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Amnesty international urges governments to sign the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court before the deadline expires

Amnesty International today called upon all those states that have not already signed the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, to do so before the deadline for signature on 31 December 2000.

In November 2000, President A.R. Robinson from Trinidad and Tobago, called the adoption of the Rome Statute "a most significant achievement in the history of mankind." In 1989 he first introduced the motion in the General Assembly that ultimately established the Court. Similarly, the Syrian Arab Republic stated that the adoption of the Rome Statute was "the second best achievement in international law after the United Nations Charter."

Amnesty International, together with thousands of NGOs worldwide and the majority of states, considers that the adoption of the Rome Statute (which establishes an International Criminal Court that will prosecute people accused of the most heinous crimes known to humanity) is one of the greatest ever advancements in international law.

This deadline is an important milestone in the establishment of an International Criminal Court. When the Rome Statute was adopted on 17 July 1998 the drafting states included a provision that the Statute would be open for signature until 31 December 2000 and after this date states that have not signed will have to ratify the Statute in one step.

Signature shows a states support for the establishment of the Court and an intention to ratify the Statute. Under international law a state which has signed a treaty is under a legal obligation not to take any

steps which would undermine it pending a final decision to ratify it or not.

As of 1 December 2000, 117 of the 189 UN Member States from all regions of the world had signed the treaty.

Amnesty International is appealing to the remaining 72 countries to sign before 31 December 2000. The organization believes that a significant increase in the number of signatures will contribute to the prompt establishment of the International Criminal Court, which will follow the 60th ratification, and promote an overall greater number of ratifications.

Background

The Rome Statute was adopted on 17 July 1998 by an overwhelming majority of states – 120 voted in favour, only seven against, with 21 abstentions. It provides for the establishment of a permanent International Criminal Court with jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, in both international and non-international conflicts.

The need for the Court is clear. In the half a century since the end of the trials before the International Military Tribunals at Nuremberg and Tokyo, despite millions of victims of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, states have largely failed to fulfil their responsibilities to bring those responsible to justice. As a result victims have been denied justice and meaningful reconciliation between conflicting groups or states has often proved impossible.

Amnesty International urges those states that have not signed the Rome Statute to strengthen the support for this essential international judicial body and to sign before the deadline.

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