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Press Conference

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PRESS CONFERENCE BY PRESIDENT OF ASSEMBLY OF STATES PARTIES TO ROME STATUTE OF INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

There was no threat of African States withdrawing from the Statute governing the International Criminal Court to protest the indictment of Sudan's President Omer Hassan al-Bashir on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, the President of the assembly of signatory States to the Statute said this afternoon.

"I've been working very diligently and very hard with my African colleagues on this issue and I have no indication from anyone to this effect," Christian Wenaweser (Liechtenstein), President of the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute, said at a Headquarters press conference. African ambassadors to the United Nations had dismissed that prospect as rumour, and several other States parties had sent demarches to African counterparts believed to be at risk of pulling out

Fears that African Union members, who had met at the regional organization's Addis Ababa headquarters on Monday and Tuesday, would quit the Court had been overplayed, he said, stressing that African membership was essential. However, an African Union Heads of State meeting in February had reportedly decided that the continent's States parties should consider such a move. Africa is the most heavily represented region with 30 States parties.

Responding to a correspondent's question about Ali Abdussalam Treki (Libya), who was earlier in the day elected President of the General Assembly's sixty-fourth session, taking into account the Libyan Government's criticism of the Court's prosecution of Mr. Al-Bashir as a form of Western colonialism, Mr. Wenaweser said he hoped that Mr. Treki would limit his activities to his role as Assembly President.

"He has no role to play as far as the International Criminal Court is concerned other than the relationship that does exist between the United Nations and the International Criminal Court," Mr. Wenaweser said. "I expect him to acknowledge and honour that."

When asked if the current General Assembly President, Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann (Nicaragua), had overstepped the bounds of his office in criticizing the Court's indictment, Mr. Wenaweser said: "Yes, I absolutely think so and I also sent him an open letter -- that he may or may not have seen -- to this effect." He said Mr. d'Escoto's comments were counterproductive and largely factually incorrect.

Concerning the Palestinian Authority's request that the Court investigate Israel's military incursion into Gaza in December, Mr. Wenaweser said that request had been an ad hoc submission by an entity or a State that was not a State party to the Court's Rome Statute. The Court was examining the request on its merits and trying to establish whether it fell within the Court's jurisdiction.

Mr. Wenaweser also told correspondents that the Assembly of States Parties' Inter-sessional Meeting on the Crime of Aggression, chaired by Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein of Jordan, was held from 8 to 10 June in New York. The Assembly of States Parties was also preparing for a conference in Kampala in 2010 to review the 1998 Rome Statute and consider any amendments to it proposed by States.

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