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JUSTICE NOW! TIME FOR AN INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

**Press conference statement by Pierre Sané
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(Check against delivery)**

At the close of possibly the bloodiest century in human history, we face an immense challenge: here in Rome, we *could* finally respond effectively to the demands of the millions of victims of the worst crimes in the world for justice.

Yet some of the government representatives gathered here for the conference to establish a permanent international criminal court which could deliver that justice look set to continue to answer those cries with a stony silence, and fail to live up to both their own commitments and the expectations of their people.

In the aftermath of the atrocities of the Second World War, humanity said “never again”, and in 1948 the UN adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Genocide Convention and began work on a permanent international criminal court -- promising a world without cruelty and injustice. Yet fifty years on, genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes remain unchecked.

Almost ten years ago at the end of the cold war, again, there was real hope that this would mean the end of governments covering up for their allies or own nationals accused of the worst crimes in the world. Their victims hoped that they would finally see justice. Yet since then, we have witnessed tragedies such as Bosnia, Burundi, Rwanda and Sierra Leone

Now, in Rome, after years of preparations our governments can take a decisive step to break with the past. They can send a strong message that they will not tolerate these crimes, and that the full weight of the law will be brought to bear on the perpetrators. They can help end the cycle of impunity which has fuelled human rights violations.

But, far from grasping this opportunity, certain governments which publicly profess support for are continuing to obstruct the creation of a fair, just, independent and effective international criminal court. What sort of message does that send about their commitment to ending human rights violations as we enter the 21st century?

Non-governmental Organizations are also gathered here in Rome. We have a clear idea about what is needed to make an effective court. Among Amnesty International's core principles are:

The court must be completely free of political interference by the Security Council. It should have a strong, independent prosecutor, and be financially independent. It should ensure justice for women and children.

It must be able to exercise **universal** jurisdiction over genocide, other crimes against humanity and war crimes. It should be able to investigate and prosecute people responsible for such crimes to justice no matter where the crime was committed.

And to do so with or without the consent of the state with custody, the state where the crime occurred, the state of the victim's nationality, the state of the suspect's nationality or any other state.

If the court is to be effective, its judgments must be accepted by all sectors of the international community as scrupulously fair and impartial. Therefore, the statute and the rules of procedure and evidence must ensure suspects and accused the right to fair trial in accordance with the highest international standards at all stages of the proceedings.

Only a minority of governments who publicly support an international court are shamefully blocking the creation of a an independent and effective court along the lines I have just outlined. A court which could prevent another Bosnia, Cambodia or Rwanda.

The millions of victims of human rights violations around the world will be looking to them to provide justice. If these governments continue on their current path, they will have future crimes against humanity on their conscience.

ENDS.../