

Statement of the Republic of Cyprus to the 18th Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC)

The Hague, 3 December 2019

Mr. President,

Dear colleagues,

It is an honour to address the 18th Session of the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute. The Republic of Cyprus fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by Finland on behalf of the European Union and its member states.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate President Kwon for his continued outstanding leadership of the Assembly.

Mr. President,

Cyprus remains a staunch supporter of the ICC. On October 11th 2019, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cyprus Mr. Christodoulides reaffirmed this support through his visit to the Court on the occasion of the unveiling of paintings of renowned Cypriot artist Lefteris Olympios which were donated to the Court. The particular artworks were chosen because they relate to key themes of the mandate of the Court: the imperative to protect children and cultural heritage during armed conflicts, the humanitarian issue of missing persons and equality under the law.

I am also very pleased to announce that for a third consecutive year Cyprus has made a symbolic contribution to the Trust Fund for the Victims, raising its total contribution to 40,000 Euros for the years 2017-2019. This gesture highlights our belief that the victims of heinous atrocities deserve justice and the continued support of the international community. Cyprus appreciates the work of the Trust Fund, including in relation to the protection of Cultural Heritage sites in Mali, following the decision of the Court in the Al Mahdi case. Initiatives to protect cultural heritage are a priority for the foreign policy of Cyprus, while the ICC is fundamental in promoting accountability for war crimes against cultural heritage.

Another priority for Cyprus relates to promoting women's rights and integrating the gender perspective internationally. We therefore particularly support the longstanding commitment of the Court in relation to sexual and gender-based crimes. The decision of the Court in the Ntaganda case last July, including in relation to crimes against humanity and war crimes such as rape and sexual slavery, is therefore of great importance. Atrocity crimes against women and girls should be thoroughly investigated and prosecuted.

Mr. President,

Despite the many achievements of the ICC, we should work harder to allow the Court to reach its full potential. During this Assembly, we will adopt significant decisions that aim to make the Court more resilient and help improve its performance. Cyprus welcomes

the independent review of the Court and considers it necessary. This review should be conducted with full respect to the fundamental principles and integrity of the Rome Statute.

Another important decision relates to the nomination and election of Judges. Improving the national procedures for selecting highly competent candidates as Judges of the Court is of paramount importance.

The work of the Committee on the Election of the next Prosecutor is also crucial. The Permanent Representative of Cyprus in New York, Ambassador Mavroyiannis, serves as the Vice-Chair of this important Committee. Cyprus is committed in contributing to a fair selection process of the most qualified and exceptional candidate for this instrumental position in the ICC.

While we strive to strengthen the Rome Statute system, we should also strive to align the Statute with existing customary international humanitarian law. Cyprus therefore fully supports the proposal to amend the Rome Statute in order to criminalize the starving of civilians as a war crime, also as concerns internal armed conflicts. There is a clear gap in ensuring accountability for this crime which should be addressed.

Mr. President,

The credibility of the Rome Statute system also lies upon the States Parties themselves. On our part, as States Parties, we evidently need to improve our performance. Strengthening our cooperation with the Court and helping address cases of non-cooperation is essential. We should also continue to be active in protecting the independence and impartiality of the Court and in promoting its Universality and Full Implementation of the Rome Statute.

In closing, I would like to reaffirm Cyprus's steadfast support to the Court and holding accountable the perpetrators for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression. Despite the persisting challenges, the vision that led to the adoption of the Rome Statute is relevant today as it was in 1998. We are therefore ready to work constructively with all States, including those who have not yet joined us as States Parties, to strengthen the Court and through it an international rules-based order.

Thank you for your attention. I am confident that the 18th Session of the Assembly will be highly productive.