both backwards and forwards at the historic developments in international justice during the last 20 years. It is not to be a year of self-congratulations and looking back, but instead a year of diagnosis and reaffirmation of progress – moving from years of having to be defensive, to years of moving forward." Further, in her statement, former ICC President Silvia Fernández de Gurmendi highlighted the work of civil society, "which played then and continues to play today a crucial and indispensable role in the making of the International Criminal Court." The high-level forum additionally benefitted from video addresses from United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), H.E. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein,

former ICC and International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda Judge H.E. Navi Pillay, and former Nuremberg Prosecutor Mr. Benjamin Ferencz.

The Coalition hosted a second day of events on 16 February at the Peace Palace in the Hague. In three sessions, panelists from all facets of the Rome Statute System addressed key questions about the history, evolution, and future of the groundbreaking treaty that established the ICC.

The first session tackled the question of the Rome Statute's historical legacy, with panelists H.E. Mr. Juan Antonio Yanez-Barnuevo, Head of the Delegation of Spain at the Rome Conference, Ms. Kimberly Prost, current ICC Judge, Mr. Fabricio Guariglia, Director of the Prosecutions Division of the ICC, and Ms. Evelyn A. Ankumah, Executive Director of Africa Legal Aid. Participants' statements and interventions from the audience addressed the question of the historical significance of the Rome Statute to the development of international criminal justice, civil society, and national justice efforts, as well as its place within the framework of ad hoc tribunals in the wider international criminal justice structure.

The second session focused on the Court today, 20 years after the signing of the Rome Statute. Dr. David Donat Cattin, Secretary-General of Parliamentarians for Global Action, Ms. Lorraine Smith van Lin, Post-Conflict Justice Adviser at REDRESS and Mr. Darryl Robinson, Professor at Queen's University, Canada addressed the successes and shortfalls of the foundational elements of the Rome Statute in the areas of cooperation, complementarity, victims and more. Panelists and members of the audience also assessed the challenges of the current geopolitical landscape in which the Court operates.

The final session looked towards the future of the Rome Statute and the system of international criminal justice it created. Mr. Richard Dicker, Director of the International Justice Program of Human Rights Watch, Ms. Jennifer Trahan, Associate Professor at New York University, Mr. Andras Vamos-Goldman, Executive Director of Justice Rapid Response and Mr. Klaus Rackwitz, Director of the International Nuremberg Principles Academy, all spoke to the key challenges to be overcome by the ICC, and the opportunities available to position the Court more positively within global politics.

The launch forum and interactive panels succeeded in bringing together government and Court officials, civil society and academia to commemorate the historical achievement that was the signing of the Rome Statute just 20 years ago. The Coalition encourages its members, governments, and other key stakeholders to use this 20th anniversary opportunity to strengthen their commitment to and support for the ICC. The Coalition additionally calls on key stakeholders to hold events of their own, from commemoration ceremonies, press briefings, stocktaking exercises, trainings and workshops to look critically at the Court, and what it has and still needs to achieve to remain the progressive hope for peace and justice that the world needs now more than ever.

Visit the Coalition's dedicated RS20 page at: <http://www.coalitionfortheicc.org/fight/Rome-Statute-20-anniversary-2018> and follow us on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.