



**Judge Sang-Hyun Song**

**President of the International Criminal Court**

*Remarks at Welcoming Ceremony for Cape Verde,  
the 119<sup>th</sup> State Party to the Rome Statute*

*The Hague, Netherlands  
19 January 2012*

Your Excellency, Madam Ambassador,

On behalf of the entire International Criminal Court, I wish you a very warm welcome!

It is a great pleasure for me to open this ceremony to celebrate Cape Verde becoming the 119<sup>th</sup> State Party, and the 33<sup>rd</sup> African State Party, to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

I am glad to be joined today by many of my fellow judges: Vice-President Hans-Peter KAUL, Judge Erkki KOURULA, Judge Sylvia STEINER, Judge Ekaterina TRENDAFILOVA, Judge Daniel NSEREKO, Judge Joyce ALUOCH, Judge Sanji MONAGENG and Judge Cuno TARFUSSER.

With us are also the Registrar, Madame Silvana Arbia, the Deputy Registrar, Mr. Didier Preira and, on behalf of the Office of the Prosecutor, Senior Legal Adviser, Ms. Shamila Batohi. Finally, I'm very pleased that we are joined by the new Vice-President of the Assembly of States Parties, Ambassador Markus Börlin.

Your Excellency,

It is very fitting that we welcome Cape Verde – a country of **ten** islands in the middle of the Atlantic – to the Rome Statute system in the year of the ICC's **tenth** anniversary!

On the same day that Cape Verde ratified the Rome Statute, it also acceded to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities. This is an unequivocal demonstration of Cape Verde's commitment to international law and the protection of human rights.

The process of Cape Verde's ratification of the Rome Statute was not without obstacles. In order to ratify, Cape Verde needed to complete the revision of its Constitution. I was pleased to note that, during this process, the ICC clause received bipartisan support and that the National Assembly approved the ratification bill unanimously.<sup>1</sup>

Your Excellency,

The nation of Cape Verde has seen injustice and human suffering. During the colonial era, thousands of slaves from Africa passed through Cape Verde on their one-way journey to forced labour, abuse and misery. Many of today's nationals of Cape Verde are their descendants. I am certain that this historical experience only strengthens your country's ability to make an important contribution to the evolving system of international criminal justice.

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<sup>1</sup> On 1 July 2011.

Ratification of the Rome Statute marks only the beginning of a country's participation in the ICC system. One of the most crucial next steps is to create the domestic legal framework for the prosecution of Rome Statute offences, as well as for various modes of cooperation with the ICC. If required, technical support for this purpose is available from several sources, for instance intergovernmental organisations, nongovernmental organisations and other States Parties.

I also hope that Cape Verde will soon ratify the Agreement on Privileges and Immunities of the ICC, which is a separate treaty that complements the provisions of the Rome Statute. Concluding voluntary agreements with the ICC, such as one on relocation of witnesses would be particularly desirable. Given Cape Verde's relative geographic isolation yet its belonging to the African continent – where all current cases before the ICC come from – Cape Verde may serve as a welcoming refuge for witnesses in need of protection.

Your Excellency,

As I already remarked when your country deposited the instrument of ratification, as the first Lusophone country in Africa to ratify the Rome Statute, Cape Verde has taken us one step closer to a truly universal system of the Rome Statute, representative of all peoples, all cultures and all legal systems of the world. Indeed, only when such a system is achieved will the Rome Statute reach its full potential.

As such, your country has taken the lead and also set an example for other African Lusophone countries to follow. Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and São Tomé e Príncipe are still outside the Rome Statute System. I sincerely hope that Cape Verde's ratification will encourage them to consider ratifying the Rome Statute.

Once again, I congratulate the nation of Cape Verde on its decision to join the Rome Statute and I warmly welcome your country to the International Criminal Court.

*Bem vindo!*