

Vanuatu's Statement

Twenty-Third Session of the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute

General Debate

3 December 2024

Delivered by Hon. Ralph Regenvanu

Vanuatu's Special Envoy on Climate Change and the Environment

Madame President, ladies and gentlemen,

Vanuatu is proud to be here and once again address this Assembly. As a State which accords high priority to international law and the rules-based order, we remain committed to the International Criminal Court and the values it embodies. Our small nation ratified the Rome Statute in 2012, recognizing that strong institutions are essential in our collective endeavour to ensure justice for the worst crimes affecting the peace and security of humankind.

Madame President, the challenges facing the international community require cooperation across borders and we believe that the Rome Statute system is uniquely placed to address such challenges. Vanuatu reiterates that respect for the rule of law is imperative to maintaining international stability and calls upon all nations to respect their Rome Statute obligations.

In this regard, we highlight our wholehearted condemnation of recent attacks on the Court and its officials. An independent and impartial judicial architecture should not be treated as optional or subject to political considerations. The ICC can count on Vanuatu's full support as well as advocacy for universality of the Rome Statute in the Pacific and beyond.

Vanuatu notes with interest the Court's recent attention to the centrality of environmental crimes and harms to the commission of existing international crimes. We are encouraged by the Office of the Prosecutor's planned policy paper on the investigation and prosecution of environmental destruction within the existing scope of the Rome Statute.

Vanuatu has long recognized the relevance of International Criminal Law to the environment. In this Assembly's 18th session in 2019, Vanuatu called upon States Parties to seriously consider the criminalization of ecocide under the Statute. Since this statement, the concept of ecocide law has gained considerable traction around the world. The law is now supported by many sectors and stakeholders, including national proposals in multiple jurisdictions and the recent criminalization of offences "comparable to ecocide" within the EU.

In light of these developments, in September this year, Vanuatu, with co-sponsorship from the nations of Fiji and Samoa, proposed inclusion of an independent crime of ecocide to this Court's Working Group on Amendments in order to fully address the worst cases of environmental harm, both in times of conflict and of peace.

To adequately protect the environment, upon which all human rights ultimately depend, enforceable standards are required, as well as meaningful international cooperation through domestic, regional and international spheres. The Rome Statute, as well as the fora provided by the International Criminal Court more generally, offer legitimate tools for ensuring effective collective action in this regard. While Vanuatu appreciates that this discussion is not one to approach lightly, we nonetheless warmly invite **all** States Parties to engage positively with our proposal, in the understanding that new tools may be required to face new challenges.

To close, the Republic of Vanuatu reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the Rome Statute system and the fundamental importance of ensuring that the International Criminal Court is legally, politically and financially equipped to discharge its crucial mandate. We urge all States Parties to recognize the importance and the potential of the Rome Statute, both as it stands and as it may evolve.

Thank you for your attention.