

AI INDEX: IOR 40/20/98  
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## International Criminal Court -"Crippled at Birth?"

**ROME** - Saddam Hussein, Pol Pot, Karadzic, Pinochet, Amin, Mobutu. These are just some of the men responsible for the worst crimes in the world whose prior consent would have been required in order for them to be tried under the statute for a permanent international criminal court agreed by government delegations at a United Nations conference in Rome, Amnesty International said today.

While recognizing that this court would be an historic step forward for international justice, the organization said that the statute still requires radical surgery to ensure that the court will be just, relevant and effective.

Amnesty International's one million members around the world will begin lobbying their governments to work towards a better court, Pierre Sané, Amnesty International's Secretary General pledged.

"This statute provides a basis for an improvement in human rights protection, but it needs work to make the court truly effective. We will continue to push for a court that could have a real impact in protecting millions of future victims," Mr Sané said.

Mr Sané expressed his regret that a few powerful countries appeared willing to hold justice hostage by threatening and bullying other states, and seemed sometimes to be more concerned with shielding possible perpetrators from trial rather than producing a charter for victims.

"This court should be aimed at one single purpose -protecting the victims of genocide, crimes against humanity and serious war crimes," Mr Sané said. "Instead, victims looking for justice are faced with a court which could let these horrendous crimes go unpunished. This court requires the permission of criminals to face trial."

"Deliberate, forced starvation of civilians -such as we have seen in Southern Sudan -will not be a war crime under the jurisdiction of the court. Gassing innocent civilians -in the way that Saddam did to thousands of Kurdish women, children and men -will not be a war crime under the jurisdiction of this court."

Mr Sané welcomed the decision to give the prosecutor power to initiate an investigation of genocide, other crimes against humanity and war crimes -based on information from victims and other sources -without waiting for the permission of the UN Security Council or states. Nevertheless, the organization is concerned that the statute provides for the Security Council to delay investigations and prosecutions for renewable periods of 12 months.

Amnesty International condemned the provision which allows states to opt-out of the court's jurisdiction on war crimes for seven years as effectively giving soldiers a "license to kill with complete impunity".

"Paradoxically, we face a future court that will need the permission of President Milosevic to commence investigations into war crimes committed by his troops in Kosovo," Mr Sané said.

2

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