



Remarks of President Song to Ambassador Petr Mareš
Welcoming Ceremony for the Czech Republic as 110th State Party
1 October 2009

Excellency,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the International Criminal Court this morning. We are here today to mark the occasion of your great country becoming the 110th State Party to the Rome Statute. I am pleased that Ambassador Lomonaco could join us. First Vice President Fatoumata Dembele Diarra is currently in a hearing and could not be with us, but I am pleased that Second Vice President Hans-Peter Kaul and my other brothers and sisters from the judiciary could attend, insofar as they are not also in hearings at the moment. The Prosecutor and Registrar are away from the Court today, but I am grateful that Deputy Registrar Didier Preira and the Head of the Prosecutor's Jurisdiction, Complementarity and Cooperation Division, Beatrice Le Fraper Du Hellen, could be here.

It is particularly fitting that you have invited Judge Philippe Kirsch to join us for today's ceremony. He has earned recognition as the "Father of the Rome Statute", and of course as this Court's first President, he skilfully guided this institution for six years.

As President, Judge Kirsch visited Prague in October 2007 – his second visit on ICC issues. At the time, there was already strong support for ratification, but some opponents remained sceptical. Wouldn't ratification impede national sovereignty? How could the Rome Statute harmonize with national law? These concerns and others are raised in many countries still weighing whether to become States Parties.

Joining the Rome Statute is a sovereign decision for every state. But as happened in the Czech Republic, the Court can engage as a partner in providing simple facts about its mandate and operations. We have seen that concern about infringement of national sovereignty often fades with understanding that this Court has no jurisdiction where national governments are willing and able to conduct credible investigations and prosecutions. Concern about potential political influence diminishes when safeguards integral to the Statute are explained. Where historical atrocities cause political polarization in the present, there can be agreement in support of the Court when it is understood that it has no jurisdiction prior to July 2002.

With the addition of the Czech Republic, now all 27 Member States of the European Union are also States Parties to the Rome Statute. This represents a milestone toward the ultimate goal of global ratification.

The Court will continue to do what it can to engage with states considering ratification or accession. This is an area where states, multilateral organizations and NGOs also have made critical contributions. As the Court works with its States Parties in this and other areas of common concern, I am most grateful to have a new partner.

It has been over 60 years since unspeakable crimes engulfed Europe, including the territory of today's Czech Republic. As Nuremberg advanced the expectation that there must be justice for the worst crimes, the first seeds were planted of what would become the European Union. Today, such crimes are hardly conceivable in a European Union that has enjoyed long-lasting peace. This is not the case in too many other parts of the world. Today, the Czech Republic joins a growing list of states committed to the notion that where violence still prevails, the most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole must be answered by justice.

Excellency, I once again welcome the Czech Republic as a State Party. As it seeks to expand the geographic reach of this common commitment to justice for the worst crimes, the Court looks forward to working with your government in the years ahead.

PRESENTING THE ROME STATUTE

In the presence of the Vice-President of the Assembly of States Parties I am pleased to present to you, Ambassador Mareš, with this special limited edition of the Rome Statute. It symbolizes our joint commitment to the rule of law and the commitment of all States Parties to this Statute to honour it.