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17th Session of the Assembly of States Parties

Plenary Session: Rome Statute 20 years: Addressing current and future challenges

Remarks

Checked against delivery

7 December 2018

Venue: King Willem Alexander, World Forum | *Time of panel:* 15h00 – 17h00

Mr Chair,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege for me to address you at this plenary, which comes at the end of a momentous year commemorating the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Rome Statute.

Allow me at the outset to express my sincere appreciation for the efforts of many in this room – Government officials and civil society representatives; those in The Hague, and in capitals around the world, in various multilateral fora, and in the field – for having made the celebrations of this 20th anniversary milestone so remarkable.

Whether it is video messages such as the one we have just seen, high-level symposiums, expert meetings or outreach gatherings with affected communities, all these efforts have contributed to something very important for the International Criminal Court (“ICC”): greater awareness and understanding of the Rome Statute, its values and goals, and the Court’s functioning.

I thank you all, sincerely. I hope that such efforts continue going forward, with the 20th anniversary of the ICC itself just around the corner.

I had the pleasure, together with other Court Principals, to participate and contribute to many of these events to promote the work of the Court.

They were excellent occasions to also remind us of why our global project for a rules-based global order remains fundamental.

Lest we forget that multilateralism as the preferred *modus operandi* for inter-state relations and cooperation, multilateral institutions, including those that advance the peaceful settlement of disputes and the rule of law, are all hard-earned fruits of our costly experience, our common loss, and indeed, our common awakening and wisdom.

In October, in this very building, I spoke to thousands of youth from all over the world at the One Young World Summit.

I shared with them my thoughts on the important role of the new generation to carry on the torch of international criminal justice and humanity's progress towards a more just world.

We should not lose sight of the fortunate fact that our generation has been shielded from devastating and destructive force of direct great power conflict and hot wars. That privilege and indeed good fortune should not result in complacency, or a failure to fully appreciate the importance of the gains made, on the suffering and costly sacrifice of millions: in particular, the momentum in the 1990s that led to its creation, alongside an unprecedented enthusiasm and belief in international criminal justice and the imperative of institutions working to preserve the rule of law as a way to curb and prevent mass violence.

I must observe with a degree of concern that we are increasingly finding ourselves confronted with threats to multilateralism and the post-World War II rules-based global order, and a rejection of international law and the international rule of law.

Unilateralism rooted in a zero-sum calculus will however not result in any long-term gains, in particular in our increasingly inter-dependent world that faces global challenges from cross-border terrorism to mass atrocities.

More cooperation and principled support for the cause of international criminal justice are therefore needed, not less.

As my Office advances its independent and impartial prosecutorial mandate, in the Rome Statute's unique, dynamic, and interdependent construct, we engage with a myriad of other actors, at various levels.

This includes domestic authorities with whom we interact from the earliest stages of our activities, in a manner respectful of their principal jurisdiction over atrocity crimes, guided by our obligations under the Rome Statute.

Ultimately, international criminal justice, with the ICC at its core, serves humanity as a whole. It is not exclusive to one people, one place, or one time. Its protective embrace is for all to enjoy so long as we have the courage to join it, stand firmly by it and help withstand its challengers.

Your Excellencies,

Thanks to your efforts, and those of your predecessors international criminal justice is here, and it is here to stay.

Thanks to your courage and unyielding support, it does not and must not bow to threats; it does and must not waver in the face of self-serving antagonism.

We must therefore remain vigilant not to do away with the achievements and progress of the past.

Earnest cooperation and concerted efforts to advance a culture of accountability are vital to ensuring success.

At this Assembly and onwards, let us all renew our resolve to live by the standards set by the Rome Statute, protect this unique treaty, its values and goals for the next twenty years to come and beyond; not for its own sake, but for the forward march of humanity towards to a more just and rules-based global order.

Atrocity crimes must be met with the force of the law firmly rooted in strong foundational basis of the international rule of law.

The challenges may be formidable, but so are the costs of failure.

I thank you and wish you continued productive deliberations. 1011