

**21st Session of the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International
Criminal Court**

Statement in the General Debate

by

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Madam President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen!

On the 24th of February, war has returned to Europe.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine is not only causing unspeakable human suffering – it is also a direct assault against the rules-based international order and the very principles of the UN Charter.

Russia is directly targeting civilians. Missiles and drones are used to destroy water, electricity and heating infrastructure. The goal is as simple as it is cynical: To cause terror among the Ukrainian population.

The UN Commission of Inquiry has confirmed that war crimes and grave violations of international humanitarian law have been committed in Ukraine and that Russian armed forces are responsible for the vast majority of them.

The pictures of Bucha and other towns will forever be engraved in our collective memory.

One thing is crystal clear for me: The perpetrators must be held accountable!

I am therefore proud that Vienna is host to the UN Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, that we train and equip Ukrainian war crime investigators and that we actively support the efforts by the International Criminal Court.

However, we all know that sadly, Ukraine is not the only hotspot. Crimes against humanity and war crimes are continuing and even intensifying in other conflict areas.

With four ongoing trials and investigations in 16 situations on four continents, the Court is more in demand than ever before.

We commend the Court's progress on Darfur. However, we regret that former Head of State Al-Bashir has still not been transferred to The Hague.

On Afghanistan, Austria welcomes the Court's decision to resume investigations. The Taliban want to drag the Afghan society back into the Middle Ages by excluding women and girls from most aspects of public life.

And it remains deeply frustrating that situations such as in Syria, Iraq or Yemen continue to be outside of the ICC's jurisdiction.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

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

Therefore, Austria has further stepped up its support to the ICC.

We seconded an expert to the Office of the Prosecutor and we provided an additional voluntary financial contribution. A further financial contribution is on its way and will be announced shortly.

Furthermore, we doubled our payments to the Trust Fund for Victims and contributed to the Trust Fund for Family Visits.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

No man made institution is perfect – and the ICC is no exception. It must continue to improve its efficiency and implement reforms.

But let us not forget the reason for which the Court was created:

To fight for international justice, to hold those who commit crimes against humanity accountable, and to strengthen the rule of law.

This is indeed a challenging task. For justice to prevail, we need patience and endurance.

I can assure you that Austria will continue to do its utmost to assist the Court in realizing its mission which is so essential to all of us.

Thank you!