



Statement by

The Honourable Minister of Justice and Community Services, Ronald K Warsal (MP)
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Plenary Statement, 17 November 2016

President Kaba, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to stand in front of this assembly today on behalf of the Republic of Vanuatu. I am well aware that I am in the presence of greatness. But great men and women are rarely isolated mountain peaks. They are the summits of ranges.

Today, the Republic of Vanuatu would like to express our gratitude for the great work done by President Kaba of the Assembly of State Parties and President Fernández de Gurmendi of the International Criminal Court.

We are also particularly thankful for the work of Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda. We strongly support the “Policy paper on case selection and prioritization” which came out of her office in September this year, in which it is clearly stated that “the Office will give particular consideration to prosecuting Rome Statute crimes that are committed by means of, or that result in the destruction of the environment, the illegal exploitation of natural resources or the illegal dispossession of land.” We feel that this is a clear direction that the court needs to move in and we assure the prosecutor of our full support.

I know from my personal experience, I know how the destruction of the environment can adversely affect communities. In Vanuatu, we have islands that are being washed away; roads that are being eaten by the sea and ever more natural disasters. Unfortunately these are no longer incidents, but they are the result of a long chain of

environmental wrong doings. Last year for instance we saw the devastation of Cyclone Pam. Rebuilding our communities from that natural disaster costed our nation over half of our GDP.

I speak not only as the Honourable Minister of Justice for Vanuatu, but also as a father of 4 children, as a representative for my people and as a man who has direct experience of the trauma that my people have suffered as a result of climate change. This is nothing less than an ecological, economical and cultural disaster. People are being displaced, tribes and languages lost and an ancient heritage wiped off the face the earth, with no chance of ever returning.

So I ask myself, why am I here?

We are facing a challenge of great enormity. But it's a challenge that I believe, that if we are unified, we can truly meet. Ours is a quest of epic proportions, of a David and Goliath story, where we are often the smallest and the unheard, but I come here to reach out to all of you, to ask for you to stand strong with us, as we find a path towards true justice, and inter-generational security and peace. Because protecting this world, and the beauty of all creatures upon it, is not something we do for ourselves, but because we are the trustees of the future of our children and we are also the guardians of the future of our Earth and seas.

Dear friends,

Our small but strong nation ratified the Rome Statute in 2012. This is our first attendance at the Assembly of State Parties, which speaks to our State's commitment to accountability. Accountability for the perpetrators and justice for the victims of those very worst crimes committed in our world. At a time of increasing isolationism and protectionism around the globe, the Republic of Vanuatu recognizes the need for unity in our pursuit of justice, and it is with this in mind that I stand before you today.

Ours is indeed a collective quest: We are following on from the words of the Chief Prosecutor Madame Fatsou Bensouda who stated in the opening plenary session, ours is "a quest to end impunity collectively." At a time when the mission of the court is threatened by the withdrawal of three Member States, it has never before been so important that we, as members of the Assembly of State Parties, stand together. We must work in unity in order to involve the active participation of all State Parties, including those who experience difficulties meeting their financial obligations. We feel it only right to say we are able to participate here as part of our arrears has been paid, yet we know many States are not able to do so. This is particularly relevant to

our own Pacific region, where I come from, where climate-change related events have severely impacted the economic growth of a number of countries.

We recognize both the difficulty and importance of the involvement of the International Criminal Court within the Pacific Region. Mindful of our international commitment to ending impunity, we believe that it is important that the court extends its outreach to Pacific Island Nations, of which only six have ratified the Rome Statute, and only two are represented today, in our delegation and that of Samoa.

So in closing let me share with you our vision.

- A vision of a strong International Criminal Court which has the legal capacity, political backing and financial support to work to its full potential.
- An ICC which has the mandate to protect the vulnerable and bring justice to those who have been hit by the worst of mankind's making.
- An ICC which can live out the true meaning of its creed: to protect all peoples of our planet which are united by common bonds, their cultures pieced together in a shared heritage and their lives forever entwined by the shared environment we live in.

In conclusion, I stand before you today, humbled by the awareness that we are all called to be here, not for short term gains but because this is about our legacy. We are here to protect a wider Earth community, our people and our planet, from the most significant crimes of concern to the international community.

Justice must not only be seen to be done, Justice must be done - and nothing less.

Thank you very much.