



**Statement by H.E. Ambassador Alexandros N. Zenon,  
Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus at the  
Fifteenth Session of the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute of the  
International Criminal Court (ICC)  
The Hague, 16 November 2016**

Mr. President of the Assembly of States Parties,  
Madame President of the International Criminal Court,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege to address today this Session of the Assembly of the States Parties to the Rome Statute; Cyprus naturally associates itself with the statement ~~made~~ on behalf of the European Union and its Member States by Slovakia.

I wish, with this opportunity, to express our appreciation to President Kaba for all his efforts during this challenging period.

Mr. President,

The establishment of the International Criminal Court was not an easy endeavor.

However, all States which took the decision to ratify or accede to its Statute were united by the belief that those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes should be held accountable.

The collective decision to establish this Court was taken as a result of the atrocities committed against millions of human beings and it is the achievement of all its Members and of the international community as a whole.

This decision was taken for the sake of present and future generations.

In Cyprus, unfortunately, we have first-hand knowledge of many of the Rome Statute crimes for more than four decades.

By joining, therefore, the Rome Statute, Cyprus made a significant step towards ensuring that such crimes cannot remain unpunished on its own territory.

Sadly, the Court has no jurisdiction in some States where such crimes continue to this day. Syria, in Cyprus's immediate neighborhood, is only one- if striking- example.

We live in a period of unprecedented crises that were unimaginable only a few years ago.

Membership to the Rome Statute ensures that, if in the future there will be a turn to the "wrong side of history", this Court will add its complementary net of accountability which could contribute in preventing the occurrence of such crimes.

Mr. President,

Cyprus remains committed to the collective goal and responsibility of making the ICC truly universal.

Without universality, we cannot effectively address the existence of double standards, which in reality can be explained by the fact that a significant number of States are not members to the Statute.

Cyprus is, therefore, honoured by its appointment as co-focal point for the Plan of Action for achieving universality and full implementation of the Rome Statute.

I wish, at this point, to express appreciation to Denmark for the excellent cooperation in realizing this mandate.

As part of this role, we have engaged in consultations with States not yet parties and all relevant stakeholders.

We have also organized a number of successful events in The Hague, in New York and in Geneva. In the near future, we will also launch a social media campaign to further promote the message of universality.

I take this opportunity to cordially welcome the delegation of El Salvador, the 124<sup>th</sup> State Party to the Rome Statute, to their first Assembly of States Parties, as a full member to the Statute.

I also acknowledge the delegations of States not yet Parties, who are attending this Assembly. Their presence here indicates that this Court and international criminal justice matter, even if for some reasons they have not yet joined the Statute.

The recent decision of some States to withdraw from the Statute is undoubtedly a matter of serious concern.

Although we regret these decisions, we do recognize that they have been taken by sovereign states, as provided by the Statute.

At the same time, we emphasize the need to strengthen the constructive communication amongst all of us.

We are ready to listen to their concerns and engage in dialogue, while respecting the fundamental principles of the Court.

Mr. President,

Despite the evident challenges, we must also not lose track of positive developments.

2016 marked the inauguration of the Court's Permanent Premises, which, we believe, will be fundamental in increasing the Court's efficiency and effectiveness.

Another important development was the judgement of the Court in the Al Mahdi case, which dealt with the crime of destruction of historic and religious buildings in Timbuktu, Mali.

This is the first time an individual is convicted by the ICC for this type of crime.

The destruction of cultural property constitutes a collective loss for all mankind, and therefore, this judgement underlines that perpetrators of such crimes will be held accountable.

Cyprus attaches particular importance to the prevention of the destruction of cultural heritage, and has taken an active role on the issue in several international fora.

Most recently, we have successfully promoted an initiative at the Human Rights Council, where, as part of a core group, we achieved the adoption of a relevant resolution. Protection of cultural heritage will also be one of the priorities of our upcoming Presidency of the Council of Europe.

Last, but not least, since the last Assembly, we also reached the threshold of thirty ratifications of the Kampala Amendments.

Cyprus, as one of the first states to ratify these Amendments, welcomes this development. The amendments can now be activated by a decision of the Assembly of States Parties in 2017.

Mr. President,

We are confident that the Court will persevere in the face of current challenges and will remain the cornerstone of international criminal justice and a rules-based international order. I can assure you that Cyprus will remain a staunch supporter of this Court.

Thank you for your attention and I wish all the delegations a productive Session of the Assembly.