



## **23rd session of the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court**

**December 2024**

Madam President,

Last year, we collectively celebrated the establishment – 25 years prior – of the International Criminal Court. States worked tirelessly to negotiate the Rome Statute which established this Court. This achievement was a pivotal moment in the history of international law.

As a founding member, Canada believed and continues to believe in the promise of a Court that could bring accountability for perpetrators of the most serious international crimes, when States with jurisdiction over those crimes were unwilling or unable to do so themselves.

Canada still believes in the promise of this Court, but we are currently navigating perilous waters. During last year's Assembly, the Court was already under unprecedented threat. Arrest warrants had been issued against seven of its high officials, simply for carrying out the mandate given to them by States Parties. Since then, the Court has faced multiple cyber security breaches, political attacks, and additional threats not just to the Court itself, but to any State supporting the Court.

To sanction the Court is to sanction each and every one of us. This is simply unacceptable. The Court is empowered by the mandate that we – the States Parties – have conferred upon it. In the Rome Statute's preamble, we States Parties expressed our common concern that the "delicate mosaic" piecing our shared human heritage together "may be shattered at any time". It is at this moment that we must all stand in unity with the Court. Canada stands strongly and proudly in support of the Court. Its ability to perform its work free from threats of retaliation is paramount.

Madam President,

Canada also stands ready to ensure the long-term sustainability of this Court. This is a goal that requires the Court to optimize its resources in the fight against impunity.

Canada notes that the Court has requested a substantial budget increase for the third consecutive year. This is a worrying trend. We recognize the increased demand on the Court in recent years. However, the need for fiscal responsibility is clear. It must be shared by all, in all aspects of the ICC's work, including prioritization of key elements of the Court's mandate.

Canada highlights the efforts of the Registrar in first identifying savings and efficiencies and areas to deprioritize, before formulating a budget request based on reassessed and realistic priorities. This is a best practice which must be replicated across the Court.

In short, Madame President, there is a strong need for the Court to be focused and efficient in its efforts to pursue accountability for those most responsible for serious international crimes, in the interest of the long-term sustainability of the Court.

The principle of complementarity, which is a key pillar on which the Court rests, must guide the Court in managing its workload. When States Parties have the demonstrated capacity and willingness to do so themselves, they retain the primary responsibility to investigate crimes falling under the Rome Statute and must be left to do so. At the same time, complementarity must meaningfully contribute to accountability. As one of the six countries to have referred the "Venezuela I" situation to the Court in 2018, Canada attaches importance to the developments of this investigation and we will continue to pay close attention.

States Parties also bear the responsibility to strive for continuous improvement of the governance and operations of the Court. Canada worked closely with many of you on several governance issues this year, including facilitating the legal aid discussions, and working with partners across regional groups to ensure positive momentum on the need for travel expenditures reform. In light of the poor results of recent audit report on travel directive compliance, more work on this issue is pressing and urgent. Canada applauds the leadership of Ambassador van den Ijssel and Ambassador Kanu for steering the Review Mechanism to a successful conclusion. We contributed actively to the establishment of a tenure policy within the Court, and the moratorium on hiring employees from non-States Parties, while also ensuring that the Court retains the flexibility to hire individuals who are uniquely positioned to contribute to the Court's mandate.

Madam President,

Cooperation is vital for the work of the Court. The number of outstanding arrest warrants continues to rise, revealing the need for greater cooperation from States. Executing those arrest warrants needs to be done in compliance with the fullness of State obligations under the Rome Statute and international law.

Striving for universality of the Rome Statute is another element essential to the long-term success of the Court. Canada reiterates its call on States that are not yet parties to ratify the Statute. We applaud Ukraine's recent deposit of its instrument of ratification and look forward to welcoming them as our newest State Party.

Thank you, Madam President.