



THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE

Statement

by

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at the

**Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute of the ICC
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**Under Agenda Item 8
"General Debate"**

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**Mr. President,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,**

The Republic of Sierra Leone extends her profound appreciation and pays tribute to the Principals of the International Criminal Court (“Court” or “ICC”), the President **Judge Chile Eboe-Osuji**, the Prosecutor **Madam Fatou Bensouda**, and the Registrar **Mr. Peter Lewis**, and all staff for the unwavering service and commitment to the Court and international criminal justice in general. Equally so, we thank you Mr. President of the Assembly of States Parties (“ASP”) and your Bureau for your hard work. At the heels of the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Rome Statute, my delegation welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this General Debate; but firstly, let me congratulate the Pacific Island State of Kiribati for the accession to the Rome Statute on 26 November 2019.

Reflecting on the experience of the critical role of the Special Court for Sierra Leone in the pursuit of transitional justice in the aftermath of our civil conflict, the Republic of Sierra Leone re-affirms its commitment and unwavering support to the ICC, an international criminal justice mechanism founded on the principle of complementarity and cooperation. In view of the unjustified but prevalent external threats to the Court, Sierra Leone reiterates its continuing willingness to support ongoing efforts at protecting the integrity of the Court, its independence and that of its principal officials, in particular the Judges and the Prosecutor. In this regard, the independence of the Office of the Prosecutor is extremely pivotal to maintaining the integrity of the Court. My delegation therefore emphasizes the critical responsibility of the Assembly of States Parties to elect the next Prosecutor on the basis of merit, but in an inclusive and transparent process. We appreciate the efforts of the Bureau, the Committee and the Panel of Experts for the work done thus far.

Mr. President, unequivocally, the reports place before the Assembly indicate that the Court was intensely engaged on many substantial issues with a high workload in the reporting period (16 September 2018 to 15 September 2019). We take due note of the 22 cases, and 11 situations the Court was seized of, including the situation in Afghanistan; and the 9 preliminary examinations being conducted by the Office of the Prosecutor (“OTP”).

We note with appreciation the notable jurisprudential development, in particular, the Appeals Chamber judgment on the question of cooperation. In the last Assembly of States Parties, Sierra Leone called for the increased use of judicial means to resolve differences in interpretation of the Rome Statute. We acknowledge that the judicial decision brings about a measure of legal clarity and certainty for States Parties to the Rome Statute and for Member States of the United Nations on situations referred to the Court by the Security Council. The outcome may not be universally accepted, but importantly the judicial mechanism has been utilized to address a difficult question, in this case, immunity (*ratione personae*) of Heads of States or Government.

In this same light, we will continue to monitor closely the progress of the appeal of the Pre-Trial Chamber II decision to reject the request of the Prosecutor for authorization to investigate the situation in Afghanistan.

Mr. President,

We restate our strong support for the **independent expert review** process. It is no gainsaying that for any institution to stand the test of time and to overcome systemic challenges, it is necessary to undertake periodic review of its processes and systems. We welcome the review, but we are concerned by the lack of complete inclusion given the practical constrain of limited representation here in the Hague. For legitimacy and acceptability, we must strive to have the Hague and New York Working Groups to be given the opportunity to engage in the major processes of the ASP in the future.

On the administration, management and judicial support activities, my delegation welcomes the issuance of the Court-wide strategic plan for the period 2019–2021, and the organ-specific strategic plans of the Office of the Prosecutor and the Registry in July this year. We commend the efficiency gains in the simultaneous issuance of the three (3) plans and the external consultations. We look forward to the full actualization of the 10 strategic goals. We equally welcome the outcome of the judicial retreat in October this year with discussions on topics related to the efficiency and functioning of the judiciary, including the 10 months' timeline to render various types of decisions or judgment. We also welcome the adoption of the amendments to the Regulations of the Court to address procedural issues relating to the activation of the jurisdiction of the Court on the crime of aggression. Significantly, these processes, plans and activities must drive the process to close the impunity gap. And delivering on this objective requires the collective will of States Parties to the Rome Statute and the continued robust support of civil society.

Mr. President,

Sierra Leone remains firmly committed to the mandate of the Court and international criminal justice generally. This commitment is for the victims. At the heart of the work of the Court are the victims, on whose behalf we have this accountability system. We accordingly welcome the high number of victims' participation in the cases before the Court in the reporting period. My delegation therefore acknowledges and commends the Trust Fund for Victims in providing assistance, enabling this increased participation, as well as payment of reparations. This session, Sierra Leone will make a financial contribution to the Trust Fund for Victims to complement our political support.

In closing, it is my singular honour to note that Sierra Leone will fully support the vision of the Court, striving to be "universal, responsive, flexible and resilient organization" with a consistent outlook toward continuously improvement.

I thank you for your kind attention.