



International Criminal Court
Nineteenth Session of the Assembly of States Parties

Statement in the General Debate
by

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Mister President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen!

25 years after the **genocide of Srebrenica**, we continue to receive disturbing reports about appalling atrocities and crimes - from around the world and almost on a daily basis.

In November, **more than 600 hundred civilians were massacred in Mai-Kadra** in the **Tigray** region in Ethiopia.

Only a few weeks earlier, we had seen footage from the **Nagorno-Karabakh** conflict showing the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and attacks against people protected under the Geneva Conventions.

While the world is fighting the COVID-19-Virus, crimes against humanity and war crimes are continuing and even intensifying.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, several **new conflict zones have emerged**: such as in **Ethiopia** and **Nagorno-Karabakh**, in addition to **protracted conflicts** like **Syria** or **Yemen**.

These conflicts are currently outside the judicial reach of the ICC.

This is simply unacceptable!

More than ever, we need to stand up for the **universality** of the Rome Statute!

Perpetrators must never be led to believe that they are **safe from prosecution**; they must not believe that they can hide **in the shadow** of our fight against the pandemic.

Therefore, this Assembly has to send a strong message:

The COVID-19 pandemic must not become a pandemic of impunity!

I commend the quick reaction by the Court to adapt its work to the COVID-19 restrictions.

Check against Delivery

And despite multiple challenges, the ICC has made important progress this year.

Take the **situation in Darfur**:

In June, thirteen years after the arrest warrant was issued, Ali Kuschaib was finally arrested and transferred to the ICC.

Former President Omar Al-Bashir, the first head of State ever charged by the ICC, is now imprisoned in Khartoum.

In October, we witnessed the first visit of an ICC Prosecutor to the Sudanese capital.

These examples send a clear message to perpetrators anywhere in the world:
It might sometimes need a long breath, but eventually justice will prevail.

These examples also send a glimmer of hope to the victims of the conflict raging in **Syria**.

We have consistently called for a **Security Council referral of the situation to the ICC**.

The ICC should try top commanders including senior ISIS leaders responsible for the worst atrocities.

For the thousands of mid-level or lower ranking perpetrators, **including Foreign Terrorist Fighters**, a **special tribunal** should be established in the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Of course, **nobody is perfect**. And this applies to the Court, too. It must constantly strive to improve its efficiency and implement reforms.

However, we clearly oppose any sanctions and other restrictive measures against the Court, its members and its staff!

The Court must be able to work freely and independently without outside pressures or interferences.

Let us not forget the reason for which the Court was created:

to fight for international justice and to hold those who commit crimes against humanity accountable; to **strengthen the rule of law** instead of the **law of the jungle**.

I can assure you that Austria will continue to do its utmost to assist the Court in realizing its essential mission.

Thank you.