



Excellencies,

Six years ago today, 11 March 2003, the first ever meeting of the judges of the International Criminal Court took place in The Hague.

Our solemn undertaking was witnessed, amongst other distinguished personalities, by the former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan who addressed us, eleven men and seven women, as “representing all regions of the world and many different cultures and legal traditions”, and depicted these first 18 judges as “the embodiment of our collective conscience”

“For centuries, -he added-, and especially in the last century, that conscience has been shocked by unspeakable crimes: crimes whose victims were counted not in tens but in thousands – even in millions”. End of quote.

The painful evidence of the impunity and frequent commission of international crimes, (genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity) around the world, against millions of women, children and men, made possible the creation of this

International Criminal Court, “to put an end to impunity for the perpetrators of these crimes, and thus, to contribute to the prevention of such crimes” (par. 5 Preamble)

Additionally, the Court intended to give the victims of these “unimaginable atrocities that deeply shock the conscience of humanity” (par. 2 Preamble) the opportunity to be part of this crucial international endeavour.”

Since that 11 March 2003, the Court has grown into a fully functioning institution.

- four situations are being investigated by the Prosecutor
- thirteen arrest warrants have been issued
- and four arrests have been executed with the co-operation of the states parties
- the Pre-Trial Chambers have considered requests for arrest warrants in four situations and have confirmed charges in two cases
- the Appeals Chamber has begun to address fundamental issues of interpretation of the Rome Statute, and this year, the Court began its first ever trial
- a second trial is completing its preliminary stage and soon it will begin hearings.

For the first time in history, victims right to participate in the proceedings, recognised in the Rome Statute, has become a reality: 404 victims (women, men, boys and girls) are currently participating in the situations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Darfur and the Central African Republic, among

them, there are 93 participants in the Lubanga case, the first trial of the ICC, and currently 57 in the Katanga/Ngudjolu case.

None of this would have been possible without international co-operation, including the support of states, international organisations and civil society and the dedication of all four organs of the Court.

This continuing support will be essential in the years to come to insure fair and expeditious trials, which guarantee the rights of the accused, the victims' right to participate, and the public right to know.

Just over seven weeks ago, the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute, elected six judges to the International Criminal Court.

This morning, the elected judges will make, in open Court, their solemn undertaking, to exercise their functions impartially and conscientiously.

This is an important day for the whole Court and as such, we judges are joined today by the Prosecutor, the Deputy Prosecutor, the Registrar and the Deputy Registrar.

The President of the Assembly of States Parties, (and the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Trust Fund for Victims) are also present today.

We welcome those judges who in a few moments will take the oath and be formally sworn in as judges of the ICC:

- Judge Fumiko Saiga
- Judge Joyce Aluoch
- Judge Sanji Mmasenono Monageng
- Judge Christine van den Wyngaert, and
- Judge Cuno Tarfusser.
- Judge Shahabudden, who was elected by the States Parties has decided, for personal reasons, not to join the Court.

We recognise his distinguished service as an international judge and deeply regret not benefiting from his wisdom and experience.

The swearing in of five judges today, marks a new chapter in the Court's history.

Allow me to pay tribute to the judges who were part of the first eighteen and have left the Court.

- Judges Maureen Clark,
- Claude Jorda,
- Karl Hudson-Phillips,
- Georgios Pikis,
- Navy Pillay,
- Mauro Politi, and
- Neroni Slade.

Each of them helped build the judicial and administrative structures that provide the foundation on which the Court stands today.

We are very grateful for all the work done by them and for their legacy for the future of the Court.

I wish also to pay tribute to the members of the last presidency, whose mandates as members of this important organ expired yesterday.

Judges Akua Kuenyehia and René Blattman, who dedicated their tireless efforts over the past three years to both, their judicial duties and their functions as first and second Vice-Presidents.

We are very grateful for their many contributions in setting up the foundations of the Court.

President Philippe Kirsch second term as the first President of the Court also ended yesterday.

Philippe Kirsch came to this court after many years of working as Chairperson of the Committee of the Whole at the Rome Diplomatic Conference, and as Chairperson of the Preparatoy Commission. His efforts contributed greatly to the miracle of the 17 July 1998 that gave birth to the Rome Statute.

As a member of the Appeals Chamber and as the first President of the Court serving two successive terms, his tireless work and skills have added fresh water to the original seed planted in 1998 to make possible a permanent, independent and truly International Criminal Court.

His contribution obliged our gratitude.

All of you leaving us today will be sorely missed.

Today, 11 March 2009, 18 judges, ten women and eight men “representing all regions of the world and many different cultures and legal traditions” will continue the task started six years ago.

We will reinforce the rule of law, at national and international level, as the only way to embody a system of criminal justice and to insure that justice will become truly inclusive, culturally sensitive, appreciative of diversity, and respectful of all legal traditions.