

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

REMARKS TO THE ASSEMBLY OF STATES PARTIES TO THE ROME STATUTE
New York, 4 December 2017

Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to join you.

Let me start on a personal note. My country, Portugal, signed and ratified the Rome Statute while I was Prime Minister.

Nearly twenty years after the signature of its founding instrument, the International Criminal Court is the central institution of the international criminal justice system.

It has helped investigate and secure convictions in important cases such as the use of child soldiers, attacks on cultural property and the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war.

The Court has also influenced the legislation of State Parties.

It has helped to reinforce many domestic criminal justice systems.

And its work has resonated with civil society and citizens worldwide who have placed their hopes in the Court as a force for upholding human dignity.

The ICC was created as a court of last resort.

States Parties have the primary responsibility to investigate and prosecute the serious crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. The United Nations supports State Parties, at their request, to develop domestic capacities to uphold this obligation.

But when the domestic level falls short, accountability remains an imperative. The ICC has become a key institution in this regard.

To ensure accountability around the world, it is essential to reach universal ratification of the Rome Statute. I invite all State parties to support any effort to achieve this goal.

I welcome the decisions of South Africa and The Gambia to rescind their notifications of withdrawal.

And I can only regret the decision of Burundi to withdraw.

Concerns regarding the functioning of the Court should be addressed and discussed primarily in the Assembly of States Parties. Indeed, the strength of the Court depends on the support it gets from you, the States Parties.

Although we can always wish for more efficiency, we must also acknowledge that the International Criminal Court has a challenging and complex mandate that encompasses some of the most difficult, sensitive and even contentious issues on the international agenda.

Achieving justice also means assisting victims.

I am encouraged that the Trust Fund for Victims is now engaged in reparations and is supporting efforts to address the harm caused by the international crimes covered by the Rome Statute. This is a unique institution in international criminal accountability.

The Court has taken other important steps to engage victims and facilitate their participation in its proceedings.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to reaffirm the commitment of the United Nations to cooperate fully with the Court. Our Relationship Agreement is based on a shared belief that justice is a goal in its own right and essential for peace, security and human rights.

The adoption of the Rome Statute was a hopeful, historic moment near the end of a century marked by atrocities and unspeakable inhumanity.

Yet serious violations of international law continue, and vast accountability gaps persist.

Our abiding challenge is to realize the full potential of the International Criminal Court to end impunity and build a just and more peaceful world.

I thank all of you here today, officials of the Court and representatives of its Member States, for your invaluable work.