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High expectations for the new International Criminal Court Prosecutor

The inauguration of Fatou Bensouda as the second ever International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor signals a new era in international justice and the potential for a more robust approach to their prosecution strategy, Amnesty International said as she began her nine-year term.

Gambian Bensouda takes over from Luis Moreno Ocampo after serving as the ICC's Deputy Prosecutor on Prosecutions since 2004.

"Prosecutor Ocampo has achieved a great deal in establishing the Office of the Prosecutor over the last nine years and hands over a large workload of seven investigations and a number on-going cases," said Marek Marczyński, Amnesty International's Head of International Justice.

Ahead of taking office, Fatou Bensouda set out a number of priorities that she will pursue during her term, including reviewing the quality and efficiency of investigations and prosecutions, developing a strong gender policy and clarifying the process through which the office selects where it will conduct investigations.

"These are very welcome commitments," Marczyński said.

"The Office of the Prosecutor should be constantly evolving and taking measures to ensure that the ICC has the biggest possible impact in the fight to end impunity."

Amnesty International has previously expressed concerns that some aspects of the Prosecution strategy were too restrictive, in particular the limited charging in the ICC's first case against Thomas Lubanga who was only charged with enlisting and recruiting child soldiers. Other allegations, including sexual violence, were not fully investigated.

"We are hopeful that the new policy developments will help advance worldwide public support for the ICC," Marczyński said.

"First and foremost, the ICC must be an impartial champion of justice for the victims of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes who have been forgotten or ignored by their own authorities."

A number of significant political challenges await the Prosecutor. In recent years, the African Union has taken measures that undermine the ICC – including refusing to cooperate with the arrest Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir - citing concerns that the ICC is only targeting Africans.

"The Prosecutor has already made strong statements requesting the support of African states. We hope they will provide her and the ICC with their fullest support to deliver justice to African victims as well as

other victims around the world.”

Other states meanwhile, including France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United Kingdom are insisting on budget cuts that threaten to undermine the ICC’s work.

“The states must not be allowed to undermine the independence of the Office of the Prosecutor through the budget process. The ICC must be given sufficient resources to conduct its work effectively.”

The ICC is currently investigating crimes in Central African Republic, Cote d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Libya, the Darfur region of Sudan and Uganda. It is examining allegations of crimes in seven other situations in order to determine whether to open investigations: Afghanistan, Colombia, Georgia, Guinea, Republic of Korea, Honduras and Nigeria.